

Disability Federation of Ireland

Bridging the Gap

**Implementation of United Nations Convention
on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN
CRPD) at Local Level**

Dr Mary Keogh and Dr Charles O'Mahony

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Foreword

It is with great pride that I introduce this important research, commissioned by the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI). The study shines a much-needed light on how local authorities are meeting their obligations under the UN CRPD, identifying progress made and the challenges that remain.

DFI has a long history of collaborating with local authorities, with a standout partnership involving Wicklow County Council. For over seven years, a DFI Community Development Officer has been seconded to support disability inclusion across the county, resulting in the creation of the Disability Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC), a unique collaborative structure akin to a Strategic Policy Committee. This partnership, guided by the UN CRPD and the Wicklow County Disability Strategy, highlights the potential of local authorities to improve the lives of disabled people.

I extend my deepest gratitude to the research team, whose dedication and expertise made this study possible. Special thanks go to the members of the Advisory Group, whose guidance and perspectives were invaluable. The Advisory Group included:

- Michael Nicholson, Wicklow County Council
- Councillor Miriam Murphy, Wicklow County Council
- Councillor Elisa O'Donovan, Limerick City West
- Councillor Vicky Casserly, South Dublin County Council
- Trudy Reilly, Access Officer, Donegal County Council
- Micheal Hurley, Access Officer, Kildare County Council
- Marian Moloney, Chairperson, Galway Access for All Lorraine Lally, Barrister, Galway
- Tommy Moylan, Association of Irish Local Government
- Emer Begley, Disability Federation of Ireland
- Laura O'Callaghan, Disability Federation of Ireland

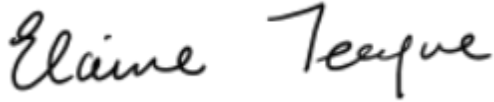
We also remember with great respect and affection Leigh Gath, who was a fearless advocate for equality and the rights of disabled people. Leigh's contributions to this project and her lifelong commitment to disability rights will not be forgotten. Her sudden passing in July has left a void, but her legacy inspires us to continue the work she was so passionate about.

Finally, to all the participants, including the disabled people and organisations who shared their experiences and insights, your voices are at the heart of this research. Thank you for your courage and advocacy.

This study highlights significant gaps that must be addressed to ensure full implementation of the UN CRPD at a local level. While there is much to celebrate, there is also much more to do. DFI remains steadfast in our commitment to ensuring that local authorities have the

tools, resources, and resolve to uphold the rights of disabled people, creating a society where everyone can participate equally.

Elaine Teague



CEO, Disability Federation of Ireland



Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the support of the participants who took part in the key informant interviews and focus groups. Similarly, the positive response rate to the survey used in this research by Chief Executives and Access Officers from local authorities gave the researchers rich insight into the challenges and opportunities to advance the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) at the local level. We thank you for your time, input and expertise.

The Advisory Group for this research project provided invaluable guidance and practical support with outreach to key informants and hosting focus groups. Thank you to each of the members Michael Nicholson of Wicklow County Council, Councillor Miriam Murphy of Wicklow County Council, Councillor Elisa O'Donovan of Limerick City West, Councillor Vicki Casserly for South Dublin County Council, Trudy Reilly, Access Officer, Donegal County Council, Micheal Hurley, Access Officer, Kildare County Council, Marian Moloney, Access for All Galway, Lorraine Lally, Barrister, Galway, Tommy Moylan, Association of Irish Local Government. Leigh Gath was a member of the Advisory Group who died suddenly in July at her home in County Limerick. Leigh was a fearless advocate for equality for the rights of disabled people. Her outstanding contributions including to this project will not be forgotten. Our sincere condolences go her family and wide circle of friends.

Finally, thanks to the Disability Federation Ireland staff who provided oversight, logistical and administrative support to this research; Emer Begley, Director of Advocacy, Laura O'Callaghan,

Community Development Officer, Meredith Raley, Policy and Research Officer, Martina Schwab, Project Manager.

The Researchers

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Executive Summary

Ireland ratified the UN CRPD in 2018 and submitted its first State report to the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2021. The State report highlighted several areas where local authorities have responsibility for supporting UN CRPD implementation.¹ More recently, in 2024 the Joint Committee on Disability Matters, published a report titled *Planning for Inclusive Communities for Persons with Disabilities* which stated “that the planning and shaping of inclusive communities requires more action by the State to mobilise an All-of-Government collaboration to establish mechanisms to ensure equal access and truly embed the rights of people with disabilities”². The Joint Committee report came from a series of parliamentary sessions that had been convened with a variety of stakeholders including organisations of persons with disabilities.³

This report examines how the 31 local authorities in Ireland are implementing the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). Although not the focus of this research, understanding the context in which local government and local authorities operate in Ireland was essential for situating this study. Ireland has over the past decade implemented several local government reforms. Yet it still stands as one of the most centralised nations in Europe when compared to other jurisdictions according to the OECD.⁴ As such, local authorities play a limited role in public spending. In fact, Ireland ranks among the lowest of OECD countries in terms of local authority funding. Local authorities are responsible for delivering many functions to local communities, including housing, planning, roads, and libraries. Independent experts’ reports have also supported this view finding restricted financial resources, power imbalances favouring chief executives over elected members, insufficient structured consultations with central government, and heavy administrative oversight. Furthermore, local authority members are indirectly elected, resulting in limited accountability to citizens for their decisions.⁵

¹ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (2021), Initial Report of Ireland under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, prepared for the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities <https://www.gov.ie/pdf/?file=https://assets.gov.ie/204196/138b7f87-c6e7-4176-bdd7-61b9e7fff6b9.pdf#page=null> last accessed 3 November 2024.

² Joint Committee on Disability Matters, *Planning for Inclusive Communities for Persons with Disabilities* (October 2024) https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_disability_matters/reports/2024/2024-10-10_report-on-planning-for-inclusive-communities-for-persons-with-disabilities_en.pdf last accessed 3 November 2024.

³ The Committee undertook a module of public meetings, 20, 27 October and 24 November 2022, 9 February and 6 December 2023, 17 January, 20 March and 3 July 2024 examining various aspects of communities and the supports required by persons with disabilities to live and participate in their communities.

⁴ See OECD, 'Regional Policy Profile: Ireland' (OECD 2016) <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/profile-Ireland.pdf> 14 October 2024.

⁵ 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).

The study, commissioned by the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of current practices, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The report identifies areas where progress has been made and the barriers that remain in ensuring the rights and inclusion of disabled people when engaging with local authorities.

The research methodology employed a two-phase approach: first, a thorough literature review and second, qualitative research with key stakeholders. The literature review involved an extensive assessment of legal frameworks, policies, academic literature, and consideration of how local authorities in other jurisdictions are implementing the UN CRPD at the local level.

The literature review also focused on national and international contexts, with particular attention to local government structures. The review highlighted gaps in the current understanding and application of disability rights at the local level, which informed the qualitative research phase of this project. The reasons for the gaps in literature may include a focus on domestic implementation of the UN CRPD (national level), with less consideration paid to the role of local government in realising state obligations. This may result from a lack of awareness or prioritisation of disability rights at the local level. Additionally, the decentralisation of responsibilities from central to local governments varies widely across jurisdictions, leading to disparities in the extent to which local government engages with disability rights, and might also explain the lack of comparative research.

The qualitative research included two surveys (targeting Access Officers and Chief Executives of local authorities), focus groups with local councillors and disabled people, and 10 key informant interviews with representatives from public bodies, Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs), disabled people and family members, government departments, and local authorities. The qualitative research provides a dataset of experiences, insights, and perspectives on how the UN CRPD is being implemented across local authorities in Ireland.

An important aspect of the research was the involvement of an advisory group, whose members, drawn from DFI's extensive networks, played a vital role in guiding and shaping the research. This group included disabled people, local councillors, representatives from DPOs, Access Officers, and key staff from DFI. Their involvement brought valuable lived experience and professional expertise into the research process. The advisory group provided oversight and guidance, enriching the study with a participatory, inclusive approach that enhanced its credibility and rigour.

Summary of Key Findings

1. Awareness exists but limited role of local authorities in implementation of disability rights

Most survey respondents, key informant interviewees and focus group participants highlighted that there was awareness within local authorities of the UN CRPD. Different initiatives in training and capacity building have helped but understanding of the role of local

authorities in its implementation of the UN CRPD varies across local authorities. The research data highlighted the focus tends to be on national rather than local responsibilities, leading to inconsistent prioritisation of disability rights at the local level. The data from the surveys and interviews highlighted that there is progress, but it is inconsistent across local authorities, particularly with regard to the role of Access Officers which is detailed further in point 2 below. A key point to consider regarding local authority roles and functions is that Ireland is generally seen as weaker in terms of funding and powers at the local level when compared to other European countries. This disparity may help explain some of the difficulties local authorities face in engaging effectively with the UN CRPD.

2. The role of Access Officer is pivotal and requires adequate resourcing and anchoring to an overall structure

The need for dedicated roles within councils to drive disability inclusion efforts was a recurrent theme across surveys, key informant interviews and focus groups. Financial and resource constraints were identified as a significant barrier. Both the interviews and focus groups identified a significant gap between ambition and resource allocation. The absence of dedicated roles, such as full-time Access Officers within local authorities, resulted in an inconsistent approach to disability rights across local authorities. The responses to the Access Officer survey for this project suggests a need for greater resources, better training, and more robust structures to support Access Officers in their roles. Many respondents of the Access Officer survey called for the role to be made full-time, with a dedicated team or additional staff to assist in managing the broad scope of responsibilities. Several Access Officers identified a need for national coordination to ensure that local authorities are supported in meeting their obligations under the UN CRPD. They also identified a need for formalised training, with a focus on human rights and disability legislation, to equip Access Officers with the knowledge and skills required to advocate for and implement meaningful changes within their communities.

The CEs survey generally rated the role of Access Officers as moderately effective, though many suggested improvements, including making the position full-time with additional training and resources. Conversely, Access Officers in their survey reported that their role was under-resourced and not fully integrated into broader local authority functions, with many expressing the view that their duties were seen as secondary or "add-ons" to other responsibilities. Both Access Officers and CEs suggested the need for greater standardisation, yet flexible, national approach to inclusion, emphasising the need for more funding and operational support. The need for full time Access Officer roles at a sufficiently senior grade level (e.g. Grade 7) with defined Key Performance Indicators, better training, and national coordination was identified as important. The CEs surveyed while supporting a standardised national approach to inclusion, some were worried about a rigid system.

3. Housing and local accessibility emerged as key concerns

The accessibility of public infrastructure was highlighted as a significant barrier in analysis of both key informant interviews and focus groups. Key informants and focus group participants both expressed concern over how local authorities fail to prioritise accessibility in both rural and urban planning. Poorly designed infrastructure, such as ramps built around obstacles like telephone poles were identified as a recurrent issue. The interviews underscored the technical challenges local authority staff face in understanding and implementing accessibility standards from the outset, while focus group participants detailed how such oversights further isolate disabled people from participating fully in their communities.

Both key informants and participants in the focus groups identified significant challenges with housing for disabled people. The Housing Adaptation Grant was frequently criticised for being insufficient, poorly implemented, and fraught with bureaucratic inefficiencies across local authorities. These concerns were raised both by key informants working within local authorities and by disabled participants and family members who have lived experience of these shortcomings. The need for universal design principles to be incorporated into all housing developments, and for greater allocation of accessible housing, was a recurrent observation. These are key changes needed if the right to independent living, as envisioned by the UN CRPD is to be implemented.

Focus group participants highlighted the inadequacies in accessibility in infrastructure and public spaces. The analysis of key informant interviews also revealed challenges with the engagement of key state agencies and other stakeholders, which hinder collaboration in implementing the UN CRPD. This perspective was shared also in the focus groups, where participants repeatedly stressed the need for better engagement with DPOs and disabled people. It was suggested that these collaborative mechanisms, when effectively used, ensure local authorities better meet the needs of disabled people.

4. Inconsistent approach to consultation and engagement with disabled people.

The findings from the research point to an inconsistency in how local authorities engage with disabled people and their representative organisations. This would be important to address as under Article 4(3) of the UN CRPD, Ireland has an obligation to “closely consult with and actively involve” disabled people in the development and implementation of law and policy to implement the Convention.

Both key informants and focus group participants called for more meaningful engagement between local authorities and DPOs. The key informants emphasised the need for structured, consistent consultation processes, while focus group participants criticised current engagement as often superficial or tokenistic. Participants called for co-design and co-creation, where disabled people have an active role in shaping the policies and practices that affect their lives in line with the UN CRPD obligations. This theme of meaningful engagement was a recurring one, suggesting that local authorities must shift from viewing disabled people as passive recipients of services to active partners in the design and implementation of their functions as a local authority.

The analysis of the surveys of Access Officers and CEs highlighted some differing perspectives within the local authority on engagement with disabled people and their representative organisations. CEs generally reported that local authorities had mechanisms in place to consult disabled people outside of standard public consultations. However, Access Officers raised concerns about the inconsistency of these consultation processes, with some reporting that they were unsure of the structures or processes available to them to engage effectively with disabled people. The data collected from the key informant interviews, the surveys and focus groups, highlighted that there have been some areas which have established networks and formal engagement structures. Good examples were identified and are highlighted in chapter 4. Successful examples of inclusive initiatives, such as Meath's sensory garden and Kerry's beach wheelchair service, demonstrate the potential of local authorities to take leadership in delivering on Ireland's commitments under the UN CRPD.

5. Stronger evidence base is needed for accountability and tracking progress

Both the interviews and focus groups stressed the importance of structured monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with the UN CRPD. Key informants noted the absence of clear reporting mechanisms, which makes it difficult to assess how well local authorities are contributing to national implementation of the UN CRPD. Focus group participants shared this concern, calling for more transparent and consistent accountability measures, such as regular reporting to the national focal point. The consensus was that without these measures there is a risk that the implementation of the UN CRPD will continue to be inconsistent across local authorities. The lack of evidenced based research was highlighted by key informant interviews and the ability to model what works. "The Age Friendly Initiative was frequently cited as a model for a national program, offering evidence of how it could be adapted for UN CRPD implementation." UN CRPD

The key findings summarised show that while there are examples of good practice across different local authorities, significant disparities remain in how disability inclusion is approached. Accessibility improvements in newer infrastructure have been notable, yet challenges persist in older, established environments. Inconsistencies across local authorities were identified, often dependent on leadership, resources, and individual commitment to disability inclusion. The role of Access Officers emerged as critical, though their effectiveness is constrained by limited resources and the perception of their role as secondary to other responsibilities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations set out in Chapter 5 are as follows:

1. **Increase compliance of existing statutory duty by discussing the yearly monitoring by the National Disability Authority on compliance with the Disability Act at senior management level at local authority level including it as part of organisational metrics that are publicly available.** Statutory duties include ensuring compliance with

various accessibility standards, such as the Web Accessibility Directive and the Disability Act. These regulations aim to improve accessibility in buildings, roads, pathways, and online services provided by local authorities. Stronger compliance and accountability are needed.

2. **Ensure public sector duty is fully implemented by putting in place metrics to measure budgets for social inclusion.** Local authorities have a statutory duty under the public sector duty to embed social inclusion, especially in community sections, ensuring they meet the needs of ageing communities and disabled people. This duty extends to their planning functions, housing delivery, and other community-based activities. The recently published report Joint Committee on Disability Matters Planning for inclusive communities for disabled people recommends equality budgeting must be developed to deliver on the UN CRPD, and all Government departments must update their budgetary key metrics to include disability.
3. **Ensure enforcement of building regulations for accessibility local authorities have the statutory responsibility to enforce building regulations that include provisions for accessibility, ensuring that aging communities and people with disabilities can access public and private infrastructure.** Technical training for engineers is required and a public listing of where failure to meet building regulations could help improve accountability. Disabled people should be involved in the training and be paid for their time and expertise.
4. **Use the reserve functions as a positive measure within the authority of councillors on decisions about annual budgets, housing policy and other concerns to ensure that they are aligned with the national obligation and in compliance with the UN CRPD.** This requires as highlighted earlier a good understanding by city and county councillors of the UNCRPD.
5. **Incorporate disability inclusion as a key area of focus of the Corporate Strategic Plans across the 31 local authorities.** At an operational level, this would include making sure disability inclusion is incorporated into all plans of the local authority support functions. It would also include developing localised disability strategies and setting key performance indicators on disability inclusion across the range of local authorities' plans.
6. **Implement a tailored approach to awareness training and capacity building on the UN CRPD and what this means for local authorities including county councillors.** It should be tailored to the specific functions and responsibilities of council staff and include mandatory training for all county councillors. The training should be regularly updated, ensuring continuous learning and engagement rather than being a one-time event. The training should be delivered by a diverse group of facilitators, including Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs), civil society, human rights experts, and, most importantly, people with disabilities who are Disability Equality Trainers. The training should cover key technical areas critical for inclusive local governance, such as universal design principles, accessible housing, and the importance of incorporating disability inclusion into all aspects of local government functions, including planning, budgeting, and policy development etc. This holistic approach will equip staff and councillors with the knowledge and skills necessary to act in accordance with statutory

obligations and in line with the UN CRPD. Regular training will help embed disability inclusion into the culture and practices of local government. Disabled people involved in the training should be paid for their time and expertise.

7. **Review the role of Access Officer with a view of uplifting it to a full-time decision-making leadership position with resources to act.** This role should be a dedicated, full-time role at grade (at least at Grade 7) which has decision making authority within each local authority, with the responsibility to drive accessibility and disability inclusion initiatives working with existing staff and where necessary additional staff in support. This role could be an expansion of its current remit within the Disability Act to be a cross-cutting role driving a mainstreaming of disability across other local authority programmes. In advance of this, a review of the Access Officer role and the associated personnel profile is essential to ensure that candidates have a strong understanding of disability rights, community development, social inclusion, and, where possible, lived experience of disability. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) should lead this review and standardise the role of Access Officer to align with local authorities' statutory obligations and the UN CRPD. This reform would align with best practices, as seen in the establishment of Local Authority Integration Teams (LAIT) across all local authorities under the guidance of the LGMA.
8. **Ensure a coordinated approach to disability inclusion through holding regular meetings between state agencies, services providers and people with disabilities and their representative organisations.** Different models that currently exist and which can be drawn from include the Older Persons Council which are representative groups of older people, established by local authorities. The good practices highlighted in chapter 4 of how Wicklow local authority established a Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC) and the approach Sligo County Council took are good models that could be replicated across local authorities depending on local context. These committees/forums would need to be resourced for ensuring meetings are accessible and inclusive.
9. **Structured and consistent monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of disability inclusion efforts.** Adopting a national framework for tracking progress on disability inclusion and disability rights at local level is a minimum needed. Tracking progress on mainstreaming disability inclusion as a crosscutting issue and mapping disability specific efforts would be helpful to tracking progress and highlighting gaps. This could be an initiative managed by the Local Government Management Association.
10. **Replicate the good practice examples documented in this report** of stakeholder engagement of disabled people and their representative organisations in co-developing local authority disability strategies. This could be lead through the initiative of the different local authorities.
11. The establishment where feasible of **local access groups** in key towns and a County Access Network to coordinate efforts and share best practices on accessibility. These groups ensure that local issues are addressed, and that disability inclusion remains a priority. In a number of local authority areas, these groups exist, and it would be important to build on them.

12. Ensure representation in local authority committees or consultative bodies is genuinely inclusive, ensuring that the voices of disabled people are fully heard, respected, and actively considered in decision-making processes. This representation should not cost disabled people to take up, resources need to be put in place for supporting representation. Staff and funding e.g. ISL etc.
13. The Public Participation Networks (PPNs) (or equivalents) should take pro-active measures to ensure full engagement for more structured and meaningful involvement of disabled people in local governance. Ensuring meaningful engagement means including budgets and resources for reasonable accommodation and accessibility to be built into the PPN funding which is allocated centrally.
14. Adopt a more unified approach, working together to advocate for broader changes. This collective effort is essential for effectively influencing policy and decision-making at the local level.

Glossary of Terms

Access Officer: A person responsible for promoting accessibility and ensuring that public services are accessible to disabled people, as required by the Disability Act 2005.

Association of Irish Local Government (AILG): The AILG is a national representative body that proudly represents and supports the role of our elected councillors.

Chief Executive (CE): The CE is responsible for carrying out the executive duties of the city council, county council, or city and county council.

Congregated Settings: Living arrangements where ten or more disabled people reside in a single unit or on a campus, often in institutional settings. The policy "Time to Move on from Congregated Settings" seeks to transition from these environments into community-based living.

Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI): An umbrella organisation that represents the interests of disabled people and their organisations in Ireland, advocating for improved policies and services. DFI has commissioned this research.

Health Service Executive (HSE): The HSE manages all the public health services in Ireland including personal social services.

Housing for All National Housing Policy (2021): The Irish government's policy aiming to ensure that everyone has access to housing, with a focus on providing suitable and affordable housing options for disabled people.

Independent Living: The ability of disabled people to make choices and have control over their own lives, including where and with whom they live. Provided for in Article 19 of the UN CRPD.

Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC): Is the statutory body which is publicly funded but independent of government. It was formed as a result of the merger of the Equality Authority and the Irish Human Rights Commission; both former bodies were dissolved and their functions transferred to the IHREC.

Local Authority: The system of government at the local level in Ireland known as local authorities, city councils or county councils. Local authorities carry out a broad range of activities that make a significant contribution to the physical, cultural, social and environmental development of their communities. Local authorities play a key role in implementing the UN CRPD and other disability policies through housing, planning, and community services.

Local Government Management Association (LGMA): The LGMA provides a range of professional services to the local government sector. They connect all 31 local authorities, aligning expertise and driving innovation.

National Disability Authority (NDA): The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the independent statutory body, providing evidence-based advice and research to Government on disability policy and practice and promoting Universal Design.

National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS): A government framework for coordinating and implementing policies that improve the lives of disabled people in Ireland, aligning with the UN CRPD.

National Focal Point: The focal point oversees the process of the implementation of the UN CRPD. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth is the focal point for Ireland.

Optional Protocol (OP): An additional legal instrument to the UN CRPD that allows individuals and groups to file complaints with the UN CRPD Committee if they believe their rights under the convention have been violated.

Public Sector Duty: A legal obligation for public bodies to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and protect human rights in their work, including in relation to disability rights, which also applies to local authorities.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The SDGs are 17 global objectives established by the United Nations to address challenges such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and peace by 2030.

UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD Committee): Is the body of independent experts which monitors implementation of the Convention by the States parties.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD): An international human rights treaty adopted by the United Nations in 2006, promoting and protecting the rights and dignity of disabled people and ratified by Ireland in 2018.

Universal Design: The design of buildings, products, and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialised design, as promoted by the UN CRPD.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1. Background to this research

The Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) commissioned this research to address the need for a better understanding of how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is being implemented at the local government level across Ireland's 31 local authorities. DFI represents over 120 member organisations working towards the inclusion and participation of disabled people. DFI recognised the varying degrees of progress and engagement by local authorities in fulfilling their obligations under the UN CRPD. With Ireland having ratified the convention in 2018, DFI through this research seeks to collate both the successes and challenges local authorities face in embedding UN CRPD, particularly in areas like independent living and accessibility. The research, therefore, seeks to collect evidence on existing practices, informal collaborations, and the structural gaps hindering consistent implementation of the UN CRPD across the 31 local authorities in Ireland. The aims of the research were:

- Identify good practice examples of structural approaches to UN CRPD implementation by local government in Ireland.
- Identify good practice models in other jurisdictions.
- Identify current structural gaps in the delivery of UN CRPD at local community level in Ireland.
- Identify existing fora, structures and stakeholders who currently, or have the potential to, support and/or lead UN CRPD implementation at a local level.
- Investigating with stakeholders, the potential for a national formal and standardised approach for local government implementation of the UN CRPD.
- Provide a series of recommendations which outline next steps to facilitate local government implementation of UN CRPD. The research project was carried out over a nine-month period from February – October 2024.

This research aligns with DFI's mission of working with multiple stakeholders to advance disability inclusion and rights at all levels of society. By commissioning this project, DFI sought to identify examples of good practice, both within Ireland and internationally, that could inform a more standardised, formal approach to UN CRPD implementation at the local level. The focus is on how local governments, in partnership with communities and Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs), can better fulfil their obligations through structured approaches, increased resource allocation, and more effective use of existing decision-making fora. The findings seek to provide concrete recommendations for ensuring consistent and comprehensive implementation of the UN CRPD, aiming to enhance the rights and full participation of disabled people in every community across Ireland.

1.2. Methodology

The Disability Federation of Ireland convened an Advisory Group of experts to guide the research design and project delivery. The Advisory Group consisting of disabled people, representatives from Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs), local authority staff working as Access Officers and in a management capacity, a member of the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG), and elected councillors. The Advisory Group met on four occasions, during which they gave guidance on the methodology and the findings from the literature review and provided valuable guidance on the qualitative phase of the research. In addition, members of the group provided guidance between meetings on data collection materials and research recommendations.

The study was designed inclusively, with significant consideration given to the accessibility of research materials and procedures. The research methodology included a literature review analysing relevant laws, policies, and previous research both domestically and internationally on the role of local government in implementing the UN CRPD. The review sought to identify gaps in existing knowledge and informed the qualitative research component of the study. A mapping of publicly available material across the 31 local authorities was also carried out to highlight how they aligned with selected UN CRPD articles from the literature review.

A mixed approach between quantitative and qualitative methods was used to collect the data for this research. Two surveys were used, one for CEs of the local authority and one for Access Officers. The qualitative phase consisted of 10 key informant interviews and two focus groups. The first focus group included 10 members, disabled people with lived experience, DPOs and family members and advocates. The second focus group consisted of members of the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) and primarily city and county councillors (10 councillors in total). The focus groups were conducted to gather insights into their perceptions and experiences.

Interviews with key stakeholders, focus groups and surveys were undertaken to complement the literature review and ensure that the voice and lived experience of disabled people is reflected in the research. The scope of this part of the research was dictated by the time allocated for completion and willingness of stakeholders to participate in the research.

1.2.1. Research Ethics

The researchers received guidance from the Advisory Group on the research design and ensured that the research adhered to ethical standards. The researchers were duty-bound to contemplate not only the well-being and dignity of participants in the research but also the broader societal and cultural repercussions of the research.

1.2.2. Informed Consent and Participant Information

Once a participant expressed a willingness to take part in the study (focus groups and key informant interviews), they received a "Participant Information Sheet" containing

comprehensive details about the research topic, objectives, and the reasons for their selection. To encourage candid responses from Access Officers, this survey was anonymous. The authors removed any data from these surveys that would identify Access Officers.

1.2.3. Data Protection

Stringent measures were implemented to safeguard participant confidentiality and data security. All personal information was anonymised throughout the research process. Data were securely stored and encrypted on a dedicated computer, with access restricted to the researchers. Physical materials and notes were stored in a locked filing cabinet within a secured office space. Data generated during this study was treated confidentially.

1.2.4. Anonymity and Confidentiality

Measures have been taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the interview participants, Access Officer Surveys and focus group participants. This approach was adopted to safeguard their identities while providing insights into their perspectives and experiences. This approach enables their perspective to be represented in the research without disclosing their identities.

1.2.5. Inclusive Research Design

In this research, the principles of disability-inclusive research were applied throughout. The National Disability Authority has noted that disabled people “are often included in the category of ‘vulnerable groups’ in policy frameworks and strategies both internationally and nationally”.⁶ The depiction of disabled people as “inherently vulnerable” does not recognise that people become “vulnerable” due to disabling barriers (attitudinal and material) within society. The approach adopted in this research project is in line with the UN CRPD, in seeking to move from a paternalistic approach to one of inclusion, empowerment, and ensuring that disabled people as rights holders, can choose to participate in the research on an equal basis with others.

The researchers recognise the historical exclusion of disabled people from research and aims to rectify this gap by ensuring that the voices of disabled people, and Disabled Persons Organisations, informed the research, its conclusions, and recommendations.⁷ The research actively involved disabled people as research participants and emphasises their contributions

⁶ National Disability Authority, '*NDA Advice Paper On Disability Language And Terminology*' (Dublin: National Disability Authority, June 2022).

⁷ Mary Wickenden and Erika Lopez Franco, 'Chapter 24: Don't Leave Us Out: Disability Inclusive Participatory Research Why and How?' in Burns et al (eds), *The SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry* (SAGE, 2021).

and perspectives. The research budget included provisions for reasonable accommodation, covering the costs of necessary accommodations like sign language interpreters.

1.3. Limitations of Research

A challenge faced in this project was obtaining full participation from all CEs of local authorities. As mentioned above, two surveys were conducted as part of this research. These surveys were designed to fill the information gaps identified by the project's Advisory Group and highlighted in the literature review. One survey targeted Access Officers within local authorities, and the other was directed at Chief Executive (CEs) of local authorities.

The response rate for the CE survey was 45.16% (14 out of 31), while the Access Officer survey had a response rate of 38.71% (12 out of 31). While higher response rates would improve representativeness, the data still provides valuable insights into the gaps in implementing disability rights at the local authority level. However, non-response bias must be considered when interpreting the results. The deadline for the Access Officer survey was extended three times to encourage higher participation. One Access Officer noted that some questions did not align with their local duties, which primarily focused on facilitating access to public services, rather than addressing broader equality or disability issues. This highlights a potential gap in how local authorities address their UN CRPD responsibilities. Despite these limitations, the insights gathered contribute valuable information to this underexplored area of research. The data provided from the key informant interviews, focus groups, and expert input from the Advisory Group to offset the low survey response rates by providing additional depth and context to the findings of this research.

1.4. Structure of the report

The report is broken down into different sections, for ease of navigation see below for outline.

- Executive Summary: gives an overview of the research project, it's findings and recommendations.
- Chapter 1: Gives background to the research.
- Chapter 2: Presents the literature review conducted for research covering international and national laws and policies and reports.
- Chapter 3: Shares the findings from the surveys undertaken with Local Authority Chief Executives and Access Offices.
- Chapter 4: Presents the key themes from key informant and focus groups interviews.
- Chapter 5: gives conclusions, recommendations and next steps.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter sets out the literature review focusing on the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) and its implications for local government. It explores the intersection of international human rights law and local government and applies it to the context of Ireland's 31 local authorities.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of the UN CRPD, emphasising key articles relevant to local government. This analysis is informed by the jurisprudence of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD Committee) and the specific competencies and remit of Irish local authorities. There is an overview of local government in Ireland, including its responsibilities under legislation.

Key public policies related to local government are also reviewed, including Housing for All National Housing Policy (2021), National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022–2027, National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022–2027 Implementation, Time to Move on from Congregated Settings: A Strategy for Community Inclusion, Disability Capacity Review to 2032, Sharing the Vision (2020), and National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2022) and other related policies.

The chapter concludes with a short overview of findings from a mapping exercise that was carried out during the literature review phase.

2.2. UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The UN CRPD and its Optional Protocol were adopted on 13 December 2006, at the United Nations in New York. The Convention was opened for signature on the 30 March 2007. On its opening day, the UN CRPD had 82 signatories, while its Optional Protocol had 44 signatories. This represented the highest number of signatories ever recorded for a UN Convention on its initial day. The UN CRPD was the first human rights treaty of the 21st century and the first human rights convention that regional integration organisations (e.g. the European Union) could accede to.

The UN CRPD officially came into force on the 3 May 2008, and had been driving a worldwide law reform programme since, with State Parties seeking to bring their domestic law into compliance. The reporting of States to the UN CRPD Committee highlights the policy impact at national level and adoption of the UN Disability Inclusion Strategy highlights the impact it has at global level.⁸ The UN CRPD represents the culmination of the disability rights movement which has challenged prejudicial and discriminatory perceptions of disabled people.

⁸ United Nations, 'United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy' (United Nations, 11 June 2019) <https://www.un.org/en/content/disabilitystrategy/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

The UN CRPD effectively requires a paradigm shift from considering disabled people as objects of charity to rights holders. The UN CRPD requires “extending the benefits of ‘the rule of law’ to all and not just to some or indeed to most. Most importantly, it has to do with treating disabled people as ‘subjects’ with full legal personhood as distinct from ‘objects’ to be managed and cared for”.⁹

2.2.1 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Monitoring

The importance of local, regional and national actors for the effective implementation of the UN CRPD was understood from its inception.¹⁰ Article 33 of the UN CRPD represents a significant innovation in the monitoring of human rights treaties, aiming to enhance the implementation of human rights and requires that disabled people must be part of the monitoring process.¹¹

Article 33 requires State Parties to establish national structures to effectively implement, coordinate, and oversee compliance with the rights in the Convention.¹² The formulation of Article 33 was significantly influenced by the active involvement of disabled people, their representative organisations, and National Human Rights Institutions during the drafting of the UN CRPD in the early 2000s.¹³

To comply with Article 33, States must establish a designated national focal point within the government, and an independent monitoring mechanism. The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) is the independent monitoring mechanism for UN CRPD in Ireland, and it works with the National Disability Authority in fulfilling this role.¹⁴ The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, is the national focal point and is responsible for co-ordinating disability policy across government. The Oireachtas

⁹ Gerard Quinn and Charles O'Mahony, 'Disability and Human Rights: A New Field in the United Nations' in *International Protection of Human Rights: A Textbook* (Åbo Akademi University Institute for Human Rights, Turku, 2012), at page 266.

¹⁰ See United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Division for Social Policy and Development, *Handbook for Parliamentarians on The Convention on The Rights of Persons with Disabilities, No 14 — 2007* (Secretariat for the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2007).

¹¹ As such IHREC has established a Disability Advisory Committee, which is composed of a diverse group of people with lived experience of disability. The role of the Committee is to ensure the direct participation of disabled people and the organisations representing them in monitoring how the UN CRPD is implemented in Ireland.

¹² See University of Galway, *Establishing a Monitoring Framework in Ireland for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission 2016).

¹³ Meredith Raley, 'The Drafting of Article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: The Creation of a Novel Mechanism' (2015) 20(1) *IJHR* 138.

¹⁴ The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) is an independent statutory body established in November 2014 under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. IHREC serves as Ireland's National Human Rights Institution and National Equality Body, with a mandate to protect and promote human rights and equality.

Committee on Disability Matters also considers all disability matters including monitoring the implementation UN CRPD.¹⁵

2.3 Identification of Themes and Best Practices in International Literature

One of the core principles of the UN CRPD is the promotion of inclusive communities and local government structures play a crucial role in transforming this principle into reality.¹⁶ By implementing inclusive policies and practices, local governments can ensure that disabled people are fully integrated and included within their community.¹⁷ This involves creating environments where disabled people can live independently and participate fully in all aspects of life.¹⁸ Localising decision-making and participation has emerged in international human rights law over recent years, demarcating a process of support for national, regional, and local governments, civil society and others in developing mechanisms and practices that effectively translate the UN CRPD into concrete practice and benefits on the ground. A current example of how international frameworks can become part of local government are the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).¹⁹

The commitment by governments to other global frameworks for example, SDG localisation can provide some pointers with respect to the implementation of the UN CRPD at local level. The World Blind Union describes in the case of the SDGs, how making them a local reality involves collaboration and coordination among all stakeholders, across all sectors and spheres of governance, and is a two-way interaction between local, national, and global levels.²⁰ In the context of UN CRPD implementation, they highlight how localisation emphasises the crucial role of local governments in promoting and protecting the rights of all disabled people.²¹ This view is echoed by Ireland's report to the UN CRPD committee, which highlights the widely held view from stakeholders that a more coordinated approach to the implementation of the Convention and of disability services generally is needed at local and national level, as people often experience fragmented services and supports, with multiple departments, providers, agencies, and independent organisations involved.²²

¹⁵ Oireachtas, 'Disability Matters Committee' (Oireachtas)

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/33/disability-matters/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

¹⁶ Article 3 (General principles), UN CRPD 2006.

¹⁷ United Nations, 'From Exclusion to Equality: Realizing the rights of persons with disabilities: Handbook for Parliamentarians on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and its Optional Protocol' (International Parliamentary Union, 2007) <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/disabilities-e.pdf> last accessed 3 November 2024.

¹⁸ Article 19 (Living independently and being included in the community), UN CRPD 2006.

¹⁹ United Nations General Assembly, 'Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development' (A/RES/70/1, 70th Session, 2015).

²⁰ World Blind Union, 'Human Rights' <https://worldblindunion.org/programs/human-rights/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Initial Report under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Ireland" Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2021, para (g) pg. 65.

2.3.1 Key Articles in the UN CRPD and the Role of Local Government

A central part of this literature review was a focus on State Reports submitted to the UN CRPD Committee. These are formal reporting documents by a State Party on the measures taken to implement the rights outlined in the UN CRPD. In addition, a review was undertaken of the UN CRPD Committee's Concluding Observations to these State Parties (where available). Concluding Observations are official assessments and set of recommendations issued by the Committee addressed to State Parties following the review of their compliance with the UN CRPD.²³ A review was also undertaken of State Reports and Concluding Observations by using keywords to extract references to local government, allowing us to provide an overview of how States articulated the role of local authorities in implementing the UN CRPD. This analysis provided insights into the distribution of responsibilities and the involvement of local government in fulfilling the Convention's objectives.

In total seventeen State Reports and Concluding Observations to the UN CRPD Committee were reviewed including Ireland, Belgium, EU, the Netherlands, Austria, the UK, Sweden, Denmark, Lithuania, Romania, Germany, Finland, Hungary, Spain, Slovenia, Switzerland, New Zealand.²⁴

This analysis identified seven key UN CRPD articles most relevant to the scope of local government. The key articles that reoccurred in the review are as follows:

- Article 8: Awareness Raising
- Article 9: Accessibility
- Article 19: Living independently and being included in the community
- Article 21: Freedom of expression and opinion, and access to information
- Article 27: Work and Employment
- Article 29: Participation in political and public life
- Article 30: Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport.

Two UN CRPD articles featured more prominently in all the countries reviewed; Article 9 on accessibility and Article 19 on living independently and being included in the community. Both articles have also been elaborated in General Comments by the UN CRPD Committee. For Article 9, the State Reports reviewed highlighted the importance of accessibility standards applying to both physical buildings and local transport and to digital and communications infrastructure. The development of curriculum for training planners and architects were also highlighted across most of the countries reviewed. For Article 19, State Reports emphasised community living and choice for disabled people as being important. Article 29 on

²³ These observations provide an assessment on how well a country is fulfilling its obligations under the UN CRPD and offer guidance for improvement.

²⁴ Using a keyword search of the following terms: local government, local functions, local coordination, local service provision, municipal

participation in political and public life and Article 30 participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport also featured in the review.

In addition, the review also sought to identify structural elements that needed to be addressed for effective UN CRPD implementation at local level, which guided the more focused part of this research project. Many of these structural issues were also identified through concluding observations by the UN CRPD committee and the commonalities including the need to ensure local government is provided with sufficient resources for UN CRPD implementation, have structures for coordination and the importance of a roadmap to follow.

The challenges of having sufficient resource allocation, lack of planning, and clear guidelines were identified across the UN CRPD Committee's Concluding Observations, and also echoed in a survey by the Council of European Municipalities and Regions carried out in 2021 on the implementation of the CRPD at local level.²⁵ The challenges identified included:

- lack of funding
- too much bureaucracy
- lack of information from national level
- difficulty to apply the UN CRPD directly, lack of clear guidelines
- availability of accessible buildings and structures.²⁶

2.4 International Human Rights Law and Local Government

The academic literature on the UN CRPD is extensive. This reflects the importance of the UN CRPD in driving a worldwide programme of law and policy reform over the past two decades. Academics, activists, disabled persons organisations, civil society and public bodies have produced extensive research on different rights and themes under the UN CRPD. The literature explores the historical context, legal implications, implementation challenges, and transformative potential of the UN CRPD.

It has been noted that for effective local government actions in implementing the UN CRPD data collection is important.²⁷ Some of the literature has noted that while the UN CRPD is an important framework for recognising the rights of disabled people that does not guarantee the realisation of these rights and their implementation, especially at the local level in parts of the Global South, faces numerous challenges.²⁸ This study across five countries (Kenya, Philippines, Jamaica, Guatemala, and South Africa) reported difficulties in localising UN CRPD

²⁵ Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CCRE), 'CEMR/UN CRPD Survey Final Report' (CCRE Website) https://ccre.org/img/uploads/piecesjointe/filename/CEMR_UN_CRPD_Survey_Final.pdf last accessed 3 November 2024.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ See Schadler, Johannes & Wissenbacz, Lars 'The role of local planning in the implementation of the CRPD' in Šiška, Jan, and Julie Beadle-Brown. *The Development, Conceptualisation and Implementation of Quality in Disability Support Services*. Karolinum Press, 2021.

²⁸ Shaun Grech, Jörg Weber, and Sarah Rule, "Intersecting Disability and Poverty in the Global South: Barriers to the Localization of the UN CRPD" (2023) 11(4) *Disabled People and the Intersectional Nature of Social Inclusion*.

provisions within the context of poverty. Barriers identified included weak disability organisations, political and legal issues, and a lack of integration of disability concerns into mainstream development efforts.²⁹ These challenges are exacerbated when considering intersecting identities such as age, gender, race, and ethnicity.³⁰ The research emphasised the need for a nuanced, intersectional, and context-specific approach that places poverty at the centre of discussions on disability rights in these jurisdictions.³¹

The National Disability Authority has noted the central role that DPOs play in training and collaboration with local authorities as required by the UN CRPD.³² It emphasises that DPOs must be supported to build capacities in areas such as human rights, public policy, and law to effectively contribute to implementing the UN CRPD.³³ This includes understanding UN CRPD implications, engaging in monitoring processes, and ensuring accessible communication. DPOs and civil society, working in conjunction with disabled people, should also contribute their expertise in providing high-quality training to support local authorities in delivering accessible services and build inclusive communities as required by the UN CRPD.

Other research has explored the disconnection between legal and political commitments and practical realities in Ghana regarding realisation of disability rights at the level of local governance.³⁴ This research suggests that harmonising disability-specific schemes with inclusive local governance is needed.³⁵ The research identified that 'District Planning and Coordinating Units' were identified as essential for enabling disability mainstreaming at the local level and decentralisation.³⁶

The attention given to the disability agenda within public administration discourse was notably heightened following the enactment of the UN CRPD on 13 December 2006. This was further emphasised with the introduction of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, which included Goal No. 3: Good Health and Well-Being, and Goal No. 10: Reduced Inequalities. In the Philippines, key legislation such as Republic Act 7277, known as the Magna Carta for Disabled Persons, and Republic Act 10070, which mandates the establishment of Persons with Disabilities Affairs Offices (PDAO) in local government units, serve as the primary legal frameworks governing disability policy.³⁷ This study specifically investigated the implementation status of Republic Act 10070 within the Provincial Government of Camarines

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² National Disability Authority, *A Review of Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) and Their Participation in Implementing and Monitoring the UN CRPD* (November 2021).

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Lars Wissenbach and Paul Anderson, "Inclusive local governance vs. unfunded mandate? Effects of decentralisation and local development on the inclusion of people with disabilities in Ghana" (2022)

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Commission on Human Rights (Philippines), 'Republic Act No 7277: Magna Carta for Disabled Persons' (CHR, undated) <https://chr-observatories.uwazi.io/en/entity/Ogqqpe6fhv4r?page=1> last accessed 3 November 2024.

Norte, Philippines.³⁸ Using qualitative methodology, the researcher conducted interviews with key informants, facilitated focus group discussions, analysed case studies, and reviewed relevant documents.³⁹ The research found that, despite the establishment of Persons with Disabilities Affairs Offices (PDAO) in local government units, the implementation of disability-inclusive policies remained inconsistent.⁴⁰ Barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, lack of reliable disability data, and minimal compliance with employment and education mandates for disabled people limited progress. However, some success was identified in increasing collaboration with provincial stakeholders.⁴¹

Local authorities play a vital role in safeguarding and advancing human rights.⁴² UNESCO noted that this was evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when local government bore the brunt of addressing multifaceted challenges. UNESCO has recognised this pivotal role since 2004, notably through its International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities (ICCAR), supporting local decision-makers in combating discrimination and fostering human rights.⁴³ However, for local governments to effectively fulfil their human rights obligations, they require enhanced capabilities. This includes the allocation of human and financial resources, the adoption of inclusive approaches to encourage community participation, especially among disadvantaged groups, and the promotion of transparency and open communication through information and technology. Networking at national and international levels further strengthens the implementation of human rights locally. The "Academy on Human Rights Go Local: What Works," a collaborative effort involving UNESCO and various international organisations, serves as a platform for sharing best practices and learning new approaches to governance centred around human rights objectives.⁴⁴

The literature on local government and the UN CRPD remains relatively limited, which contrasts to the voluminous amount of research produced on the UN CRPD. The reasons for the gaps in literature may include a focus on domestic implementation of the UN CRPD (national level), with less consideration paid to the role of local government in realising state obligations. This may result from a lack of awareness or prioritisation of disability rights at the local level. Additionally, the decentralisation of responsibilities from central to local governments varies widely across jurisdictions, leading to disparities in the extent to which local government engages with disability rights, and might also explain the lack of comparative research.

³⁸ Sonia Fontanilla-Pimentel, 'Improved Access and Participation for Persons with Disabilities in Local Governance' (2020) 4(1) Policy and Governance Review 1-13.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² See UNESCO, 'How to support local authorities to implement human rights' (6 March 2023)

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/how-support-local-authorities-implement-human-rights#:~:text=Local%20authorities%20are%20essential%20to,and%20entitlements%20are%20not%20fulfilled> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁴³ UNESCO, 'International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities – ICCAR' (UNESCO) <https://www.unesco.org/en/no-racism-no-discrimination/iccar> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁴⁴ Global Campus of Human Rights, 'Academy and Conference Series' (Human Rights Go Local) <https://www.humanrightsgolocal.org/events/academy-and-conference-series/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

Furthermore, research on local government and the UN CRPD may be hampered by limited data availability, the complexity of researching decentralised government structures, resource constraints for conducting research, and limited resources for Disabled Persons Organisations. Therefore, while recognising the importance of local government in advancing disability rights, the literature in this area remains underdeveloped, highlighting the need for further research to bridge this gap and identify international best practice and comparative approaches.

2.5. The Role of Local Government in Ireland

The Local Government Act 2001, as amended by the Local Government Reform Act 2014, serves as the legal foundation for allocating roles for local authorities in Ireland.⁴⁵ Before the 2014 Act, local governments were responsible for functions such as housing, planning, local road maintenance, water and sewage services, environmental conservation, and recreational amenities etc.⁴⁶ In addition, local authorities also played a significant role in representing local communities. With the enactment of the Local Government Reform Act of 2014, local authorities received additional duties, notably in the areas of planning, local and community development, and promoting economic development and enterprise at the community level.

A recent report from the Council of Europe was highly critical of local government in Ireland.⁴⁷ The 'Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the European Charter of Local Self-Government' noted that while Ireland boasts a robust democracy and has implemented local government reforms over the past decade, it still stands as one of the most centralised nations in Europe.⁴⁸ It concluded that Ireland meets only 8 out of 20 principles outlined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The report noted that while the Irish Government asserts its commitment to bolstering local self-governance, and significant strides have been made since the last review in 2013. However, it noted that considerable work remains before Irish local self-government reaches parity with its European jurisdictions.⁴⁹ The rapporteurs expressed concerns, including the limited scope of public affairs under local authorities' jurisdiction, their restricted financial resources, imbalances between elected members and chief executives in local authorities, insufficient formalised and regular consultations with central government, and extensive administrative oversight. Additionally, members of local authorities are indirectly elected and lack accountability to citizens for their decisions. Recommendations in the report included:

- Transferring more functions to local authorities
- Continuing executive reforms

⁴⁵ Yvonne Scannell, 'Local Government in Ireland' in Angel-Manuel Moreno (ed), *Local Government in the Member States of the European Union: A Comparative Legal Perspective* (INAP 2012) 309-338.

⁴⁶ Aodh Quinlivan, 'Reforming Local Government: Must it Always be Democracy Versus Efficiency?' (2017) 65(2) *Administration* 109.

⁴⁷ 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).

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

- Direct elections
- Instituting formal and regular consultations between central and local government
- Enhancing local democratic oversight of internal administrative structures
- Reducing administrative supervision
- Increasing local resources.

The research in Ireland assessing the role of local authorities in promoting accessibility and inclusion for disabled people indicates room for improvement.⁵⁰ A recent report on public perceptions of how effectively local authorities deliver accessible services and information, and essential infrastructure and digital accessibility was explored. The findings indicate that while progress has been made, there remains a need for local authorities to improve their efforts to engage with disabled people, improve service provision and facilitate greater community inclusion. There was agreement with the sentiment that local authorities treat people fairly and equally increased over the three-year period of the research, rising from 35% in 2021 to 38% in 2023. In contrast, views on improved access for disabled people showed only minor fluctuations, with agreement levels at 39% in 2023, slightly down from 40% in 2021 and up from 38% in 2022.⁵¹

2.6. Funding of Local Authorities in Ireland

The financial management of local authorities includes capital expenditure, current expenditure, charges for goods and services, rates, specific state grants, the Local Government Fund, Local Property Tax, and the preparation of Annual Financial Statements.⁵² Capital expenditure, includes spending on long-term assets like infrastructure and public facilities, largely financed through state grants, development levies, and local authority resources. The current expenditure involves daily operational costs of local authorities, including staff salaries and maintenance, with budgets determined by local councils based on community needs and available resources.

Local authorities have the authority to set charges for various services such as housing, waste management, and planning applications, with some fees fixed at the national level. Rates are levied on commercial properties based on valuations to fund local services. Specific state grants are allocated for designated purposes like housing and road maintenance. The Local Government Fund, established in 1999, is now primarily financed through motor tax, payments from the Exchequer, and Local Property Tax, supporting a range of local government initiatives and infrastructure projects. Local Property Tax, introduced in 2013, is an annual tax on residential properties that contributes to local services. County and city councils having the

⁵⁰ Holly Morrin, Dr Bernie O'Donoghue Hynes, Dr Des Delaney and Ailish Mitchell, *2023 Local Government Services Report: Awareness, Engagement, Satisfaction, and Sentiment* (LGMA, April 2024).

⁵¹ Ibid, at page 42.

⁵² See Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Local Government Finance* (6 December 2018; last updated 12 June 2023) <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/118d0-local-government-finance/> last accessed 14 October 2024.

discretion to adjust the rate by up to 15% to meet financial needs.⁵³ Each local authority is required to prepare an Annual Financial Statement which undergoes independent audit, with consolidated results published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. This framework seeks to ensure accountability and promote financial well-being and value for money within local government.⁵⁴ However, the OECD has noted that Ireland is significantly centralised when compared to other jurisdictions. As such, local authorities play a limited role in public spending. In fact, Ireland is among the lowest in OECD countries in terms of funding of local authorities. However, they are significant public investors, handling more than half of public investment.

2.7. Ireland's legal and policy framework on disability rights at local level

Ireland has several laws and policies that create obligations on the implementation of the UN CRPD by local government. Firstly, Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005 includes several provisions which relate to obligations of public bodies including local authorities. The specific provisions in sections 26, 27, and 28 require local authorities to ensure that their services are accessible to people with disabilities. This includes providing integrated access to mainstream services, ensuring that goods or services purchased are accessible unless impractical or cost-prohibitive, and offering communications in accessible formats. Additionally, electronic information must be compatible with adaptive technologies, and information relevant to people with intellectual disabilities must be available in easy-to-read formats. Part 5 of the Disability Act provides for the minimum statutory employment target for persons with disabilities to be employed in the public sector as 3% which will increase to 4% in 2024.⁵⁵ Furthermore, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty set out in section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 obligates all public bodies to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and treatment of its staff and the persons to whom it provides services and protect the human rights of its members.⁵⁶ In addition to statutory duties, several other national policies are directly linked to local government and its role in implementing the UN CRPD. The policies could be described as supporting the implementation of Article 19 (Living Independently and being included in the community) and Article 30 (Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport etc). The section below discusses a number of these policies.

2.7.1. Housing for All National Housing Policy (2021)

⁵³ Government of Ireland, 'Local Government Finance' (gov.ie) <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/118d0-local-government-finance/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁵⁴ See OECD, 'Regional Policy Profile: Ireland' (OECD 2016) <https://www.oecd.org/regional/regional-policy/profile-Ireland.pdf> 14 October 2024.

⁵⁵ National Disability Authority, 'Monitoring' (NDA) <https://nda.ie/monitoring/monitoring> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁵⁶ Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, 'Implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty' (IHREC, 2022) https://www.ihrec.ie//app/uploads/2022/08/IHREC_Public_Sector_Duty_Final_Eng_WEB.pdf last accessed 3 November 2024.

The "Housing for All" (2021) strategy is the Irish Government's roadmap to provide accessible, high-quality housing for all by 2030, with an estimated annual requirement of 33,000 new homes to fulfil this need.⁵⁷ It emphasises the creation of affordable housing options, addressing homelessness, enhancing social inclusion, and improving the efficiency of existing housing stock through four main pathways. A critical aspect of the plan is its focus on improving housing availability and support services for disabled people. This emphasis is evident in the commitment to integrated and sustainably delivered housing solutions that promote equality, choice, and independent living. Local authorities play an important role in achieving these objectives through the development and execution of Housing Delivery Action Plans. These plans are tasked with setting clear, target-driven objectives for social housing delivery, including provisions for disabled people, over the plan's lifetime.

Local authorities are also instructed to incorporate the housing needs of disabled people into their strategic planning, as informed by the Department of Health's Disability Capacity Review to 2032. This approach seeks to ensure that future housing developments meet the diverse needs of the population, guided by the principles of universal design. Moreover, the "Housing for All" plan calls for the strengthening of Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) at the local level. These groups are charged with the detailed implementation of Local Strategic Plans, addressing the specific housing needs of disabled people in their areas. The strategy outlines several actions, each with designated timelines and lead organisations, to ensure the effective delivery of these housing solutions. Notably, actions include:

- the development of a new National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability for 2022-2027
- the establishment of Local Authority Housing Delivery Action Plans
- the nomination of Disability Friendly Housing Technical Advisors in each local authority to oversee the adaptation and creation of disability-friendly housing.

"Housing for All" places significant emphasis on local authorities' responsibility to plan, deliver, and report on housing solutions tailored to the needs of disabled people, aiming to foster more inclusive communities and improve the quality of life.

2.7.2. National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022 – 2027

The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People commits to providing over 90,000 social housing units by 2030, emphasising the expansion of newly constructed homes through an unprecedented state-wide housing construction initiative.⁵⁸ This effort encourages Local Authorities and Approved Housing Bodies to resume large-scale construction. An essential component of this strategy is the "Design Manual for Quality Housing," which encompasses a diverse array of house, apartment, and duplex designs. This manual serves as a resource,

⁵⁷ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland* (2021).

⁵⁸ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 - Implementation Plan* (22 June 2023).

offering guidance and illustrative examples of various housing models to the accessibility needs of disabled people. The strategy is performance-oriented, mandating that Local Authorities develop and implement detailed plans to address and anticipate the housing requirements of disabled people.

Furthermore, the strategy highlights the role of 'Housing and Disability Steering Groups' as a mechanism for achieving the strategy's objectives at the community level. These groups operate within each local authority region, with their significance and operational capacity reinforced by the Housing for All policy. This strategic framework outlines a plan for these Steering Groups to rejuvenate and refine their objectives and methods, aiming for a more cohesive and strategic approach to addressing the housing needs of disabled people locally. Therefore, the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People is a significant policy initiative by the Irish Government, developed through the collaboration of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (DHLGH), the Department of Health (DoH), and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). It aims to build on the foundations laid by the previous National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016 (extended to 2021), under the overarching housing policy "Housing for All – A New Housing Plan for Ireland".⁵⁹

This strategy outlines a framework for integrating disability into mainstream housing policy, seeking to ensure access to suitable housing and related support services. The stated vision of Policy is twofold: to enable disabled people to live independently with control over their living situations, fostering community inclusion, and to ensure equal access to housing and integrated support services. It acknowledges the diverse needs of disabled people, categorising disabilities into sensory, mental health (including psychosocial disabilities), physical, and intellectual disabilities, and committed to start the strategic planning required to enhance housing delivery for these groups as one of the first actions under the plan.

The strategy identifies six key themes based on an eight-month consultation period:

1. **Accessible Housing and Communities:** Emphasises creating accessible and universally designed homes and communities, informed by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.
2. **Interagency Collaboration and Provision of Supports:** Focuses on improving cooperation between local authorities, the Health Service Executive (HSE), and other departments to align housing and support services.
3. **Affordability of Housing:** Addresses the need for affordable housing options for disabled people, ensuring their inclusion in the housing market.
4. **Communication and Access to Information:** Aims to improve the communication channels and information accessibility for disabled people, ensuring they are not disadvantaged.

⁵⁹ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Housing for All - a New Housing Plan for Ireland* (2021).

5. **Knowledge, Capacity, and Expertise:** Seeks to enhance the understanding of disability and housing within relevant organisations and foster disabled people’s participation in communities.
6. **Strategy Alignment:** Ensures that all government housing policies and strategies promote the rights of disabled people and are aligned with the UN CRPD and other relevant strategies.

The strategy's development process involved two rounds of consultation in 2021, engaging various stakeholders including disability groups, local authorities, and housing bodies, to refine and validate the strategic direction and thematic areas of focus. Essentially, the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022–2027 seeks to set a clear path forward for integrating the housing needs of disabled people into Ireland's broader housing policy, with a strong emphasis on inclusion, accessibility, and inter-agency cooperation. Section 1 of the Strategy evaluates the advancements made in the past decade to enhance housing and support services for disabled people. It discussed several policies and strategies developed during this period, their impact on promoting change, and how these changes have influenced the development of this Strategy (2023). The National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011 to 2016, which was extended to 2021, aimed to improve access for disabled people to suitable housing and support services in a cohesive, sustainable way that supports equality, choice, and independent living. Despite its initial term, the Strategy was extended due to its ongoing relevance and the unfinished achievement of its aims, further prolonged by the COVID-19 pandemic. A review by The Housing Agency documented the Strategy's outcomes, highlighting successful projects and initiatives that provided housing and related supports for disabled people.

Significant to the Strategy was the creation of collaborative structures at both national and local levels, including the Implementation Monitoring Group, the Housing Subgroup, and Housing and Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs) in each local authority area. These groups worked to implement the Strategy's aims, with HDSGs developing Local Strategic Plans to address local needs and set targets for housing delivery for disabled people over five years. Feedback from the consultation rounds indicated recognition of the Strategy's role in promoting independent living and addressing institutionalisation. It also noted variability in improvement across regions and the broad spectrum of needs among different disabilities. In every local authority area, a Housing and Disability Steering Group (HDSG) was set up, led by the local authority's Director of Service for Housing. These groups included members from the Health Service Executive (HSE), Approved Housing Bodies (AHBs), and the disability sector. Their key duties involved creating Local Strategic Plans (LSPs) to adapt the national strategy's actions to the local context. The first round of LSPs was finalised in 2015 and 2016, and many HDSGs formulated new LSPs at the beginning of 2021. These updated plans often include specific objectives for providing housing to people with disabilities over the following five years.

The section of *National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027* on data collection highlights the efforts by the Housing Agency starting in 2017 to gather data on social housing

allocations to disabled people, using a template form for local authorities to record allocations by disability category. This initiative saw improvements in data quality over time, particularly in 2019 and 2020. The data reveals an overall increase in allocations across various disability categories from 2016 to 2020, with notable increases in allocations for physical and mental health disabilities. This effort is part of a broader strategy to improve data collection and coordination, crucial for the new Strategy outlined for 2022 – 2027. Key future actions identified include:

- maintaining and strengthening the Housing and Disability Steering Group structure
- embedding National Guidelines for Assessment and Allocation in local authorities' practices
- reviewing Local Strategic Plans in 2022
- continuing annual reporting to The Housing Agency
- reviewing Housing Adaptation Grant Schemes
- mainstreaming Early Interventions Process training
- expanding the Accessible Information Initiative
- completing the Mental Health Property Transfer Project by mid-2022
- continuing the de-congregation programme
- promoting housing recommendations in Sharing the Vision.

These actions aim to enhance housing provision and support for disabled people, ensuring progress made under the National Housing Strategy for People with Disabilities (NHSPWD) continues into the new strategic period.

2.7.3. The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 Implementation

The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027 Implementation Plan was announced in January 2022 (published in June 2023), and it aims to facilitate disabled people to live independently with appropriate choices and control over their living conditions, promoting their inclusion in the community. It emphasises a whole-of-community approach, incorporating infrastructure, transport, education, and employment considerations into housing planning for disabled people. The policy is informed by the UN CRPD. The strategy is built upon national housing and disability-related policies such as Housing for All, Time to Move on from Congregated Settings, and the Disability Capacity Review to 2032. It continues the efforts of the National Housing Strategy for People with a Disability 2011-2016, extended to 2021. The strategy outlines six themes, including:

- accessible housing and communities
- interagency collaboration
- affordability
- communication and information access
- expertise development
- strategic alignment with other government strategies.

The Implementation Plan details actions and assigns responsibilities primarily to local authorities, the Health Service Executive, and other stakeholders, setting timelines and key performance indicators (KPIs) for each action.

Local authorities are recognised as essential in implementing the strategy's actions. Their responsibilities include improving the availability and accessibility of housing for disabled people and engaging in interagency collaboration to provide support services. Local authorities are to tackle affordability issues by integrating the needs of disabled people into housing plans. Additionally, they ensure that communication and information are accessible and work on building knowledge and expertise within their organisations regarding disability and housing. Furthermore, they are required to align their housing strategies with the national strategy to promote the rights and inclusion of disabled people. The strategy includes commitments to funding and resources necessary for implementing the outlined actions, ensuring local authorities and their partners have the means to achieve the set objectives.

2.7.4. Time to Move on from Congregated Settings: A Strategy for Community Inclusion

The report titled "Time to Move on from Congregated Settings: A Strategy for Community Inclusion," published in June 2011, focused on transitioning disabled people from congregated settings, defined as living situations where ten or more people reside in a single unit or on a campus, to community-based living arrangements. In 2008, about 4,000 people were living in such settings. The policy began implementation in 2012. It aimed to enable disabled people to live in their own homes and be integrated into their communities, enhancing opportunities for personal development and community connection. A specialised subgroup, the 'Time to Move on Subgroup', was established to drive this policy's implementation, supporting the transition to mainstream community residential supports. This included oversight, resource development, and capacity building at a national level. Financially, the policy was supported by €100 million in capital funding allocated to the Health Service Executive (HSE) from 2016-2021 for housing, along with additional revenue resources to facilitate the de-congregation of priority sites. According to the 2023 policy, a focus was placed on high-priority settings, and efforts continued to progress de-congregation across all settings. Strategies involved using capital funding, engaging with the housing sector for home acquisition, and providing support services guidance. Tools and resources were developed to support services in navigating de-congregation processes.

The transition for disabled people from congregated to community settings is viewed as a personal journey, emphasising the creation of a home, exercising choice, and integrating into the community. Over 1,000 people have moved to community settings, with ongoing efforts to support the remaining 1,800 from the original count and an additional 560 identified later. The 2023 Policy regards this as significant progress as it includes the closure of 19 settings and the reduction of residents in others, demonstrating a move away from large-scale congregated

living. However, Disabled Persons Organisations have been highly critical of the lack of progress from a rights perspective.⁶⁰

Both the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027, launched in January 2022, and its predecessor emphasised that addressing the housing needs of disabled people is a public policy priority. These policies have underscored the necessity for leadership, resources, support, and guidance at the national level. However, significant disparities in how local authorities, tasked with executing these policies at the local level, perform and adhere to practices. Effective accommodation delivery is contingent on sufficient funding, support, and oversight from the central government. The national strategy's call for a comprehensive government approach to foster effective collaboration and coordination among all pertinent departments is key. This is vital for achieving its objectives and ensuring effective management and monitoring of local implementation.

2.7.5. Autism Innovation Strategy

Respondents to the recent consultation on the Autism Innovation Strategy expressed concerns about the absence of specific actions related to housing and supported living for autistic people.⁶¹ They suggested that local authorities' housing guidelines should identify autistic people as a priority group who may need state assistance to live independently from their families.⁶² Respondents also advocated for better and broader autism training across multiple sectors. They recommended training for youth workers and volunteers to foster inclusive spaces for autistic youth, dieticians due to links between autism and eating disorders, staff at Tusla (the Child and Family Agency). Respondents specifically identified a training need amongst local authority personnel in homeless services.⁶³

2.7.6. Sharing the Vision (2020)

"Sharing the Vision (2020)" is Ireland's updated national mental health policy, succeeding the 2006 "A Vision for Change".⁶⁴ It advances relevant aspects of the former policy and integrates fresh recommendations to improve national policy in alignment with the ten-year plan for health and social care service reform and transformation outlined in *Sláintecare*. The policy's objective is to enhance mental health services and support, covering a wide spectrum from promotion and prevention to acute and specialised service provision, through the decade 2020-2030. The policy emphasises a cross-governmental approach and grounded in human rights, "Sharing the Vision" focuses particularly on Social Inclusion, advocating for equitable access to various services, including housing, for people with complex mental health

⁶⁰ Disability Federation of Ireland, 'DFI's Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee' (Disability Federation of Ireland, 9 February 2023) <https://www.disability-federation.ie/news/latest/2023/02/09/dfis-opening-statement-to-the-joint-oireachtas-com/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁶¹ See *Autism Innovation Strategy: Analysis of Second Public Consultation on Draft Autism Innovation Strategy* (National Disability Authority, August 2024), at page 39.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*, at page 26.

⁶⁴ Department of Health, *Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone* (2020).

problems. It highlights the necessity for specific actions across Government Departments to enable access to housing opportunities for people with psychosocial disabilities or mental health problems, aiming to eradicate discrimination.

From the feedback received during the consultation phase, the updated policy recognises a need for a stronger emphasis on deinstitutionalisation in mental health. The policy underlines that quality, secure, and suitable housing is vital for the recovery of people with psychosocial disabilities or mental health problems. The inefficiency and high costs associated with a lack of housing alternatives to institutional care, leading to inadequate care, is also acknowledged. To address housing needs for those with mental health difficulties the policy acknowledges the need for concerted efforts among government bodies, local authorities, and housing providers. Furthermore, comprehensive support from health professionals and voluntary organisations is identified as essential for improving the lives of those with complex mental health issues, helping them maintain tenancies and live independently. Effective coordination between mental health services and housing authorities is critical for providing social housing and ensuring specific housing needs are met. Advocacy for social welfare, housing, and access to other services is also deemed crucial.

The policy notes the pivotal role of "Mental Health Tenancy Sustainment Officers" in helping people with mental health problems maintain stable housing and avoid returning to residential mental health services or homelessness. "Sharing the Vision" advises that local housing plans should incorporate the housing requirements of those with complex psychosocial disabilities, in cooperation with statutory mental health services. The recommendations include developing a joint protocol between the Department of Health and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, along with other stakeholders, to facilitate the transition of people from HSE-supported accommodation to community living. It also notes that it is crucial to ensure sustainable resources for tenancy and independent living supports, in conjunction with HSE supports such as Intensive Recovery Support teams. Additionally, the 2016 housing design guidelines by the HSE and The Housing Agency should be used as a standard for housing recommendations in "Sharing the Vision" to promote independent living and mental health recovery.

2.7.7. National Disability Inclusion Strategy

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS), which was launched in 2017 and was to run to 2021 but was extended to cover until the end of 2022.⁶⁵ This strategy represented a comprehensive approach by the Government to improve the lives of disabled people. It acted as the key framework guiding the activities of various government departments and agencies, aligning with the obligations set forth in the UN CRPD, which was finally ratified in 2018. In March 2020, a revised version of the Strategy was introduced by the Minister responsible for disability, following a mid-term review. This revision added 20 new actions, amended 35

⁶⁵ Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, *National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2021)* (24 February 2020, last updated 2 March 2022).

existing actions, and marked nine actions as completed, bringing the total to 125 actions organised across eight key themes:

- Equality and choice,
- Joined-up policies and public services,
- Education,
- Employment,
- Health and well-being,
- Person-centred disability services,
- Living in the community, and
- Transport and accessible places.

The development of this Strategy began in 2015 when the Department of Justice and Equality, together with the NDA and the Interdepartmental Group, launched a consultation process. Subsequently, the coordination of the Strategy was undertaken by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth (DCEDIY), from October 2020.⁶⁶ The implementation was monitored by a Steering Group that included officials from all relevant departments, the Disability Stakeholders Group, and representatives of the National Disability Authority. Chaired by the Minister of State with responsibility for Disability, this group met four times a year to ensure the Strategy's progress and effectiveness.

The process for the next National Disability Strategy has just completed and the Strategy is expected to be published in late 2024.

2.7.8. DFI Research on Housing and Local Authorities and the UN CRPD

In research commissioned by the Citizens Information Board and Disability Federation of Ireland, it found that local authorities bear the main responsibility for providing housing to disabled people and play a critical role in this process.⁶⁷ However, their performance has been inconsistent in terms of assisting with applications and effectively communicating with disabled people. There is considerable variation among local authorities concerning the number and percentage of households recognised as needing social housing due to disability. The involvement of disabled people and their advocates in creating strategic housing plans also differs widely across local authorities. The research also identified that some local authorities actively promote participation and demonstrate positive approaches, whereas others are viewed as lacking in this area. Additionally, the way local authorities disseminate

⁶⁶ National Disability Authority, *National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017–2022*

<https://nda.ie/monitoring/national-disability-strategies/national-disability-inclusion-strategy-2017-2022> last accessed 3 November 2024. The Health (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2022 transferred the policy, functions and funding for specialist disability services from the Minister for Health to the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration. The commencement orders for this legislation are in 2022 and 2023.

⁶⁷ Michael Browne and Gearoid Mac Eochaidh, 'The Right Home: The Housing Needs of People with Disabilities' (Citizens Information Board and Disability Federation of Ireland, 2022).

information and support social housing applications for disabled people varies significantly. Some local authorities are proactive and encouraging, while others are perceived as creating barriers to participation. The research noted that some local authorities often fail to adequately consider or address the unique needs of people with disabilities, sometimes offering unsuitable housing options.⁶⁸ Additionally, it was suggested that some local authorities tend to rely excessively on accommodation provided by disability service providers, which frequently involve clustered housing specifically designed for disabled persons, rather than integrated, community-based living arrangements.

The main piece of work undertaken to date in Ireland on the UN CRPD and local government was undertaken by the Disability Federation of Ireland.⁶⁹ The project aimed to train local authority staff in using the UN CRPD to fulfil their obligations under the Public Sector Duty. Training was provided to 14 local authorities through two sessions: a pre-learning focus group and a four-hour training session. Key findings from the research include positive staff response to the training, identifying equality barriers and solutions, a need for further training in disability awareness and mental health, and inconsistent awareness of the UN CRPD and Public Sector Duty among local authorities. The project highlighted the lack of resources and ongoing segregation of disabled people in local authority practices.

2.7.9. Creating Inclusive Environments for Disabled People within Local Authorities

The important role of local authorities in achieving inclusive community engagement is set out in the Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making.⁷⁰ This guide was developed by the Department of Rural and Community Development in collaboration with a range of stakeholders including DPOs and emphasises the importance of involving minority groups, including disabled people, in local decision-making processes. The guide used the model from *Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)* in emphasising the importance of creating inclusive environments for disabled people in line with Ireland's obligations under the UN CRPD.⁷¹ This involves enabling full participation of disabled people in policy design, delivery, and monitoring at all levels. The guidance also noted the need to shift from the medical model, which focuses on impairments, to the social model, which identifies societal barriers like attitudes, policies, and in the built environment. The guide highlights the importance of DPOs as essential partners for local authorities, offering opportunities for disabled people to address issues and shape policies that impact their lives. The need for disability equality training was also highlighted, which should be delivered by DPOs, to ensure disabled people's voices inform planning and decision-making processes.

⁶⁸ Ibid, page 9.

⁶⁹ Meredith Raley, *Training Local Authorities in Using the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Fulfil their Public Sector Human Rights and Equality Duty* (Disability Federation of Ireland, June 2021).

⁷⁰ *A Guide for Inclusive Community Engagement in Local Planning and Decision Making* [Second Edition] (October 2023).

⁷¹ Ibid, at page 45.

2.8. Access Officers

The role of Access Officers is an important accessibility measure and is set out in Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005.⁷² The section 26(2) provides:

“Each head of a public body referred to in subsection (1) shall authorise at least one of his or her officers (referred to in this Act as “access officers”) to provide or arrange for and co-ordinate the provision of assistance and guidance to persons with disabilities in accessing its services.”

Access Officers play a key role in ensuring public services are accessible.⁷³ Their responsibilities include helping and guiding disabled people in accessing services and information. Access Officers must be easily identifiable and accessible through multiple contact methods. They should also have adequate training and resources to fulfil their role effectively, reporting systemic access issues to senior management to improve services. The literature on the role of Access Officers in Ireland, particularly those working within local authorities, is limited in assessing their effectiveness in ensuring that local authorities meet their statutory obligations under the Disability Act 2005. This gap highlights the need for more focused research on how well Access Officers are fulfilling their roles in promoting accessibility and compliance with legal requirements at the local government level.

However, the National Disability Authority does monitor compliance of public bodies (including local authorities) under the Disability Act 2005. The NDA’s 2022 Monitoring Report outlines the compliance of public bodies with their legal obligations to ensure services and information are accessible for disabled people.⁷⁴ The report focuses on the role of Access Officers in providing assistance and promoting accessibility. It reported progress, with 68.3% of public bodies meeting promotion requirements for Access Officers, though 41.3% still need improvement. The NDA made recommendations including ensuring public websites are user-friendly and updating Access Officer information to comply with statutory obligations. These recommendations apply to all public bodies including local authorities and point to the need for greater compliance with the accessibility requirements in the 2005 Act.

2.9. Housing Adaptation Grant

The Housing Adaptation Grant scheme was introduced in 2007. It was designed to assist older people and disabled people in making necessary adaptations to their homes, supporting independent living. The literature on the Housing Adaptation Grant scheme has focused on its importance for disabled people and older people, highlighting the inadequacy of the

⁷² See Section 26(2) of the Disability Act 2005.

⁷³ National Disability Authority, *Access Officer Guidance for Public Bodies* (NDA, 2022) <https://www.nda.ie/monitoring/monitoring/access-officer-guidance> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁷⁴ National Disability Authority, *Disability Act – Part 3 Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information Provided by Public Bodies: Monitoring Report 2022* (NDA, June 2023).

scheme.⁷⁵ Local authorities are tasked with administering housing adaptation grants, which are partially funded by the central government (80%) and require local authority contributions (20%).

The Government recently published a report that reviewed the Housing Adaptation Grants.⁷⁶ The Report highlighted the rising demand for these grants due to Ireland's ageing population and increasing disability needs. The report recommends increasing grant limits, revising income thresholds, improving the application process, and supporting the development of universally designed homes to reduce future reliance on these grants. It also emphasises the cost-effectiveness of home adaptations compared to long-term care and stresses the need for better data collection and funding sustainability.

The review noted that due to funding constraints, many local authorities struggle to provide their required match funding.⁷⁷ This issue has been exacerbated by the phasing out of Internal Capital Receipts, which many local authorities previously used to meet their funding obligations. The report also noted a concern that a quarter of local authorities may struggle to match the required funding even if grant limits are increased.⁷⁸ The review underscores the rising demand for grants due to an ageing population, particularly people aged over 65, whose numbers are expected to double by 2040.⁷⁹ This demographic trend coupled with the increased costs of construction and adaptation work, which puts pressure on local authorities to manage the distribution and effectiveness of grants.

The review calls for a more consistent administration process across local authorities.⁸⁰ Currently, there are 31 variations of how data and applications are processed. It was noted that some local authorities have moved towards online systems, but there is a need for greater harmonisation. Recommendations also include simplifying the application process, improving data collection, and exploring the potential for an online national application system.

There are calls to improve efficiency by increasing grant limits, adjusting income thresholds, and revising the means test. The review also noted that local authorities need additional training and guidance to ensure they are equipped to manage the scheme effectively and consistently. The review also recommended workshops for local authorities to implement any new regulations or guidelines and to ensure the sustainability of the schemes given rising demand.

⁷⁵ Disability Federation of Ireland, *Housing Adaptation Grant Review Submission* (2 August 2022) <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/housing-adaptation-grant-review-submission/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁷⁶ Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, *Report on the Review of Housing Adaptation Grants for Older People and People with a Disability* (September 2024) <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/ef265-ministers-obrien-and-dillon-announce-reforms-following-review-of-the-housing-adaptation-grants/> last accessed 3 November 2024.

⁷⁷ Ibid, page 8.

⁷⁸ Ibid, page 57.

⁷⁹ Ibid, page 38.

⁸⁰ Ibid, page 93.

2.10. Empowering Civic and Cultural Participation: The Role of Local Authorities in Fulfilling Articles 29 and 30 of the UN CRPD

2.10.1. Article 29 and Article 30 of the UN CRPD

Article 29 of the UN CRPD essentially sets out the framework for enabling disabled people to participate fully in political and public life.⁸¹ Article 29 requires state parties to “guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others”. To realise Article 29, States must ensure that voting procedures, facilities, and materials are accessible and user-friendly for disabled people, and safeguard their rights to vote by secret ballot, run for office, and serve as elected representatives. Article 29 also requires states to foster an inclusive environment where disabled people can engage in public affairs equally, including through non-governmental organisations and by forming or joining organisations representing disabled people.

Article 30 of the UN CRPD underscores the right of disabled people to participate fully in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sports on an equal basis with others. The right also encompasses access to cultural life.⁸² States must ensure that disabled people have access to cultural materials, television programmes, films, theatres, and other cultural sites in accessible formats. This includes access to places such as theatres, museums, libraries, and tourism services, as well as monuments and sites of national cultural significance. It extends to the development of creative potential by requiring State Parties to provide opportunities for disabled people to develop and use their creative, artistic, and intellectual abilities, not only for personal fulfilment but also to contribute to societal enrichment.

Recognition of cultural identity is also a key aspect of the right. States must recognise and support the unique cultural and linguistic identity of disabled people, including sign languages and deaf culture. Participation in sports and leisure is explicitly set out in Article 30. States are required to promote the involvement of disabled people in mainstream sports at all levels.⁸³ They must also ensure that disabled people can organise and participate in disability-specific sports, access recreational and tourism venues, and have equal opportunities for disabled children to participate in play, recreation, and sports, including in the school system. Access to services related to organising recreational, tourism, leisure, and sports activities should also be ensured to comply with Article 30.

In relation to Article 29, local authorities in Ireland facilitate access to voting for people with physical disabilities or illnesses. Voters with disabilities who reside in their own homes and

⁸¹ National Disability Authority, *Overview of UN CRPD Article 29 in Ireland: Participation in Political and Public Life* (June 2023).

⁸² Mathew Smith and Michael Stein, 'Article 30 of the CRPD as a Vehicle for Social Transformation: Harnessing the CRPD's Potential for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities' in E J Kakoullis and K Johnson (eds), *Recognising Human Rights in Different Cultural Contexts* (Palgrave Macmillan 2020).

⁸³

cannot visit a polling station may apply to their local authority for inclusion in the annual Postal Voters List within the Register of Electors.⁸⁴ For those in hospitals, nursing homes, or similar settings, local authorities manage the Special Voters List, also updated yearly, allows them to vote on-site. First-time applicants for the Special Voters List must provide a medical certificate. The National Disability Authority has noted that postal voters face compromised ballot secrecy as their names and addresses are included with their votes.⁸⁵ The statistical report detailing postal and special voting number for the 2020 General Election, indicate that 27,665 postal and special ballots were issued.⁸⁶ However, there was no specific data on how many of these ballots were issued to disabled people. Out of these, 393 ballots were rejected upon opening, and 19,687 were successfully cast, making up 0.9% of the valid votes (from a total of 2,183,489). Notably, the turnout rate for postal and special ballots was 71.2%, surpassing the general election turnout of 62.9%.⁸⁷

The Fundamental Rights Agency's report on the state of political participation rights for disabled people in Ireland ahead of the 2024 European Parliament elections is of note. The Report focused on Ireland's obligations under Article 29 of UN CRPD.⁸⁸ It evaluated the legislative frameworks, like the Electoral Act, Disability Act, and Equal Status Act, which support accessible voting options and aim to establish accessibility standards for polling stations. The Report identified that a number of practical challenges remain, as a significant portion of disabled voters face difficulties in accessing polling stations, casting ballots privately, and obtaining information in accessible formats.⁸⁹ The Fundamental Rights Agency also identified the lack of formal disability awareness training for election staff as a significant barrier.⁹⁰ Despite these barriers, FRA noted some promising practices such as the Irish Sign Language (ISL) Interpreting Team at the Oireachtas has collaborated to develop new ISL signs for parliamentary terms, enhancing accessibility in parliamentary settings.⁹¹ Additionally, broadcasting regulations that require subtitling, sign language interpretation, and audio description for election-related content, were positive in improving information access for disabled people.

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters published recommendations in October 2022, advocating for stronger enforcement of accessibility standards, establishing a formal complaints mechanism, and ensuring that all polling stations meet accessibility requirements.⁹² The Committee also emphasised the role of local authorities in enhancing the

⁸⁴ Ibid, at 18.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ See Houses of the Oireachtas, *Dáil Éireann: An 33ú Dáil Tolltoghchán / 33rd Dáil General Election, 8 February 2020, Election Results* (Houses of the Oireachtas 2020), at page 82.

⁸⁷ NDA

⁸⁸ Lucy Michael, *The Right to Political Participation of Persons with Disabilities Ahead of the 2024 European Parliament Elections* (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, January 2024).

⁸⁹ Ibid, page 20.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid, page 21.

⁹² Joint Committee on Disability Matters, *Participation of People with Disabilities in Political, Cultural, Community and Public Life* (October 2022).

participation of disabled people within their communities. Local authorities are encouraged to adopt a community development approach that promotes social inclusion for disabled people. This involves local area coordination to ensure access to services, physical and cultural activities, and creating an inclusive environment. It also recommended strengthening collaborations between local stakeholders to support community inclusion.⁹³

The Committee recommended that local authorities apply Universal Design principles in built environments and public services.⁹⁴ It was noted that this would ensure that information, communications, and physical spaces are accessible, allowing disabled people to participate meaningfully in their communities. It was also recommended that local authorities should establish permanent mechanisms for consulting disabled people and their Disabled Persons Organisations.⁹⁵ Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) and Public Participation Networks (PPNs) are cited as potential structures to facilitate direct consultation and engagement on issues affecting the disability community including realising Article 29 of the UN CRPD.⁹⁶ Regular audits of accessibility in public spaces and services are also recommended.⁹⁷

The Committee cited evidence from public meetings that highlighted that disabled people are often excluded from decision-making processes due to insufficient consultation across various sectors and levels.⁹⁸ Key barriers include inaccessible voting procedures, limited engagement in policy development, and low representation of disabled people in the Dáil and Seanad.⁹⁹ The Committee also highlighted the lack of consultation with disabled people during the legislative process in the Houses of the Oireachtas, particularly in the pre-legislative phase, which impacts legislation that directly affects their lives.¹⁰⁰

The Disability Matters Report in respect of Article 30 of the UN CRPD emphasises the right of disabled people to fully participate in cultural, recreational, leisure, and sports activities on an equal basis with others. The report identified the systemic and physical barriers that prevent people with disabilities from enjoying these rights. It highlights the need for accessible cultural venues, public spaces, and sporting facilities, as well as the lack of accommodations such as ISL interpretation and accessible formats for cultural content, which restrict the inclusion of disabled people in these areas. The Report also called for enhanced funding and resources to support inclusion, including the establishment of personal assistance services that enable people to engage beyond basic needs, covering cultural and recreational pursuits. It also called for increased disability awareness and inclusion training within sports and cultural organisations, aiming to shift from a medical model to a social and rights-based approach in line with the UN CRPD.

⁹³ Ibid, page 28.

⁹⁴ Ibid, page 6.

⁹⁵ Ibid, page 35.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid, page 9.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

The Disability Matters report emphasised the crucial role local authorities play in ensuring that people with disabilities can fully participate in cultural, recreational, leisure, and sports activities. Local authorities are responsible for developing inclusive community spaces and ensuring that local amenities, such as parks, sports facilities, playgrounds, and cultural venues, are accessible to everyone, including disabled people.

2.10.2. Inclusive Access to Arts and Library Services: Policy and Strategy

The Arts and Disability Policy and Strategy 2012-2016 aimed to enhance the accessibility of arts for disabled people, grounded in the principles of the UN CRPD. It was committed to inclusive practices across the arts sector, encouraging participation, creation, and employment for disabled people. This strategy sought to create equal opportunities, ensuring that disabled people could contribute to and engage with the arts without facing barriers. The strategy identified the important role local play in the delivery of the strategy. The Council noted local authorities work in supporting community-based initiatives and fostering inclusive environments locally. It also noted that through collaboration with arts organisations, local authorities contribute to ensuring accessibility in cultural programming, facilities, and resources is inclusive across urban and rural areas alike. This policy was superseded by the "Making Great Art Work" strategy by the Arts Council of Ireland (2016-2025). This outlines the vision for the arts sector, emphasising support for artists, public engagement, and sustainable, inclusive infrastructure.¹⁰¹ A key focus in the strategy is creating an environment that nurtures artists at all stages of their careers, with fair remuneration and resources for growth, facilitated through partnerships with local authorities.

Like the sports strategies (see below) it seeks to expand public access to the arts, particularly for marginalised groups, including disabled people, to foster inclusivity and diversity. Local authorities play a key role in this framework, with formal agreements to align national and regional arts initiatives, ensuring accessible and equitable arts services across Ireland. Strategic investment in both the physical and organisational arts infrastructure is highlighted in the strategy, aiming to enhance facilities for diverse audiences and artists.

The "National Public Library Strategy 2023-2027" outlines Ireland's vision for public libraries as inclusive, community-centred spaces providing diverse services focused on accessibility, cultural enrichment, and lifelong learning.¹⁰² It highlights a commitment to universal accessibility and inclusivity, aiming to offer accessible services to everyone, including disabled people. Initiatives to enhance accessibility include providing assistive technologies, sensory-friendly spaces, and expanding disability-friendly services. Special attention is given to sensory facilities, such as sensory rooms and adaptive resources.

¹⁰¹ Arts Council, *Making Great Art Work: Leading the Development of the Arts in Ireland, Arts Council Strategy (2016–2025)*

¹⁰² Government of Ireland, *The Library is the Place: Information, Recreation, Inspiration National Public Library Strategy 2023-2027* (Government of Ireland, 2023)

The strategy also emphasises services for marginalised groups by collaborating with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth. Programmes like the "First 5 Little Library" encourage early childhood library engagement, supporting literacy from a young age. Libraries also partner with Age Friendly Ireland to create age-friendly spaces that accommodate the needs of individuals with disabilities as they age. Digital and Physical Accessibility is another focus, with initiatives to remove barriers like library fines that previously limited access for disadvantaged groups.

The strategy promotes digital resources and mobile library services, which are particularly beneficial for people in rural areas, isolated locations, or with restricted mobility. According to the strategy libraries aim to become community and civic engagement hubs by providing accessible spaces that foster community engagement, where people of all backgrounds can access resources, attend events, and pursue lifelong learning.

The Health and Wellbeing aspect of the strategy includes the "Healthy Ireland at Your Library" initiative, which collaborates with the health sector to offer reliable health information and wellness programmes accessible to everyone. The strategy is centred around removing physical, social, and digital barriers to ensure that libraries are accessible, inclusive, and welcoming for all, with a particular emphasis on accommodating disabled people.

2.10.3. Inclusive Access to Sport: Policy and Strategy

The National Sports Policy, alongside the strategies outlined by Sport Ireland, underscores a commitment to increasing participation and accessibility in sports, particularly for disabled people. The Sport Ireland Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities outlines a commitment to promoting accessible and inclusive sports opportunities.¹⁰³ The document sets a framework supporting equal participation for disabled people in sport, aligning with Article 30 of the UN CRPD. Sport Ireland states its commitment to fostering inclusive sports environments, where everyone, regardless of ability, can participate. This commitment acknowledges the lower participation rates among disabled people and the need for targeted strategies. The policy highlights the benefits of physical activity for physical, mental, and social well-being, noting that disabled people are disproportionately likely to be sedentary.

The policy aligns with Ireland's National Physical Activity Plan, emphasising evidence-based approaches to increase activity and reduce barriers.¹⁰⁴ Sport Ireland collaborates with organisations including National Governing Bodies (NGBs), CARA (for advocacy and training), Paralympics Ireland and importantly for this research Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) within local authorities. Sport Ireland adopts inclusive practices, ensures the representation of disabled people in decision-making, promotes governance supporting accessibility, and fosters capacity-building through training. These principles guide funding, facility access, and programme design to prioritise universal accessibility and inclusivity. The policy document contains reference to several actionable steps, such as establishing a working group for

¹⁰³ Sport Ireland, *Policy on Participation in Sport by People with Disabilities* (Sport Ireland 2019).

¹⁰⁴ Government of Ireland, *National Physical Activity Plan Implementation 2020* (Government of Ireland 2020).

disability sport, including specific commitments in future strategies, implementing disability awareness training, supporting CARA and Paralympics Ireland, and advocating for inclusive infrastructure in all sports facilities. Sport Ireland's policy seeks to eliminate barriers and actively promote sports inclusivity through strategic partnerships, targeted funding, and programme development to create equitable sports experiences for people with disabilities.

The Sport Ireland Statement of Strategy 2023-2027 is a strategic plan focused on promoting a more active Ireland by encouraging sports participation across all demographics, improving governance, and enhancing high-performance sports.¹⁰⁵ Sport Ireland aims for "[a]n active Ireland where everyone can enjoy the lifelong benefits of sport and physical activity".¹⁰⁶ Core values include inclusion, integrity, respect, excellence, and accountability, guiding all strategic initiatives. The strategy outlines key priorities for enhancing sports participation and inclusivity across Ireland, with a strong focus on accessibility and support for people with disabilities. The strategy seeks to increase overall sports participation with specific targets for underrepresented groups, including disabled people. It seeks to reduce participation gaps across diverse communities, particularly focusing on women, low-income groups, and disabled people. It emphasises inclusivity, aspiring to improve representation and accessibility for all, with particular attention to disabled people, ethnic minorities, and economically disadvantaged communities. This strategy includes initiatives to support Irish athletes in achieving world-class success, with a dedicated pathway for both Olympic and Paralympic athletes, ensuring comprehensive development across all competitive levels. In alignment with the National Sports Policy, Sport Ireland's strategy aims to raise participation rates among people with long-term disabilities from 26% in 2021 to 40% by 2027.¹⁰⁷ This goal is supported by actions such as developing accessible facilities, enhancing funding for disability, and enforcing accessibility standards across all sports facilities. Additionally, the strategy emphasises collaboration with disability organisations to foster inclusive environments, especially through Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) and National Governing Bodies (NGBs).

The Sport Ireland Strategy 2023-2027 emphasises collaboration with local authorities to foster inclusivity and increase participation in sports. A key component of this strategy involves Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), which work closely with local authorities to promote sport at the community level.¹⁰⁸ This approach seeks to develop sport facilities, organise local programmes, and improve access to recreational sports, ensuring that resources are optimised, and inclusive opportunities are available to all community members. Sports Ireland recognise that local authorities are integral in implementing local sport plans, with a focus on increasing participation, especially among underrepresented groups, such as people with disabilities. Sport Ireland aims to support LSPs in strengthening their organisational frameworks, enhancing governance, and developing initiatives that target inclusion in sport at the grassroots level.

¹⁰⁵ Sport Ireland, *Sport Ireland Strategy 2023-2027* (Sport Ireland 2023).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, at page 8.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, page 7.

The National Sports Policy 2018-2027 also seeks to ensure sport is more inclusive, and accessible across Ireland.¹⁰⁹ It focuses on increasing participation, developing sports infrastructure, enhancing high-performance opportunities, and building capacity within sports organisations. The strategy also notes the important role of local authorities in enhancing community engagement with sports and physical activities. As mentioned above local authorities are tasked with managing public spaces, such as parks and recreational areas, that are widely used for informal sports and physical activities. This includes supporting community events like park runs and other non-competitive gatherings that foster casual engagement with sports.¹¹⁰ As noted above local authorities also work closely with Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs) to ensure that public recreational areas are accessible and utilised effectively. This partnership approach notionally allows them to reach "hard-to-reach" groups, such as those in lower socio-economic brackets or disabled people, by facilitating various programmes aimed at increasing sports participation and removing barriers to access.¹¹¹

In addition to their operational roles, local authorities are encouraged to develop Local Sports Plans in cooperation with LSPs and other community stakeholders, which align with the national policy's goals to increase participation across diverse demographics.¹¹² These plans are intended to support localised strategies that address specific community needs, including the establishment of inclusive facilities and the creation of initiatives for underserved groups in the community. Recognising the importance of shared facilities, the strategy also calls for local authorities to facilitate more community access to sports facilities during off-peak hours and to support initiatives that promote broader participation across all age groups and abilities.¹¹³

The discussion above indicates that the National Sports Policy and Sport Ireland's strategic plans speak to the important role of local authorities play in fostering an inclusive sports environment across Ireland. Local authorities, in collaboration with Local Sports Partnerships (LSPs), are key in implementing local sports initiatives that align with national goals to increase participation among underrepresented groups, particularly disabled people. Through the development of accessible facilities, organisation of community programmes, and the creation of Local Sports Plans, local authorities are positioned to bridge gaps in sports accessibility at the grassroots level. This partnership has the potential to not only enhance community engagement but also ensures that public spaces and resources are utilised effectively to promote equal access to sports for all community members, contributing significantly to the national objective of an active, inclusive Ireland.

2.11. Mapping Exercise

¹⁰⁹ Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport, *National Sports Policy 2018-2027* (Government of Ireland 2018),

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, at page 33.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, at page 34.

¹¹² *Ibid*, at page 35.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, at page 48.

An initial mapping exercise was undertaken during the literature review phase which comprised of a desk review of State reporting on all the local authorities against UN CRPD articles that were identified; Article 9 (Accessibility); Article 19 (Living Independently and Being Included in the Community; Article 21 (Freedom of expression, opinion and access to information), Article 29 (Participation in Public and Political Life) and Article 30 (Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure and Sport). The purpose of this mapping was to collect data that could be used for following up during key the informant interview phase and also to get a broad view as to how the local authorities performed in delivering the key rights from UN CRPD relevant to their functions.

The data from the mapping exercise was taken from material publicly available on the local authority websites and through other sources focusing on disability inclusion and rights at a community level in the 31 local authorities, The mapping found mixed results across the different local authorities across Article 9, Article 21, Article 29 and Article 30. It highlighted consistent data across all local authorities on sharing information on accessibility of the local authority itself and within the community, accessible streets, building and parking, This was likely due to both these areas being outlined as a key function of local authorities. Other areas that emerged across different local authorities included some good initiatives taken in local, sports and recreation, access to libraries, and inclusive playgrounds. (Article 30). Good examples that emerged from the mapping included Roscommon Leisure Centre, Meath Library and Accessible South Dublin County.¹¹⁴ In addition, the example of good initiatives on accessible and inclusive libraries were also shared in the focus groups and a number of them correlated with the mapping.

The mapping has its limitations due to the lack of robust data available on disability at a local level. It was possible to cross check the mapping of Access Officers and access to information and by also reviewing the monitoring reports by the National Disability Authority on the implementation of Part 3 and Part 5.

2.12. Conclusions

This chapter provided a review of the UN CRPD and its application to local government, particularly within the Irish context. It highlighted key articles of the UN CRPD relevant to local authorities, including accessibility, independent living, and participation in public life. The analysis was further informed by the jurisprudence of the UN CRPD Committee and the specific competencies of Irish local authorities. The review emphasised that Ireland's local government system, in terms of funding and function, is one of the weakest in Europe.

The literature reviewed illustrates that while significant attention has been paid to Ireland's national-level compliance with the UN CRPD, there is a clear gap in research regarding the role

¹¹⁴ See Roscommon Lesisure Centre, <https://roscommonleisurecentre.ie/accessibility/> last accessed 3 November 2024; see Meath County Council; <https://www.meath.ie/council/council-services/libraries/toys-technology-and-training> last accessed 3 November 2024, see also <https://www.dublinsoutdoors.ie/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Brochure-Accessibility-2018-D5.pdf>

of local authorities in fulfilling state obligations under the Convention. While national policies and strategies like Housing for All and the National Disability Inclusion Strategy highlight the importance of local government, the practical implementation of these obligations at the local level remains inconsistent. This inconsistency is exacerbated by limited resources, a lack of structured coordination, and fragmented services, all of which hinder the effective realisation of disability rights at the local level.

Access Officers play an important role in ensuring that public services are accessible to disabled people, as mandated by Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005. The literature exploring the effectiveness of Access Officer working across local authorities is limited.

A key function of local authorities in Ireland is the administration of the Housing Adaptation Grant, introduced to assist older people and disabled people in modifying their homes, is a critical component in realising the right to independent living (Article 19 UN CRPD). While the grant scheme is valuable, its administration varies significantly across local authorities, and funding limitations have resulted in inconsistent support. Many local authorities struggle to provide the necessary match funding.

The literature review identified both progress and persistent barriers in the realisation of Articles 29 and 30 of the UN CRPD, which outline the rights of disabled people to participate fully in political and public life (Article 29) and in cultural, recreational, leisure, and sports activities (Article 30). Although legislative frameworks, such as the Electoral Act and Equal Status Act, support accessible voting, practical challenges remain. These include limited physical access to polling stations, a lack of accessible voting materials, and insufficient disability awareness training for election staff. To remove these barriers local authorities, need to adopt Universal Design principles in all public spaces, enforce accessibility standards consistently, and provide training to ensure inclusive voting environments. Similarly, the right to cultural participation faces significant obstacles due to inaccessible cultural venues, inadequate accommodations (e.g., sign language interpretation), and limited opportunities for engagement in recreational and sporting activities. While policies like the National Sports Policy and strategies by Sport Ireland emphasise inclusivity and accessibility local authorities need to play a central role in ensuring accessible community spaces and supporting disability-specific sports initiatives. This requires Local Sports Partnerships effectively engaging with disabled people and their representative organisations, conducting regular audits of public spaces, and implementing local sports and cultural plans to address specific community needs. Local authorities in Ireland have a key role in removing structural barriers through community development approaches that promote accessibility, universal design, and active consultation with disabled people and their representative organisations. By delivering inclusive environments within their mandate across political, cultural, and recreational areas, local authorities can ensure the realisation of Articles 29 and 30 of the UN CRPD.

The gap in research at the intersection of local government and the UN CRPD may stem from a variety of factors. These include a lack of awareness of the role of local government in advancing disability rights, the complexity of researching decentralised government

structures, and the limited resources available to conduct such research. Furthermore, the decentralisation of responsibilities across jurisdictions varies widely, leading to disparities in how local governments engage with disability rights. More focused research is needed to better understand the role of local authorities in implementing the UN CRPD and to identify best practices that could improve local-level compliance. This research is essential for informing public policy and ensuring that local authorities have the resources and guidance needed to advance disability rights effectively locally.

Chapter 3: Surveys of Access Officers and Chief Executives of Local Authorities

3.1. Introduction

As mentioned in **Chapter 1** two surveys were undertaken as part of this research project. The questions in both surveys were designed to address the information gaps identified by the project's Advisory Group and highlighted in the literature review. The first survey was directed to Access Officers working within local authorities and the second was a survey of Chief Executive (CEs) of local authorities.

3.1.1. Access Officer Survey

As highlighted in the literature review, Access Officers play a critical role in promoting equality and social inclusion by ensuring that disabled people can access public services. The role of Access Officers is enshrined in legislation, specifically under Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005, which mandates that all public bodies, including local authorities, appoint an Access Officer. Given their essential function within local authorities, it was decided to survey Access Officers. An invitation was sent to all Access Officers, requesting their participation by completing the survey. The survey consisted of 24 questions and was designed to take approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

3.1.2. CE Survey

It was important also to survey the CEs of local authorities in Ireland. CEs hold a key leadership position, responsible for implementing policies that significantly impact the lives of disabled people in communities across Ireland. By collecting responses from CEs, we aimed to evaluate how disability rights are being integrated into the daily operations of local authorities and the extent to which the principles of the UN CRPD are reflected in their policies, practices, and decision-making processes. This survey sought to identify both the progress made and the gaps that remain in ensuring that local government upholds the rights and inclusion of disabled people.

3.2. Response rates of surveys

The response rate for the **CE survey was 45.16% (14 of 31 CEs participated), while the response rate for the Access Officer survey was 38.71% (12 of 31 Access Officers participated)**. From a methodological perspective, these response rates are useful. While a higher response rate would strengthen the representativeness of the findings, the response rates provide valuable information on the perspectives of Access Officers and CEs. This data offers meaningful perspectives as to the gaps in the implementation of disability rights at the

local authority level, though it is important to consider the potential for non-response bias when interpreting the results.¹¹⁵

The deadline for completion of the Access Officer survey was extended three times to facilitate a greater response rate. One Access Officer noted that the lower response rate could be explained by the fact that:

“... some of the questions raised did not align to the access duties assigned locally so I found it difficult to complete”.

This Access Officer noted that:

“My duties as access officer were mainly to be a conduit for public persons raising issues with access to services, public buildings, and/or public realm within the purview of... [the] Council, to have their query or complaint heard and more importantly responded to by the relevant member of staff. I also advised staff around plain English, the need to capitalise hashtags and describe images on social media and ensure colour background on posters did not render documents illegible.”

Based on this perspective the limited scope of the Access Officer's role, focused primarily on facilitating access and not broader equality or disability issues, underscores a potential gap in how local authorities address the full range of responsibilities that might be expected under the UN CRPD.

In the information sheet sent to all Access Officers inviting them to participate in the survey, the researchers made it explicitly clear that all responses would be anonymous and that the researchers would not know their identities. Additionally, the researchers committed to ensuring that no information included in the final report would allow the respondents to be identified. Despite these assurances, one Access Officer working in a local authority reported a reluctance to provide any critical feedback about their local authority in the survey.

This reluctance to be openly critical, even with the promise of anonymity, could have impacted the survey responses by limiting the candour of participants. If multiple respondents felt the same hesitancy, this could have resulted in less critical feedback than might otherwise have been provided, potentially skewing the findings toward a more positive or neutral view of local authority practices. This could have hindered the ability of the survey to fully capture areas in need of improvement, particularly if respondents felt constrained in highlighting weaknesses or challenges within their local authority. However, as will be seen below there was significant critical comment from some Access Officers, which mitigates this risk as Access Officers offered a range of different perspectives.

¹¹⁵ See Berg, N. (2005). Non-response bias. In K. Kempf-Leonard (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Social Measurement* (Vol. 2, pp. 865-873). Academic Press.

3.3. Findings from the Access Officer Survey

For the purposes of presenting the findings we have categorised the questions into the following themes:

1. Awareness of Disability Rights
2. Progress and Good Practices
3. Role and Responsibilities of Access Officers
4. Adequacy of Training for Access Officers
5. Collaboration, Support and Engaging with Disabled People
6. Human Rights Perspective and Future Improvements
7. Additional Comments and Insights

3.3.1 Awareness of Disability Rights

1. Have you heard of the United Nations Disability Convention (UNCRPD)?



Chart 1 Respondents' Awareness of the UN CRPD

Out of the twelve respondents, eight confirmed that they had heard of the UN CRPD, while four stated they had not. It is surprising that four people in the role of Access Officer, a position dedicated to promoting accessibility and equality, were not aware of the UN CRPD, highlighting the gap in essential knowledge critical to their role.

2. How aware are you of the United Nations Disability Convention (UNCRPD) and what it means to your role as Access Officer. Please choose from the following options, you can choose more than one.

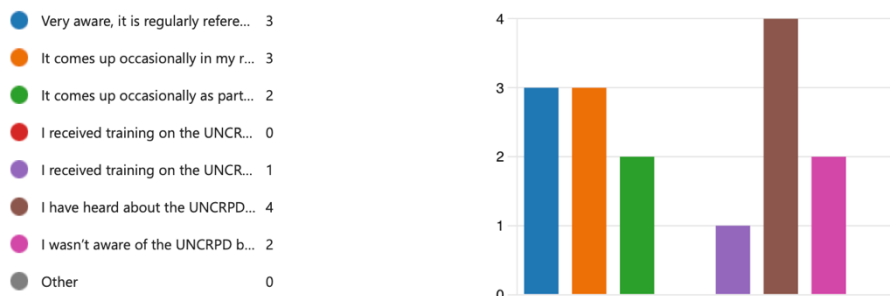


Chart 2 Levels of Awareness of the UN CRPD and Its Relevance Among Access Officers

Responses to "How aware are you of the United Nations Disability Convention (UN CRPD) and what it means to your role as Access Officer?" indicated varied levels of awareness among Access Officers. Three respondents stated that they are "very aware", regularly referencing it in their work, while three others mentioned that they have heard of the UN CRPD but do not fully understand it. Four respondents noted that it occasionally comes up in their role, either during interactions with the public or internal meetings. Interestingly, two respondents indicated they were not aware of the UN CRPD before receiving the questionnaire. One person mentioned receiving training on the UN CRPD, which has helped them in their role. This suggests that while a portion of Access Officers is well-versed in the UN CRPD, there are significant gaps in understanding and application, with some officers needing further training.

3. How aware are you of Irish anti-discrimination and equality laws, and what they mean for your role as an Access Officer?
Please choose from the following options; you can select more than one."

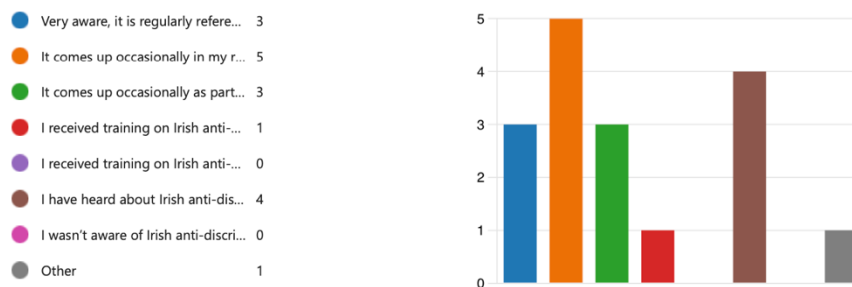


Chart 3 Access Officers' Awareness of Irish Anti-Discrimination and Equality Laws and Their Relevance to the Role

Responses to "How aware are you of Irish anti-discrimination and equality laws, and what they mean for your role as an Access Officer?" indicate a range of awareness levels. Three respondents indicated that they are "very aware" and regularly reference these laws in their work, while several others noted that these laws "occasionally come up" either in their role when interacting with the public or during internal meetings.

One respondent highlighted that they had received training on these laws, though it hasn't come up since. Four respondents mentioned that they have heard of these laws but do not fully understand them. One Access Officer responded that they have not received any training in this area but would welcome it.

These findings suggest that while some Access Officers are well-informed about Irish anti-discrimination laws, there are notable gaps in understanding and application, with some officers needing additional training on the relevant legislation.

4. How would you describe the knowledge of Disability Rights / the UN Disability Convention (UNCRPD) amongst Local Authority staff?

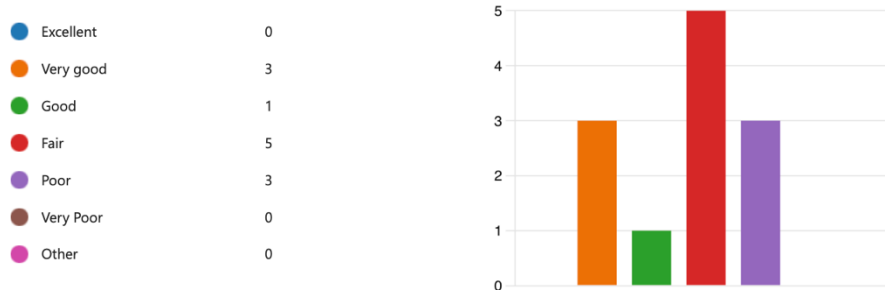


Chart 4 Local Authority Staff's Knowledge of Disability Rights and the UN CRPD

The responses to "How would you describe the knowledge of Disability Rights / the UN Disability Convention (UN CRPD) amongst Local Authority staff?" indicated a mixed assessment. Three respondents rated the knowledge as "Very good," and one rated it as "Good". However, four respondents described the knowledge level as "Fair," while three indicated it was "Poor." These responses suggest that while some staff have a good understanding of disability rights and the UN CRPD, there are notable areas where improvements in knowledge and awareness are required.

5. How would describe the Local Authority management's understanding of disability rights / the UN Disability Convention (UNCRRD) and its implications for the work of the Local Authority?

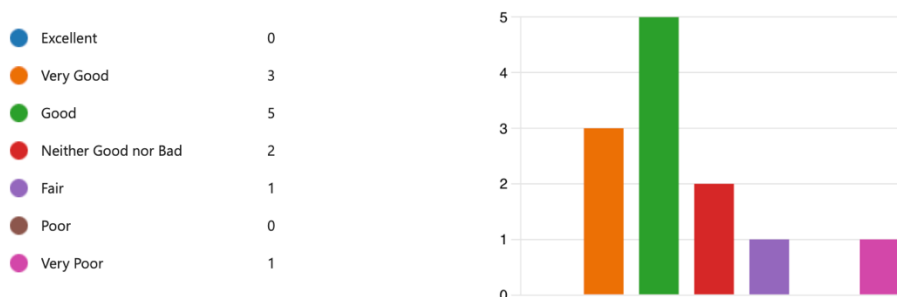


Chart 5 Management's Understanding of Disability Rights and the UN CRPD

The responses to "How would you describe the Local Authority management's understanding of disability rights / the UN Disability Convention (UN CRPD) and its implications for the work of the Local Authority?" indicates a generally positive perception. Four respondents rated the management's understanding as "Good", and three rated it as "Very Good". Two respondents considered it "Neither Good nor Bad", while one rated it as "Fair". However, one respondent rated the understanding as "Very Poor". Overall, while the majority of Access Officers view management's understanding as favourable, there remains a need for improvement.

6. How would you describe your Local Authority's understanding of its role in implementing the UN Disability Convention (UNCRPD) and implementing measures to support Irish anti-discrimination and equality law?

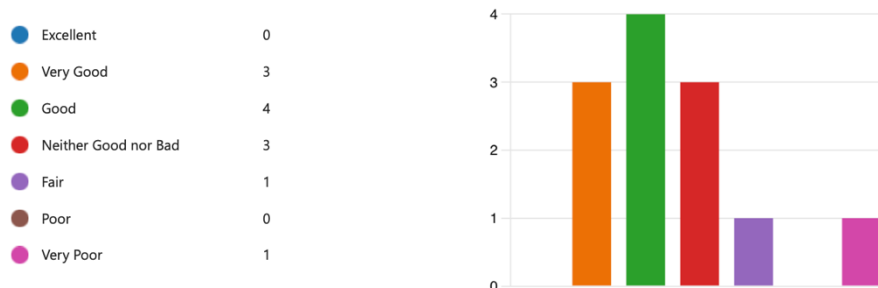


Chart 6 Local Authority's Understanding of Its Role in Implementing the UN CRPD and Supporting Anti-Discrimination and Equality Law

These findings indicate that the majority of Access Officers rated the Local Authority management's understanding of disability rights and UN CRPD positively. Four respondents rated it as "Very Good", and five rated it as "Good". However, three respondents felt that management's understanding was neutral, with "Neither Good nor Bad", while one person rated it as "Fair" and another as "Very Poor". This suggests that while many Access Officers believe management has a solid understanding of disability rights, there are a few areas where knowledge and implementation may be lacking.

3.3.2. Progress and Good Practices

Responses to "Can you identify specific areas where you have observed progress or improvements in supporting disabled people within your Local Authority?" highlight various achievements across different local authorities. Some key areas of progress mentioned include:

- Construction of accessible buildings with staff showing a clear understanding of accessibility requirements.
- Initial progress following the enactment of the Disability Act 2005, with cross-departmental collaboration, staff training, and community consultation resulting in the delivery of capital and revenue projects aimed at improving access.
- Improved accessibility of routes to public buildings and car parks, as well as attention to gradients, ramps, and other access considerations in housing developments.
- Enhancements in digital communications, such as Irish Sign Language (ISL) training, the adoption of the JAM card, and compliance with the EU Web Accessibility Directive to ensure accessible online documents.

- Establishment of strategically important committees such as the Disability Inclusion Strategy Committee (DISC), influencing work programmes and budget allocations, as well as developing training for staff.
- Significant improvements in library services, accessible public spaces, playgrounds, and sensory areas.
- Installation of hearing loop systems, automatic assisted door opening devices, and enhanced lighting in public areas.
- Launch of awareness campaigns like "Make Way Day," indicating ongoing initiatives to improve access and inclusion.

However, some Access Officers identified challenges, such as reduced funding streams over the years leading to a slowdown in planned disability-related projects, and the dissolution of cross-departmental structures established under the Disability Act 2005, which has limited consultation and input from Access Officers in recent years. These responses suggest both substantial progress and the need for continued efforts and resources to ensure accessibility and inclusion for disabled people.

Responses identified a range of exemplary practices / initiatives across different local authorities.

1. Examples included **Disability Awareness Training**: Local authorities liaising closely with local disability networks and conducting staff training to build awareness of disability issues.
2. **Make Way Day Reports**: These are compiled annually and presented to municipal districts to inform their work and budgets, ensuring that improvements are aligned with the solutions suggested by disabled people.
3. **Early Project Discussions**: Involving disability considerations at the early stages of housing developments, enterprise projects, and public space renewals to identify non-compliance issues proactively.
4. **Website Accessibility**: Meath County Council was ranked 1st among local authorities for website accessibility in the National Disability Authority's (NDA) report, highlighting the importance of digital inclusivity.
5. **Beach Accessibility**: A structured approach to making beaches accessible earned national recognition, and the local authority was the first to introduce 30% universally designed homes into the County Development Plan for housing developments.
6. **Consultation with Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs)**: Implementation of a consultation framework in partnership with DPOs to ensure inclusive decision-making.
7. **Employment of Disabled People**: Local authorities promoting employment opportunities for people with disabilities, contributing to inclusivity in the workforce.
8. **Community Collaboration**: Close working relationships with community groups to support sustainable accessibility and empower other communities by sharing information.
9. **Cavan Disability Network**: A network set up to give a voice to disability groups and disabled people, serving as an exemplary model for advocacy and collaboration.

Findings related to gaps or challenges in supporting the rights of disabled people at the local level in Ireland revealed several themes:

1. Structural and Resource Limitations:

- (i) Many older buildings and narrow streets are not accessible, and while new developments attempt to address this, legacy infrastructure remains a significant barrier.
- (ii) The role of Access Officer in many local authorities is considered an "add-on" to other full-time positions, resulting in the role not being taken seriously or integrated into planning processes for new projects.
- (iii) The disbandment of disability structures within local authorities due to lack of funding has further reduced the effectiveness of these roles.

2. Leadership and Policy Issues: There is a lack of top-level leadership within local authorities regarding disability rights, leading to the exclusion of essential accessibility features (e.g., ramps, accessible parking) in projects due to misunderstanding or budget cuts. Several respondents emphasised the need for greater emphasis at the national level, particularly in the implementation of national strategies like Housing for All and The National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, which they felt were inadequately funded and not followed through at the local level.

3. Funding and Training Deficiencies: A major challenge is the lack of direct funding from central government to support local authorities in delivering accessible services, employing Access Officers, and providing disability awareness training. Respondents highlighted the need for ongoing training for local authority staff to ensure they understand their responsibilities and can adequately support the rights of disabled people in their roles.

4. Knowledge Gaps: Several respondents pointed to a general lack of knowledge about the rights of disabled people, particularly among staff without a background in housing, public building design, or related areas. This knowledge gap poses a significant challenge to the effective implementation of accessibility measures.

The responses to this question suggest that while there is a growing focus on inclusion, significant gaps remain in both the implementation policy and practical implementation, particularly due to resource constraints, lack of leadership, and inadequate training. Addressing these issues will be essential to ensure that the rights of disabled people are fully supported at the local level.

3.3.3. Role and Responsibilities of Access Officers

When asked "Does your role have Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)?" revealed a mix of approaches across local authorities. Six respondents indicated that they do not have KPIs, while four confirmed that they do. One respondent mentioned having KPIs, but none of them are related to disability. Another respondent indicated uncertainty, stating "I'm not sure". This suggests a lack of consistency across local authorities in how the role of Access Officer is evaluated and measured, with limited focus on disability-related outcomes in terms of how the role of Access Officer is performed.

The responses to a question on "Which of the following best describes your position?" reveals that most of the Access Officers are part-time and often lack a clear job description. Six respondents indicated that they are part-time without a defined job description, while three noted that the role is an "add-on" to their full-time positions, without formal orders or delegation. Three respondents mentioned that their role as Access Officer is part-time with a defined job description. One respondent highlighted that their Access Officer duties are in addition to other roles and that their time is limited based on workload. These responses highlight the part-time and often undefined nature of the Access Officer role in many local authorities, which limit the effectiveness of the position in addressing disability rights comprehensively across local authorities.

Responses to the question "If your Access Officer role is not full time, are you given sufficient time to focus on your role as Access Officer?" reflect that many Access Officers struggle to allocate adequate time to their responsibilities. While three respondents indicated that they have sufficient time, six stated that they do not, with some explaining that they are overwhelmed by other duties. Several respondents mentioned that they try to fit their Access Officer tasks into their other roles, but the workload is too large for one person or insufficient time is formally allocated to the position. One respondent expressed a desire for more time to be dedicated to the Access Officer role. These responses suggest that in many cases, the part-time nature of the role, combined with other work responsibilities, limits the ability of Access Officers to discharge their functions.

"No. I have very little time to dedicate to Disabilities. I try to integrate this into my position and through works that I can influence within my own section." **Access Officer 2**

"Role is bigger than workload for one person" **Access Officer 6**

"I assign my own time, but the volume of other work is huge too" **Access Officer 11**

All twelve respondents to the **Question** are you required to undertake tasks outside the scope of your role as Access Officer indicated that they are required to undertake tasks outside the scope. This suggests that the Access Officer role is always combined with other responsibilities, which diverts focus and limits the time and resources available to fully address

the needs of disabled people within local authority areas. This hinders the effectiveness of the role.

In follow-up most respondents (eight out of twelve) believe that taking on additional tasks impacts their ability to perform effectively in their Access Officer role. Four respondents indicated that the extra tasks do not affect their performance. This indicates that in most cases, the assignment of additional duties outside of the Access Officer role hinders the ability to focus adequately on accessibility and disability rights issues. The addition of non-related responsibilities likely shifts the focus on core Access Officer duties, potentially limiting the role's effectiveness within local authorities. The four respondents who disagreed may have a limited understanding of the full scope of their role as Access Officer, which could explain why they do not believe that additional tasks detract from their ability to effectively perform their duties in this capacity.

3.3.4. Adequacy of Training for Access Officers

Six out of twelve respondents have not received any disability rights training, while the other six indicated that they have. This suggests a significant gap in the provision of training for Access Officers, which hinders their ability to effectively carry out their responsibilities in promoting accessibility and disability rights. Ensuring that all Access Officers receive relevant training is crucial in strengthening their personal effectiveness in performing their roles effectively.

Some respondents reported receiving **Disability Awareness Training**, which helped to raise general awareness about disability but did not provide the specialised knowledge needed for their role. One respondent, for example, noted that they had organised disability training for their entire local authority using a funding stream they applied for, but the training did not focus on their own specific needs as an Access Officer. Due to funding limitations, they prioritised organisational awareness over their own role-specific training requirements.

“I organised Disability Awareness Training for the entire LA 2 years ago under a funding stream that I was able to apply for. The training was good regarding heightening awareness, but it did not provide any specialised training for my own role.” **Access Officer 2**

Several respondents expressed frustration with the lack of formalised training since taking on the role. One respondent mentioned that they were assigned the Access Officer role three years ago but had not received any training specific to the position apart from what they had undertaken as part of their own professional development (CPD). Another respondent reported not receiving any training but expected to attend training in the near future. There was a strong sentiment from a few that more formalised training programmes with certification (such as National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) qualifications) would be highly beneficial in preparing Access Officers for the demands of their role.

“I think a dedicated course and/or training with NFQ qualifications would be hugely beneficial” **Access Officer 10**

On the other hand, some respondents were satisfied with the training they received. One person described their training as very adequate and effective, while another praised the excellent training provided by a private accessibility consultancy provider. Some officers had also taken the initiative to pursue additional qualifications in areas like access auditing and had attended various seminars and conferences over the years to keep up with evolving standards. Several respondents emphasised the need for better national coordination and regular opportunities for Access Officers to connect, share insights, and engage in face-to-face training.

“Attended LGMA workshop recently. It was informative regarding Neurodivergence.[I] met other Access Officers. We all need a national link to guide us in our work. Proper Training for the role should be provided to us and at a suitable location (not MS Teams) and where we can discuss our learnings together.” **Access Officer 11**

While some Access Officers are content with the training they have received, others pointed to significant gaps, with a clear demand for more specialised, formalised, regular and interactive training to better support their role in local authorities.

3.3.5. Collaboration, Support and Engaging with Disabled People

Findings revealed a mixed level of understanding and communication amongst colleagues. Three respondents noted that their colleagues "have some sense of the role" and include them in relevant work planning and consultation processes. However, six respondents reported that they "rarely receive communications" from their colleagues regarding their role as Access Officer, indicating a lack of engagement or understanding from their peers. Three respondents mentioned that their colleagues "understand the role well" and reach out to them on relevant issues. One respondent expressed that their colleagues "are not very clear on the role" and ask for support with unrelated matters, which suggests confusion or a lack of clarity about the responsibilities of the Access Officers. These responses indicate significant variability in relation to how the Access Officer role is integrated within local authorities' work.

Findings from the research show that supports that could lead to the implementation of the UN CRPD and promote inclusion and equality for disabled people revealed were observed as follows:

- **Local Disability Networks:** Several respondents pointed to the presence of **local Disability Networks** or **Disability Steering Groups**, which include different stakeholders such as voluntary groups, disability organisations, and local authorities. These networks play an important role in raising issues and promoting inclusion at the local level, with some respondents noting that their councils are engaged with these networks.

- **Structures under the Disability Act 2005:** One respondent suggested that structures established under the Disability Act 2005 should be reinstated, potentially under the **Local Community Development Committees (LCDC)**. They suggested that the LCDC, which focuses on social inclusion, could be a strong platform for supporting UN CRPD implementation by involving a broad range of stakeholders, including local authorities, social protection, education and training boards (ETBs), and the business community.
- **Local Authority Equality Officers and the Public Sector Duty:** Some respondents mentioned the role of Equality Officers within local authorities, as well as the importance of implementing the public sector duty to ensure that local authorities meet to their obligations regarding equality and inclusion.
- **Existing Steering Groups:** Some Access Officers also highlighted various **existing steering groups** such as the **Housing and Disability Steering Group**, the **Transport Task Force**, and the **Public Participation Networks (PPN)**. These groups bring together key stakeholders such as disability organisations, the HSE, local businesses, law enforcement, and academic institutions to collaborate on disability issues. However, it was noted that much of the work in these groups falls to the Access Officer to drive forward.
- **National and Local Policies:** Some respondents noted that Local Authorities incorporate the principles of inclusion into their policies, such as the County Development Plan, Local Area Plans, and Age-Friendly Plans, which align with national policies and statutory provisions.
- **Gaps in Support:** A few respondents expressed concerns about the lack of structures and support, with one respondent noting that **none exist** that they are aware of. Another Access Officer emphasised that their role should be full-time and not an additional responsibility to other roles within local authorities.

While various networks, steering groups, and policies exist to promote disability inclusion, there are concerns about the consistency and effectiveness of these structures. There is a lack of consistency across local authorities. Respondents called for stronger national coordination, more dedicated roles, and enhanced training to fully implement the UN CRPD at the local level.

Most respondents (11 out of 12) feel that their colleagues are supportive. Only one respondent indicated that their colleagues were not supportive. This indicates that, in most local authorities, Access Officers generally receive the assistance they need from colleagues when addressing accessibility issues.

One respondent mentioned that while colleagues are as helpful as they can be, financial constraints are a significant barrier to getting projects implemented. Another respondent

emphasised the need for more authority to direct actions to be taken, indicating a desire for greater responsibility and decision-making power in their role. One respondent noted that they receive regular support from the Disability Federation of Ireland and mentioned workshops organised by the LGMA for multidisciplinary teams working on disability and neurodivergence. They also referenced an upcoming meeting of Access Officers, which shows that external training and peer support are valuable resources.

One respondent highlighted that the broad scope of the Access Officer role requires more than one person per local authority. They suggested that the role should first be consolidated into a full-time position before building a team around it, pointing to the need for greater resourcing and structural support within local authorities. These responses indicate that while some support exists, many Access Officers feel that additional resources, decision-making authority, and financial support are needed if they are to effectively undertake their role and address accessibility issues within local authorities.

3.3.6. Human Rights Perspective and Future Improvements (Questions 21-23)

Many respondents emphasised the importance of ensuring that all people are treated with respect for their human rights. One respondent noted their efforts to create a customer-friendly environment for disabled people. Several respondents highlighted the significance of the Access Officer role in upholding human rights. One noted that it is paramount to ensuring that human rights are respected, while others underscored the need for greater training and resources to fully enable local authorities to meet their obligations.

*“LAs take notice when they are directed to put Strategies and actions into place. The Public Service Duty will inform some work of the LAs in the near future but only if resources are provided as well as training for staff across LAs. No one or two people will be able to create change unless the LA environment is also supported to do this.” **Access Officer 2***

Some respondents expressed concerns about the vast scope of the role and its coverage of different aspects of human rights.

*“The area of work is huge, covering all aspects of human rights. It is an unreasonable expectation that one person could possibly be equipped to fulfil the diversity of this role. We are catering to the needs of 22% of our population and it should be similarly resourced to that of Climate Change, Age Friendly, Healthy Ireland, and Integration Teams, where there are sizable teams in place in each LA National recognition of Grade 7 would also enforce the importance of this brief and help gain buy in from senior management teams.” **Access Officer***

6

Another respondent saw their role as crucial for raising awareness about the obligations local authorities have towards people with disabilities. They pointed out that many people have personal connections to someone with a disability, and increasing awareness and providing guidance on how to ensure equal treatment could be very effective. A few respondents

expressed their role in terms of ensuring access to services for all and described their involvement in promoting inclusion at various levels. Based in these responses Access Officers view their role as important for advancing human rights and promoting equal access for disabled people within local authorities. However, many emphasised barriers and the need for greater support, resources, and training.

When asked to list the most important actions or resources that would improve the implementation of disability rights at the Local Authority level responses reflected themes already discussed above, including actions and additional resources to support the realisation of disability rights. Again, many respondents emphasised the need for a dedicated structure and a full-time Access Officer role, with some suggesting that a Director of Services or equivalent should be designated as Access Officer. One respondent suggested that the role should not only focus on technical, administrative, and IT issues but also involve expertise in various other aspects of accessibility.

Training was repeatedly mentioned. Respondents called for training of all staff, especially technical training to ensure compliance with law and policy. One respondent suggested online training modules to raise awareness, while others highlighted the importance of educating the public to promote understanding of disability rights and prevent misuse of accessible services like parking spaces. Several respondents suggested establishing groups involving local stakeholders and disability groups and carer groups to address access issues and improve consultation processes. Many respondents again highlighted the need for additional resources, including funding for project implementation and dedicated budgets for Access Officers. One respondent suggested the need for annual audits and inspections of premises are necessary to ensure compliance with accessibility standards. Another respondent mentioned the need for a team structure within local authorities to better manage the broad scope of the Access Officer role. Respondents identified a need for more dedicated roles, enhanced training for both staff and the public, stakeholder engagement, and adequate resources to effectively implement disability rights within local authorities.

How Local Authority engage and consult with disabled people to ensure their representation in decision-making processes was reported as inconsistent, and differing means of engagement across local authorities. Many respondents mentioned their local authorities' collaboration with **Disability Networks**, such as the countywide Disability Network, Meath Disability Network, and Cavan Disability Network. These networks act as platforms for consultation and facilitate communication between disabled people and local authorities. In some instances, local authorities also work through the **Public Participation Networks (PPN)** to gather input, though one respondent noted that the accessibility of consultation materials is key to ensuring effective participation.

Several local authorities conduct **walkability audits**, particularly for initiatives like **Town First** and **Active Travel Projects**, where disabled people are invited to assess the accessibility of proposed designs. Public consultations on development projects and public realm improvements were identified as common practice, with feedback from disabled people

considered during the design process. Additionally, **Disabled Access Certificates** are assessed to ensure compliance with accessibility regulations, such as Part M.

Some Local Authorities have created **community access groups** to share knowledge and develop best practices, often working closely with the **Centre for Independent Living** to address challenges. These groups help to shape designs, especially in areas like social housing, by regularly consulting with disabled people. **Strategic Policy Committees** and **universal public consultations** are also used by some councils to gather broader input on policies, plans, and projects.

However, not all local authorities have robust consultation processes in place. One respondent highlighted the use of the **consult.ie** website to facilitate feedback, while a few others commented they were unaware of any formal engagement with disabled people in their local authority or had limited participation in local access groups.

“None as far as I’m aware” Access Officer 10

While some local authorities demonstrate strong engagement with disabled people through structured networks and consultation processes, others appear to have less formalised or limited participation.

3.3.7. Additional Comments

The additional comments provided by respondents offer a range of views regarding the role of Access Officers and the challenges associated with promoting disability rights within local authorities. Access Officers identified significant challenges in how their role is perceived and implemented within local authorities, with suggestions for greater recognition, resources, and clarity in responsibilities for Access Officers to better support the rights of disabled people who engage with local authorities. Some respondents suggested that the role of the Access Officer is often not taken seriously unless prompted by external queries. This suggests that the role is seen as reactive rather than proactive within some local authorities.

“Disability with LAs is addressed in its basic format especially through HR, but the role of the Access Officer is really not taken seriously unless we are asked to feedback to queries received from the Department or a citizen on a very infrequent basis.” Access Officer 2

Role of central government; One Access Officer suggested that central government needed to commit to sustained funding and support, warning against cutting funding for disability during crises. They highlighted the importance of financial and policy continuity to maintain progress on accessibility and inclusion.

“It’s a long journey, there needs to be central government commitment to ensure continuity of progress made and not cut funding at the first sign of a crisis”. Access Officer 2

Inadequate Definition of the Access Officer Role, correlating with responses to the questions above on the Role and Responsibilities of Access Officers, respondents criticised the current definition of the Access Officer's role, noting that it focuses primarily on signposting. In practice, some Access Officers see themselves as experts in accessibility, responsible for compliance with the UN CRPD and advising senior management in local authorities on best practices.

"In reality, an Access Officer is the expert in accessibility with responsibility for compliance with the UN CRPD, while also leading and advising senior management on best practice of A-Z service delivery across the organisation. I think this aspect is fundamental and needs to be addressed." Access Officer 6

However, this view conflicts with those other Access Officers who perceive their role narrowly, have received little to no specialised training, and who reported that they were able to fulfil their functions as Access Officer despite having other significant duties beyond access as part of their employment with their local authority.

Accessibility of Public Spaces; Several respondents emphasised the need for better accessibility at public recreational areas, such as beaches, pointing out issues like difficult access to paths, lack of equipment, and inadequate cleaning. They also highlighted the importance of accessible toilets and private changing areas, and identifying the need for investment in such amenities to make spaces accessible to all.

"Many beaches are difficult to access due to the nature of paths, roads, and a lack of available equipment. Where beaches are accessible, regular cleaning of paths and slipways is needed for safe access. There should also be more disabled toilets and private changing areas." Access Officer 10

Development and Investment in the Role of Access Officer; Several respondents suggested that the Access Officer role should be a full-time position with a clear description and supported with specialised training. They also recommended that the role be positioned at a technical level, under departments like Health and Safety or Corporate Services. This reflects a belief that the current part-time nature of the role limits its effectiveness and aligns with the findings discussed above.

"The role should be a full-time position in Local Authorities. There should be a clear description of the role and there should be suitable training provided. I think the role should be at a technical level and under the umbrella of Health and Safety/Corporate Services Dept. It is impossible to learn about the job during working hours and my job that I primarily focus on has too many demands/workloads in it as well." Access Officer 10

3.3.8. Summary of Access Officer Survey Findings

The survey of Access Officers within local authorities provides useful insights. While some Access Officers suggest some progress on accessibility, such as the construction of accessible buildings, improvements in digital communications, and engagement with disability networks, significant challenges and gaps remain. The responses suggest that progress is inconsistent across local authorities, with some Access Officers experiencing better support and more proactive engagement than others.

One of the key issues identified is the **limited scope and part-time nature** of the Access Officer role in many local authorities. A significant number of respondents indicated that their role is an "add-on" to their full-time positions, often without a defined job description. This has resulted in a lack of focus on disability within local authorities a weakening of their responsibilities which undermines the effectiveness of the role.

The absence of **Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)** related to disability rights within local authorities further underscores the need for clearer evaluation measures to assess the functions of the role of the Access Officer.

A recurring theme throughout the survey responses is the **inadequate training** provided to Access Officers. While some respondents reported receiving relevant training, including Disability Awareness Training and training in access auditing, many noted that they have not received any specialised training focused on disability rights. This lack of formalised and consistent training undermines the ability of Access Officers to perform their duties effectively, particularly given the evolving legal and policy frameworks surrounding disability rights, and Ireland's ratification of the UN CRPD.

The survey also highlights **gaps in consultation and engagement** with disabled people at the local level. While some local authorities have established strong networks with disability groups, such as local Disability Networks and through their Public Participation Network, others have less formal or structured engagement processes. Inconsistent approaches to consultation mean that the voices of disabled people are not always being heard in decision-making processes, which is a key requirement of the UN CRPD (see Chapter 2). This inconsistency is compounded by the fact that some Access Officers are unsure of the structures or processes available within their local authority to engage with disabled people effectively.

Several Access Officers also pointed out that the **role lacks recognition and support** at both the local and national levels. The discharge of disability structures within local authorities and the absence of dedicated budgets for accessibility projects were cited as key obstacles to progress. Additionally, the reluctance of some Access Officers to provide critical feedback, even with the promise of anonymity, suggests that there may be a broader issue of insufficient leadership and accountability within local authorities when it comes to addressing the needs of disabled people.

The response to the survey suggests a need for **greater resources, better training, and more robust structures** to support Access Officers in their roles. Many respondents called for the role to be made **full-time**, with a dedicated team or additional staff to assist in managing the broad scope of responsibilities. Several Access Officers identified a need for national coordination to ensure that local authorities are supported in meeting their obligations under the UN CRPD. **Formalised training**, with a focus on human rights and disability legislation, are needed to equip Access Officers with the knowledge and skills required to advocate for and implement meaningful changes within their communities.

While there has been progress in some areas, the survey reveals **significant challenges** that must be addressed to ensure that local authorities across Ireland can effectively promote disability rights and meet their obligations under the UN CRPD. This requires a **coordinated national effort**, supported by adequate funding, clear definition of the role of Access Officer, and comprehensive training, to empower Access Officers to champion change.

3.4. Survey of Chief Executive

The survey received responses from 14 local authorities. This represents approximately 45% of the total 31 local authorities. For the purposes of presenting the findings we have categorised the 29 questions into the following 9 overarching themes:

1. Identifying Local Authority Information
2. Awareness and Knowledge of Disability Rights
3. Data Collection and Successful Initiatives
4. Performance in Key Areas of Disability Inclusion
5. Role and Effectiveness of Access Officers
6. Collaboration, Challenges, and Barriers to Inclusion
7. Government Support and Standardisation
8. Recommendations and Additional Support
9. Public Policy and Final Comments

A potential limitation of the survey of CEs lies in the fact that several local authorities who are known for good practices in disability inclusion participated, as noted in our mapping exercise (see Chapter 2). This may have led to a positive bias in the survey results, as all participating councils highlighted examples of good practices within their local authority. Conversely, local authorities that chose not to respond might have been less confident in their performance regarding disability rights and inclusion, which could suggest that the survey results are not fully representative of the broader national picture. This non-response bias might skew the findings towards a more favourable assessment of local authority performance, leaving potential gaps in understanding the challenges faced by less confident or underperforming councils. Nevertheless, the response rate of 45% provides a useful set of findings, particularly given the gaps in the literature, as discussed above.

3.4.1. Identifying Local Authority Information

While the response rate is at 45%, it nonetheless provides valuable insights from nearly half of the local authorities in Ireland, reflecting a range of perspectives on the implementation of the UN CRPD at the local level. The CEs of local authorities that responded include:

1. Clare County Council
2. Cork County Council
3. Dublin City Council
4. Kerry County Council
5. Leitrim County Council
6. Louth County Council
7. Meath County Council
8. Monaghan County Council
9. Offaly County Council
10. Roscommon County Council

11. Sligo County Council
12. South Dublin County Council
13. Tipperary County Council
14. Wicklow County Council

3.4.2. Awareness and Knowledge of Disability Rights

2 all 14 respondents to the survey indicated that they are aware of the United Nations Disability Convention (UN CRPD) and its connection to the work of local authorities. This suggests a widespread recognition of the importance of the UN CRPD among the local authority CEs who participated, indicating a foundational level of awareness of the Convention and its implications for local governance.

Their knowledge of the needs of disabled people within their local authority areas is rated below on a scale from 1 to 10, with the following scores:

No of respondents	Knowledge rating (1- 10)
2	5
2	6
4	7
6	8

These ratings suggest a moderate to high level of awareness among the CEs about the needs of disabled people within their local authority, with most respondents scoring themselves between 6 and 8.

3.4.3. Data Collection and Successful Initiatives

Local authorities indicated that they use different methods and processes to collect data and information on disabled people within their areas. A commonly used formal source is the Census data provided by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), which offers demographic insights into disability needs. Many authorities also referenced national frameworks, such as the National Housing Strategy for Disabled People 2022-2027, to guide their decision-making processes.

Housing assessments and housing need applications serve as key tools for collecting individual data on the requirements of disabled people, especially in terms of access to housing and adaptations. Consultation and collaboration play a significant role in data collection for several local authorities. Disability advocacy groups, forums such as the Disability Consultative Committee (DCC), and Public Participation Networks (PPNs) provide valuable input on local needs. Some local authorities actively engage in participatory processes, such as walkability audits, where disabled people contribute directly to project planning and design.

Collaboration with community stakeholders, advocacy groups, and Approved Housing Bodies also helps shape policies and ensure that disability concerns are addressed. In addition to external consultations, internal surveys are conducted by some local authorities to assess the needs of employees with disabilities. For instance, Wicklow County Council runs a staff census to identify the percentage of employees with disabilities and address their needs through its Disability Liaison Officer. Recruitment processes are designed to capture data about potential staff members with disabilities to ensure reasonable accommodations are in place. Some local authorities have set up specialised committees and forums, such as disability steering groups and strategic policy committees (SPCs), to oversee the integration of disability rights and gather relevant data. These groups often collaborate closely with housing departments and other key sections to ensure that disability issues are considered in the development and planning stages of public projects. It was also reported that data is collected through disability grants and support schemes that focus on physical access and housing adaptations. These grant assessments provide specific insights into the needs of people requiring modifications to public spaces and housing. These methods demonstrate a varied approach, with some authorities leaning heavily on formal data, while others emphasise local consultation.

Local authorities provided a range of examples of successful initiatives and programmes aimed at supporting inclusion and equality for disabled people. These initiatives cover various aspects of accessibility, housing, recreation, and awareness campaigns.

One key area of support involves adjusting housing to meet the needs of disabled people. For example:

- Tipperary County Council ensures that its Choice Based Letting system is inclusive of marginalised groups, including people with intellectual disabilities. Similarly, several local authorities mentioned housing adaptation grants and the establishment of Housing and Disability Steering Groups to address the specific housing needs of disabled people.
- Meath County Council has implemented initiatives such as signing up to the JAM card programme and developing a sensory garden in collaboration with Prosper Meath.
- Sligo County Council has launched a Disability, Inclusion and Access Strategy and made significant improvements in web accessibility, outdoor recreation, and housing adaptation grants.
- In Offaly, the local authority is actively working with the Offaly Disability Equality Network (ODEN) on various issues, such as parking and public realm design while promoting inclusive housing strategies.

Accessibility to public spaces is another priority, with some local authorities introducing wheelchair swings and footpath improvements, such as in Louth. Leitrim County Council has supported walkability studies, disability service providers, and sports inclusion programmes.

Wicklow County Council has partnered with the Disability Federation of Ireland to supplement the work of the Access Officer and facilitate the Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee

which is an elected committee. Wicklow has also implemented the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Lanyard across its public offices and delivered various sports and education programmes for children with disabilities, such as the "Learn to Cycle" initiative.

Some local authorities have focused on public awareness and inclusion campaigns. For example, Cork County Council has participated in the "Make Way Day" campaign and developed age-friendly walkability audits. Kerry County Council has implemented a beach wheelchair service, autism-friendly initiatives, and sports inclusion programmes. Kerry has also participated in the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) programme, which promotes access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities.

In relation to cultural inclusion, South Dublin County Council has taken several steps, such as becoming JAM Card© friendly and installing assistive technologies across its library network. The council has also partnered with Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) in the "Making Inclusion a Reality" project, which builds capacity for disabled people to engage with the Housing Disability Steering Group. Similarly, Dublin City Council is progressing toward Autism Friendly City accreditation and offers a wide range of programmes that promote inclusion through sports, arts, and cultural activities. The examples set out in the responses demonstrate the local authorities' commitment to supporting disabled people through a range of initiatives that address housing, public spaces, recreation, and cultural life.

CEs reported different mechanisms in place to consult disabled people outside the usual public consultations. These methods are intended to ensure inclusive decision-making processes and effective representation of disabled persons in local matters.

Some local authorities have established dedicated forums or consultative committees. For example, Louth County Council engages with the Louth Disability Forum, while Leitrim County Council involves representatives from the disability sector in strategic planning bodies such as the Leitrim Local Community Development Committee, Social Development SPC, and the Sports Partnership Board. Similarly, Wicklow County Council has a Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC), which includes stakeholders such as people with lived experiences of disability, elected members, and service providers. DISC has been involved in various consultations, including the development of the Local Economic Community Plan. Offaly County Council consults with disabled people through the Housing and Disability Steering Group and engages in early planning processes with organisations like ODEN (Offaly Disability Equality Network). In Sligo, the Disability Consultative Committee works alongside the Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) and the Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI), ensuring that consultative processes are accessible.

In South Dublin County, the Disability Advisory and Consultative Panel, established in 2010, provides advice to the Council on matters relevant to disabled people, with both advisory and consultative roles. The panel hosts annual seminars focused on specific issues, such as accessibility and universal design. Dublin City Council has developed a specific consultation framework in collaboration with DPOs to ensure meaningful engagement on projects undertaken by the council. This framework, currently being implemented, is supported by a

new digital consultation platform compliant with WCAG 2.2 AA standards. Monaghan County Council works closely with the local DisAbility Network and has recently consulted them on the Town Centre Plan. Cork County Council follows a similar approach, consulting disabled people through its Housing Disability Subgroup and conducting public consultations for various projects.

In some cases, councils acknowledged challenges in reaching disabled people for participation in consultations. However, CEs reported a strong effort across local authorities to establish mechanisms that allow for inclusive and accessible engagement in decision-making processes.

3.4.4. Performance in Key Areas of Disability Inclusion

7. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in providing accessible information to disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

6.64
Average Rating

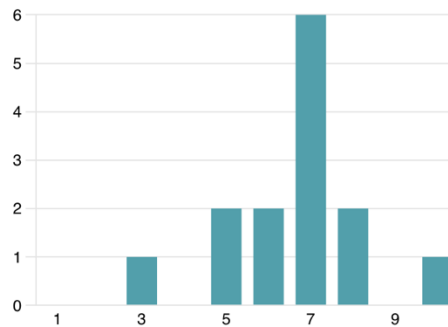


Chart 7 Rating of Local Authority's Performance in Providing Accessible Information to Disabled People

The ratings provided by the Local Authorities on how well they are performing in providing accessible information to disabled people varies across the different authorities. On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent, the ratings range from as low as 3 to a high of 10. Several authorities rated themselves relatively high in this area, with scores of 8 and 7 being common, suggesting confidence in their efforts to make information accessible. One authority rated itself a perfect 10, indicating that they believe they have achieved a high standard in accessibility.

On the lower end of the scale, a few authorities gave themselves a score of 5 or 6, implying that while some progress has been made, there is still room for improvement. One authority gave a score of 3, reflecting significant dissatisfaction with their performance in this area. This

wide range of ratings indicates that while some local authorities feel they are excelling in providing accessible information, others recognise the need for improvement, particularly in enhancing accessibility measures and ensuring that everyone, including those with disabilities, has access to important information.

8. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in conducting disability awareness campaigns, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

6.21
Average Rating

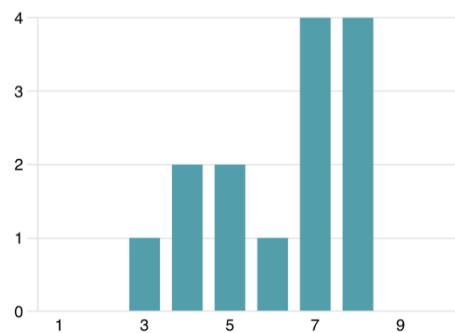


Chart 8 Rating of Local Authority’s Performance in Conducting Disability Awareness Campaigns

The ratings provided by Local Authorities on their performance in conducting disability awareness campaigns indicates a diverse range of self-assessments, with scores spanning from 3 to 8 on a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is terrible and 10 is excellent. Several authorities rated themselves at 7 or 8, indicating a solid level of confidence in their disability awareness efforts. These authorities likely believe that their campaigns are effective in promoting disability awareness within their communities.

Conversely, a few authorities rated themselves at the lower end of the scale, with one authority providing a score as low as 3 and two others at 4. These lower scores may reflect a perception that their efforts are insufficient or that more work is needed to improve the visibility and impact of their campaigns. The majority of the ratings, however, fall in the mid-range, with several authorities giving themselves a rating of 5 or 6, suggesting that while they have made some progress in raising disability awareness, they also recognise that there is more that can be done. The responses suggest that while some local authorities feel they are making progress in raising disability awareness, others acknowledge that significant improvements are needed.

9. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in realising the right to housing for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

7.29
Average Rating

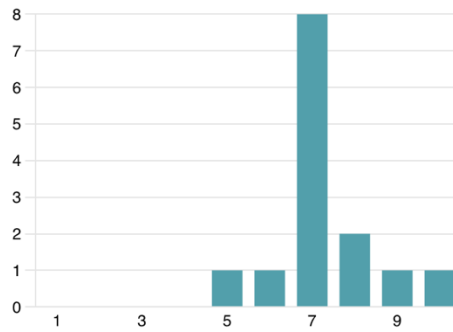


Chart 9 Rating of Local Authority’s Performance in Realising the Right to Housing for Disabled People

10. Please rate how well your Local Authority is implementing accessible and inclusive housing strategies, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)

6.86
Average Rating

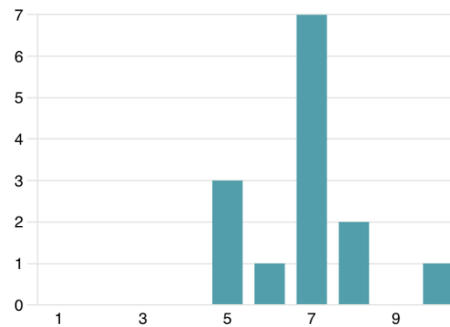


Chart 10 Rating of Local Authority’s Implementation of Accessible and Inclusive Housing Strategies

The survey responses regarding Local Authorities' performance in realising the right to housing for disabled people and implementing accessible and inclusive housing strategies show a range of self-assessments. Most ratings for realising the right to housing fall between 6 and 8, indicating a moderate to strong confidence in their actions in these areas. However, some authorities rated themselves at a 5, signalling room for improvement. When it comes to

implementing accessible and inclusive housing strategies, most ratings fall between 5 and 7, with a few higher scores of 8 and one perfect score of 10. These self-assessments suggest that while many local authorities believe they are making good progress, some feel there is still significant work to be done in enhancing accessibility and inclusivity in housing.

11. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in adhering to accessibility standards for physical buildings, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

6.86
Average Rating

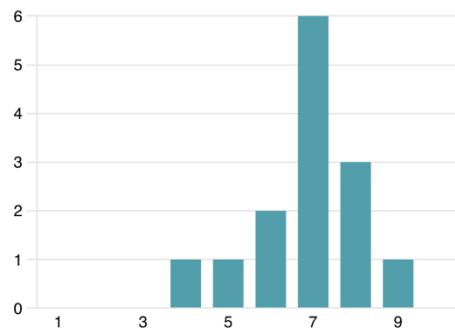


Chart 11 Rating of Local Authority’s Performance in Adhering to Accessibility Standards for Physical Buildings

12. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in implementing accessibility standards for local transport, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

6.07
Average Rating

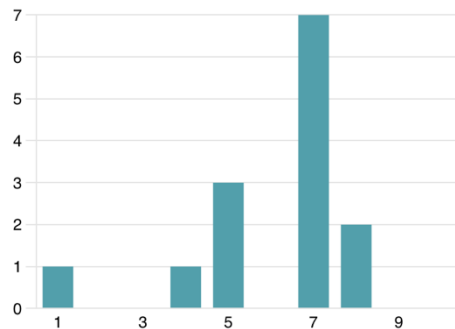


Chart 12 Rating of Local Authority’s Performance in Implementing Accessibility Standards for Local Transport

The survey responses to **Question 11** regarding how well Local Authorities are performing in adhering to accessibility standards for physical buildings and **Question 12** implementing accessibility standards for local transport show a generally positive trend with room for improvement. For physical buildings, most ratings group around 7 and 8 with an average score of 6.86, indicating a strong compliance with standards. However, some lower scores, such as 4 and 5, suggest some local authorities face challenges in providing accessible housing. Similarly, for local transport, ratings range from 4 to 8, with several authorities rating themselves a 7 or 8, but some expressing lower confidence, especially with a notable rating of 1 (the average is 6.07). This reflects gaps in the implementation of transport accessibility.

13. Please rate how well your Local Authority is providing accessible information about local government, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

6.86
Average Rating

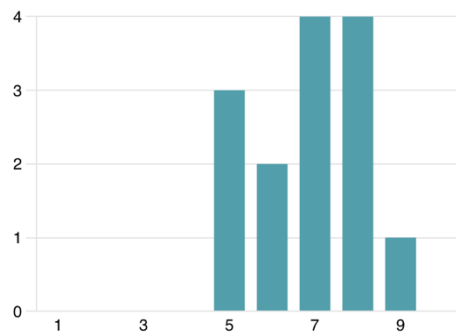


Chart 13 Rating of Local Authority's Performance in Providing Accessible Information About Local Government

14. Please rate how well your Local Authority is ensuring its website is accessible for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

7.43
Average Rating

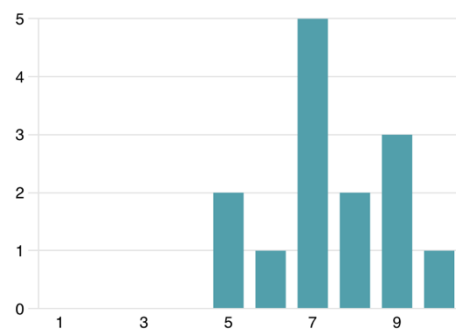


Chart 14 Rating of Local Authority’s Performance in Ensuring Website Accessibility for Disabled People

The ratings provided for Local Authorities' performance in providing accessible information about local government (**Question 13**) and ensuring website accessibility (**Question 14**) for disabled people indicate a relatively positive responses, but with areas for improvement. Scores for accessible information range mostly between 5 and 8, with a couple of authorities rating themselves at 9 (the average was 6.86). However, some scores as low as 5 indicate that more needs to be done to improve accessibility of information. Similarly, website accessibility scores are mostly in the range of 7 to 9, with one authority rating itself a 10 (the average was 7.43), though lower scores indicate some local authority websites are not accessible.

15. Please rate how well your Local Authority is supporting living independently and being included in the community for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

6.71
Average Rating

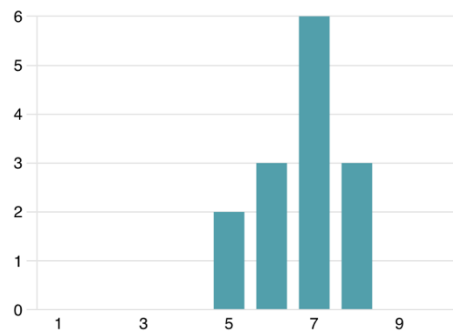


Chart 15 Rating of Local Authority’s Performance in Supporting Independent Living and Community Inclusion for Disabled People

The ratings for how well Local Authorities are supporting disabled people in living independently and being included in the community (**Question 15**) range from 5 to 8. Most Local Authorities rated their performance between 6 and 8 (the average being 6.71). This indicates a generally positive self-assessment but with room for improvement. A few Local Authorities rated themselves at 5, indicating that more work is needed to support independent living and community inclusion. There was varied performance across the different Local Authorities, with a tendency towards reporting moderate to good provision of support.

16. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in supporting work and employment opportunities for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

7.21
Average Rating

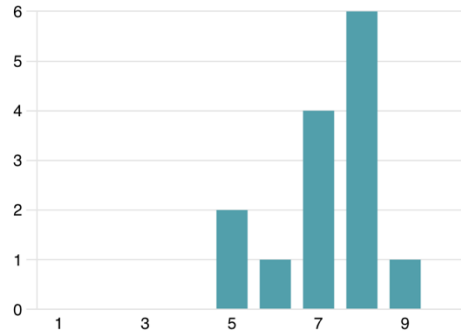


Chart 16 Rating of Local Authority's Performance in Supporting Work and Employment Opportunities for Disabled People

The ratings for how well Local Authorities are supporting work and employment opportunities for disabled people (**Question 16**) range from 5 to 9 (the average was 7.21). Most Local Authorities rated their performance between 7 and 8, indicating a generally positive perception of their performance in this area. A few rated themselves lower at 5, suggesting that further actions are needed.

17. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in enabling disabled people to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent.

[More Details](#)

7.21
Average Rating

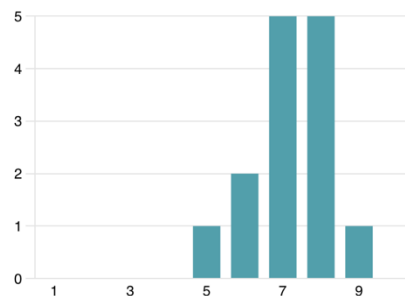


Chart 17 Rating of Local Authority's Performance in Enabling Participation in Cultural Life, Recreation, Leisure, and Sport for Disabled People

The responses to the question about how well Local Authorities are performing in enabling disabled people to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport (**Question 17**)

reflect a range of perspectives. Scores vary from 5 to 9, with the majority of responses falling between 7 and 8 (the average was 7.21). This indicates that most Local Authorities see themselves as performing moderately well in this area, with room for improvement. Some local authorities have received higher ratings.

3.4.5. Role and Effectiveness of Access Officers

18. In your opinion, how effective is the role of Access Officer in supporting the rights of disabled people within your Local Authority?

[More Details](#)

● Very effective	2
● Somewhat effective	10
● Neither effective nor ineffective	2
● Very ineffective	0
● Somewhat ineffective	0



Chart 18 Effectiveness of the Access Officer Role in Supporting the Rights of Disabled People within the Local Authority

The responses to **Question 18** regarding the effectiveness of the Access Officer in supporting the rights of disabled people within Local Authorities show a general perception of moderate effectiveness. Most respondents rated the role as "somewhat effective". A couple of responses rated the role as "very effective," while a few were neutral, suggesting variability as to how effective Access Officers are viewed across different local authorities.

The responses to **Question 19** on how to enhance the effectiveness of the Access Officer role in supporting the rights of disabled people within Local Authorities included some interesting suggestions. There was a consensus on the need for more training, clarity, and support for the role of Access Officers, both from within local authorities and from Government. Some CEs suggested making the position a fully funded, permanent post with an operational fund to ensure it is not treated as an "add-on" role to other responsibilities. There were calls for the role to be made full-time, particularly in smaller authorities where it is currently a part-time position. Additional specific training, particularly in UN CRPD was highlighted as crucial, as was the creation of opportunities for ongoing professional development. Many responses emphasised the need for senior management to engage more deeply with the Access Officer role and for the creation of more networking opportunities between Access Officers across Local Authorities.

3.4.6. Collaboration, Challenges, and Barriers to Inclusion

Respondents to **Question 20** identified multiple collaborative efforts across local authorities with community organisations, disabled persons organisations (DPOs), and other stakeholders to support inclusion and equality. These collaborations range from local arts and sports initiatives to strategic committees focused on housing and disability inclusion. For example,

local authorities collaborate with organisations like the Irish Wheelchair Association, Prosper Meath, and Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) to develop inclusive public spaces and community projects such as sensory gardens. They also work with organisations to enhance housing solutions for disabled people, as seen in partnerships with Approved Housing Bodies like ANVERS and COPE Foundation. Other examples include public awareness campaigns such as "Make Way Day" and sports partnerships that provide activities for disabled people. Some local authorities have established Disability Consultative Committees to facilitate ongoing collaboration with the disability sector and engage with stakeholders through steering groups and strategic policy committees. Other initiatives identified included support for voting, and inclusive housing developments.

CEs responding to **Question 21** identified that they face several challenges in ensuring inclusion and equality for disabled people. A recurring theme is funding limitations, which hinder the ability to make more significant progress in accessibility and inclusion. Many CEs highlighted the need for more resources to support training, initiatives, and upgrading older buildings to be accessible. There is also a recognition that meeting the diverse needs of disabled people, particularly in rural or isolated areas, is a complex issue that requires better planning and understanding of both current needs and planning for the future.

A number of local authorities referenced the importance of greater buy-in from sectors like health, which play an important role in supporting independent living for disabled people. Other challenges identified echoed responses from earlier questions (i.e. staff turnover, lack of sufficient training). Additionally, the need for inclusive initiatives, rather than "disability-only" projects, was mentioned by some respondents for ensuring in emphasised to ensure full integration of disabled people into all aspects of community life. Some CEs identified the difficulty of embedding public sector duty, UN CRPD, and universal design principles into all their projects and functions.

Some CEs identified barriers that hinder the inclusion and equality for disabled people within local communities. Recurrent challenges include funding shortages, which affect the ability to implement necessary changes and adaptations to facilities. There is also a lack of knowledge and awareness about the specific needs of disabled people, often resulting in missed opportunities for inclusion that could be achieved with small adjustments. Issues related to accessibility (both in physical infrastructure and information) were also highlighted, with many towns having narrow streets and older buildings that are not accessible.

Additionally, local groups often face challenges due to a lack of resources to make venues physically accessible. Limited employment opportunities and transport services also limit full participation in community life for disabled people. The ability to engage in recreational activities, particularly sports, is hindered by the lack of infrastructure in sports facilities.

The provision of adequate changing facilities at blue flag beaches and support for sports organisations could significantly improve participation. Other issues such as negative attitudes, stereotypes, and insufficient use of universal design principles contribute to the

ongoing challenges in ensuring inclusion and equality for disabled people in local communities.

3.4.7. Government Support and Standardisation

23. How would you rate the support provided by the Government in helping your Local Authority understand its role in supporting inclusion and equality for disabled people?

[More Details](#)



Chart 19 Rating of Government Support in Helping Local Authority Understand Its Role in Supporting Inclusion and Equality for Disabled People

The majority of local authorities in response to **Question 23** rated the support provided by the Government in helping them understand their role in supporting inclusion and equality for disabled people as "Fair" or "Good". A few rated it as "Very Good," while one respondent indicated "Very Poor" support.

Responses to follow on **Question 24** indicated that while some local authorities feel they have received adequate support from the Government, others express a need for further guidance, especially in understanding and catering to the diverse needs of disabled people. Specific suggestions included signposting expert resources, establishing networks for Access Officers, and providing more targeted training. National policies, such as the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and Housing Strategy for Disabled People, were referenced as helpful, but there is a consensus that more consistent and specialised support would enhance the local authorities' capacity to fulfil their roles.

25. Do you believe that implementing a formal, standardised national approach to inclusion and equality for disabled people at the local level would be beneficial? Please select one of the following options. If none of the options apply, select 'Other' and provide your explanation in the text box.

[More Details](#)

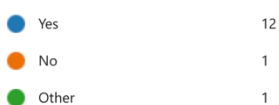


Chart 20 Perceived Benefits of Implementing a Formal, Standardised National Approach to Inclusion and Equality for Disabled People at the Local Level

Responses from CEs to **Question 25** indicates that the vast majority of local authorities expressed support for implementing a formal, standardised national approach to inclusion and equality for disabled people at the local level, believing it would be beneficial. However, one respondent highlighted concerns about the potential rigidity of such structures and emphasised the importance of guidance, good practices, and flexible outcomes tailored to the diverse needs of disabled people. One respondent did not believe a standardised approach would be beneficial, preferring a more informal approach.

3.4.8. Recommendations and Additional Support

The CE's recommendations to improve inclusion and equality for disabled people in **Question 26** reflected responses to earlier questions. Many respondents emphasised the importance of dedicated funding and resources to support these initiatives:

- Having full-time Access Officers and more frequent engagement with disabled persons' organisations.
- The need for clear guidance on minimum accessibility standards, especially for events and consultations.
- Funding for public realm audits, greater support for wrap-around services, and more focus on raising awareness within local services and businesses.
- The need for tailored, flexible approaches that account for local contexts rather than a one-size-fits-all national strategy.
- Encouraging disabled people to participate in local politics and providing toolkits and guidance to ensure inclusivity were also suggested.

Again, several respondents to **Question 27** reiterated points made in response to earlier questions. Some recommended the need for clear guidance and assistance for local authorities, particularly regarding what is expected in terms of implementation and the provision of additional resources when necessary.

Suggested resources included training, toolkits, and case studies to facilitate best practices, with a focus on the dedicated teams and targeted training on various rights contained in the UN CRPD. Some respondents pointed out the value of a more structured and consistent approach, such as providing full-time staff dedicated to accessibility and equality, particularly for roles like Access Officers. Other recommendations included returning the Disability Participation and Awareness Fund to local authorities, setting up a national Access Officer network, and providing ongoing training.

Some participants suggested the need for targeted funding for local transport initiatives, upgrading public buildings, and enhancing access to digital services. Respondents also highlighted the importance of national clarity on interpreting and applying the UN CRPD, such

as establishing a registration process for Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) and updating the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

3.4.9. Public Policy and Final Comments

The responses to **Question 28** on the housing adaptation grant provided some very detailed and interesting perspectives on how this is administered by local authorities including challenges in administering the grants. This observation from the CE of Sligo County Council captures some of the recurrent issues raised by other CEs.

*“Housing Adaptation Grant for a Person with a Disability is available to assist in the carrying out of works which are reasonably necessary for the purposes of rendering a house more suitable for the accommodation of a person with a disability who has an enduring physical, sensory, mental health or intellectual impairment. The types of works allowable under the scheme include the provision of access ramps, downstairs toilet facilities, stair-lifts, accessible showers, adaptations to facilitate wheelchair access, extensions, and any other works which are reasonably necessary for the purposes of rendering a house more suitable for the accommodation of a person with a disability. The level of grant aid available is determined on the basis of gross household income and shall be between 30% – 95% of the approved cost of the works. Demand is greater than the budget available, we could double the number of houses adapted in one year. Increasing accessible housing stock and supported services [is needed].” **CE Sligo County Council***

Several shared practices and challenges were reported across the different local authorities. CEs reported that grants are handled efficiently and with compassion, with some authorities managing to expend over €5 million annually on such grants. One local authority noted that it is moving its application process online and committed to ensuring accessibility for applicants who cannot use this process. A more systematic linkage between health services like the HSE and the housing section of local authorities was suggested by some CEs to improve information sharing and support.

Challenges identified include inflation in construction costs, which puts additional financial strain on applicants and local authorities since grant ceilings have remained static for many years. Applicants often face difficulty in accessing required multi-disciplinary input such as Occupational Therapist or medical reports, due to the pressures on healthcare staff. Some CEs noted that housing departments in local authorities are attempting to simplify communication and provide more accessible information, but the process remains complex for applicants. The availability of clear and easy-to-read forms is needed. Again, funding and resources were identified as key challenges across different local authorities. Some CEs note that they could double the number of houses adapted if more funds were available. Others mentioned that they are overwhelmed with applications, which leads to slow and bureaucratic processes and delays. Some local authorities have tried to streamline the application process, but they admit that it is still too slow for applicants who often need immediate solutions. It was noted that the Housing Adaptation Grant is means tested based on household income, which can be

problematic. Another obstacle to timely processing of grant applications is that local authorities have an obligation to ensure applicants provide all necessary documentation, such as tax clearance certificates, and in getting quotations from contractors in a specified form, which can delay the approval process.

Different priority systems are used by local authorities to allocate grants based on the type of disability and the urgency of the required work. For example, applicants who are terminally ill or require adaptations to facilitate hospital discharge are given the highest priority. However, many local authorities reported the challenges of rising construction costs, and the shortage of contractors further complicates the process.

“Funding is allocated to applicants on the following priorities -

Priority One: *Applicants who are terminally ill or mainly dependent on family or a carer, or where alterations/adaptations would facilitate the discharge from hospital or alleviate hospitalisation in the future*

Priority Two: *Mobile but needs assistance in accessing facilities, or where, without the adaptation the disabled persons’ ability to function independently would be hindered*

Priority Three: *The applicant is independent but requires special facilities to improve their quality of life, e.g. separate bedroom or living space*

There is a high demand for these grants in Wicklow. It is difficult for proposed applicants to get quotations particularly for the smaller works. On receipt of quotations that costs of works can be expensive and over the threshold. Applicants regularly omit relevant information required in support of their application particularly quotations for work and tax clearance certificate where works exceed €10,000.00. To assist with completion of applications a list of contractors is provided in such instances to assist and highlighting sticker provided on various written communications reminding of tax clearance requirement.” **CE Wicklow County Council**

Several CEs noted that their local authority is in the process of improving their systems, such as moving applications online and providing better feedback for unsuccessful applications. There is a strong call for increased funding from CEs, especially considering rising construction costs, and for dedicated, full-time staff to manage the increasing number of applications.

The final comments provided by the CEs yielded some interesting comments and observations. Many respondents noted that certain responsibilities, such as supporting disabled people, rely heavily on external services, particularly the HSE, and emphasised the importance of wrap-around services and applying universal design principles to avoid the need for retrofits later in housing stock. Some CEs expressed their commitment to improving support for disabled people and acknowledged areas that needed improvement. A recurring theme was the challenge of maintaining a focus on disability initiatives amidst the wide range of responsibilities that local authorities discharge. Although there is a desire to do more, they reported resources and priorities are often stretched. The role of the Access Officer was a key point of discussion, with suggestions that this should be a full-time role within each local

authority, supported by a national network and ongoing training. Additionally, local authorities were seen as well-positioned to allocate funds, such as the Disability Participation and Awareness Fund.

Some respondents pointed out the limitations of a survey in fully capturing the scope of local government initiatives and suggested further engagement through the County and City Management Association (CCMA). Some CEs also noted that transport and employment opportunities, are not entirely within the control of local authorities, which limits their influence of local authorities within these areas.

3.4.10. Summary of CE Survey

All CEs confirmed awareness of the UN CRPD and their local authority's role. Ratings of knowledge about the needs of disabled people ranged from moderate to high, with most scoring between 6 and 8. Local authorities use different data collection methods, including census data and housing assessments, often consulting with disability advocacy groups. Successful initiatives include housing adaptations, accessibility improvements, and awareness campaigns. Local authorities cited examples like Sligo's Disability, Inclusion, and Access Strategy, Meath's sensory garden, and Kerry's beach wheelchair service as examples of good practice. Local authorities also have mechanisms to consult disabled people outside standard public consultations, including consultative committees and forums. Self-reporting on performance in providing accessible information and conducting disability awareness campaigns were varied. Scores ranged from 3 to 10 for accessible information and 3 to 8 for awareness campaigns, which suggests confidence amongst some local authorities and areas for improvement for others. There was a moderate to strong performance in providing accessible and inclusive housing, adhering to accessibility standards, and supporting employment opportunities. While this data provides valuable and interesting insights, it is important to acknowledge the limitations that are inherent in self-reporting. These limitations include potential biases, inaccuracies in personal recall, and the tendency for respondents to present themselves and their local authority in a more positive manner. These factors may impact the reliability of these findings.

Most Access Officers were seen as moderately effective, with suggestions for improvement including more training, full-time roles, and better internal and external support. Collaboration with community organisations and disabled persons' organisations was highlighted as important for local authorities. However, challenges remain, including inadequate funding, the need for training, and gaps in accessibility especially in older buildings and rural areas. Transport and employment opportunities also remain limited in many local areas. Government support was generally rated as "fair" or "good," though some called for more guidance and resources. Most CEs supported a standardised national approach to inclusion, though some were worried about a rigid system. The survey highlighted the need for dedicated funding, clearer guidance, and training for local authorities to include disabled people. There were calls for increased collaboration with disabled persons' organisations and more flexible, context-specific strategies rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. CEs noted

challenges in administering housing adaptation grants, including funding shortfalls, inflation / rising construction costs, and delays due to application requirements. There was a call for improved systems and more resources to meet the growing demand.

3.5. Conclusions from both surveys

Comparing the perspectives of Access Officers and CEs in the two different surveys discussed above indicates some shared observations and notable differences. Both groups reported a foundational awareness of disability rights, particularly the UN CRPD, recognising its relevance to their roles. However, the depth of knowledge varied across different Access Officers and CEs with Access Officers, indicating gaps in understanding or limited training on how to apply disability rights in practice. There is a need for more consistent and comprehensive training across all levels of local authority employees.

When it comes to progress in implementing disability rights, both Access Officers and CEs provided examples of successful initiatives, such as housing adaptations, accessibility improvements in public spaces, and inclusive recreational initiatives. However, both groups acknowledged that while there are examples of progress, substantial challenges remain, especially concerning older infrastructure and funding limitations. This concern was a common theme, with both Access Officers and CEs emphasising the need for increased financial resources and dedicated roles to fully support accessibility.

One of the key differences between the two groups was in the perception of the effectiveness and support for Access Officers. CEs generally rated the role of Access Officers as moderately effective, though many suggested improvements, including making the position full-time with additional training and resources. Conversely, Access Officers reported that their role was under-resourced and not fully integrated into broader local authority functions, with many expressing that their duties were seen as secondary or "add-ons" to other responsibilities. This divergence highlights a disconnect between the operational reality Access Officers work in and the perceptions of CEs.

Another difference emerged in terms of consultation processes. CEs generally reported that local authorities had mechanisms in place to consult disabled people outside of standard public consultations. However, Access Officers raised concerns about the inconsistency of these consultation processes, with some reporting that they were unsure of the structures or processes available to them to engage effectively with disabled people.

There are areas of agreement between Access Officers and CEs, such as the recognition of resource constraints and the importance of inclusive policies, the differences in their perspectives underscore the need for a more cohesive and well-supported approach. Addressing the structural and operational gaps is needed to ensure that local authorities are better equipped to meet their obligations under the UN CRPD.

Chapter 4 Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups

In addition to the surveys of the CEs and the anonymous survey of Access Officers in local authorities (see Chapter 3), we conducted a total of 10 key informant interviews. These key informants were carefully selected to represent a broad range of perspectives, including disabled people, senior officials from key government departments, statutory agencies, Disabled Persons' Organisations, local authority staff, as well as a parent of a child with a disability. Furthermore, two focus groups were convened to gather more in-depth insights. The first focus group was with disabled people and DPO representatives (10 members), and the second included participants from the Local Government Management Agency and councillors elected to local authorities (10 members). The aim of these key informant interviews and focus groups was to obtain a deeper exploration of the key issues surrounding the implementation of the UN CRPD at the local government level. This chapter presents the key themes and insights that emerged from the interviews and focus group discussions, highlighting both the challenges and barriers disabled people face when engaging with local authorities, as well as the opportunities for better performance. As will be seen the findings underscore the need for local authorities to enhance their performance in fulfilling statutory obligations and actively contribute to the state's compliance with the UN CRPD.

4.1 Key Informant Interviews

This section presents the key themes that emerged from the interviews with key informants as part of this research project. The Advisory Group provided valuable input by offering guidance on the research process and suggesting key informants for the interviews. Each participant was provided with an information sheet and a consent form before the interviews, which were conducted via MS Teams or Zoom.

4.1.1. Increased UN CRPD Awareness Levels and Implementing Challenges

A number of key informants highlighted how there was a growing awareness on the understanding of the UN CRPD and one key informant highlighted Article 19 on living independently in the community as an article where awareness was raised. It was also acknowledged by a number of those interviewed that the UN CRPD is shaping daily practices in particular highlighting the importance of the importance of choice, compatibility, and independence for people with disabilities in housing arrangements. The insights shared by key informants on awareness was encouraging, one key informant commented on how training needed follow up.

*“You do the training and then you come out of it and you're your gung ho. But then after we'll say a number of days or a number of weeks and other responsibilities kind of creep in, you lose that. So, if I suppose it's a bit like if you don't use it, you lose it. So, I think the training was given. However, where we are at the moment, I would say we might need to refresh that training and then have a more structured approach.” **Key Informant 1***

Caution was raised by one key informant on the limitations of taking an awareness approach as a sole measure to get embedding disability inclusion, as it does not address structural issues. Commenting on the progress made from awareness training, they noted

"[a]n awareness exists, and this is good but for it to be embedded into all areas of local authorities' structures and priorities, it is currently happening where committed staff are in place and so it can be quite "happenstance". we might need to refresh that training and then have a more structured approach." **Key Informant 3**

Beyond the topic of training, implementation challenges came up across all the key informant interviews specifically low engagement of some key agencies creating barriers in collaboration and communication. A varied understanding of the UN CRPD was also highlighted as a challenge with some local authorities being further ahead in their knowledge on the UN CRPD.

Accessibility of buildings, roads, pathways, and community spaces was highlighted as a challenge which often impeded the full participation of disabled people in community life. Regarding accessibility, this key informant commented.

"[t]he technical ability to engage with the material is often lacking in local authority members... although the will is there. We're conscious of this sort of yo-yo effect around what we want to achieve. Rather than having local authorities do what they're already doing and then hire three people to make the activity accessible, we need to get to a point where local authorities are thinking about accessibility from the very, very, very beginning." **Key Informant 5**

The challenge of local authorities struggling to grasp the full concept of entitlement to independent housing for all people, regardless of disability was also highlighted as a challenge. Persistent gaps in delivery were a recurrent theme, one key informant highlighted how there remains a significant gap in the understanding and delivery of services based on the will and preferences of disabled people. Two key informants highlighted how disability proofing could help with improving these gaps by ensuring disability inclusion across plans of the different departments in the local authority, they noted

"They're very structured as it is in terms of their accounts, development plans, the local Economic Community plan, or whatever. So, every one of them needs to have a section on disability in it." **Key Informant 2**

4.1.2. The Need for Financial and Other Resources to Support Implementation

Resource allocation came up across several key informant interviews, with the majority of the key informants highlighting that adequate funding is critical for local authorities to effectively promote disability inclusion and implement their commitments under the UN CRPD. The need for innovative funding practices was also suggested by a few key informants. Two key informants highlighted the example of the first round of the Disability Awareness and

Participation Fund as innovative in supporting local authority in their efforts to ensure disability inclusion and accessibility. They also highlighted the challenges with its rollout as it lacked guidance and many local authorities did not engage with it or if they did, they used it for capital expenditure.

The need for more dedicated roles within local authorities to drive disability initiatives was highlighted across most interviews. Several key informants highlighted how often the responsibility for disability inclusion is spread too thin without any ownership leading to inconsistent performance across local authorities.

*"There needs to be resources to match the ambition. Wanting to do the right thing across a massive remit of local areas and then rely on the staff of local authorities and particularly the senior staff of local authorities to sort of give a steer as to what the process or what the procedure or what the powers of the authority are in question with that". **Key Informant 8***

The pressure on staff in local authorities particularly the community sections was highlighted.

*"Community sections in local government just seem to be swamped with work. They are limited where they have staff, but in terms of the demands, a lot of new areas have developed... It's a challenge to keep motivated, engaged, and focused on one topic." **Key Informant 1***

Drawing on other successful programmes for putting in place finance and staff was highlighted by several key informants, particularly Age Friendly model, this was raised by a number of informants as a good practice example.

*"Age Friendly Ireland has done an amazing job in getting funding and making real changes across local authorities. When you look at what's happening with disability funding, it's clear that the Age Friendly approach works much better. We need the same focus and resources is we are to do better with accessibility, inclusion and rights. Right now, though, we're just not getting that same level of support or leadership". **Key Informant 8***

Several key informants highlighted problems with the Housing Assistance Grant, which is administered by local authorities.

A recurrent observation was that inflation in construction costs have increased significantly since the grant was first introduced in 2007. Participants were critical of the means testing of the grant suggesting that this is a major barrier for disabled people to access the grant as household income is assessed and not the disabled persons income. Delays in processing grants by some local authorities was highlighted as well. This participant outlined the criticism of the scheme, "[e]ven with the proposed increase to €40,000, the grant is not enough. With construction costs rising, that amount barely makes a dent when you're trying to cover the cost of a proper bedroom and bathroom extension. It's good to see some movement on it, but

honestly, even €60,000 would not cover what's actually needed to get the job done these days." Key Informant 1

A parent of a teenage daughter who is a wheelchair user and who requires significant support and care highlighted the barriers to accessing this grant as follows, “[w]e’ve tried to access the Housing Adaptation Grant to make our home more suitable. Our house is semi-detached, and we urgently need a downstairs bathroom and bedroom for her. She is a teenager now. Unfortunately, the grant doesn’t cover anywhere near the cost of the work, and the application process has so many requirements. We can’t afford to pay out in advance for the work either. My partner is her full-time carer, and we simply don’t have the money to do the work ourselves. It’s put us in a really difficult situation. I work in accounts for a hospitality business, and when COVID hit, I remember how quickly the government stepped in to defer commercial rates and provide funding to help businesses. I applied to the local authority for that funding for my employer and it was easy to draw down. I couldn’t help but think, why can’t the Housing Adaptation Grant be this straightforward?” Key Informant 10

4.1.3. Structured Support Engagement and Participation

Improved engagement with disabled people and their representative organisations in decision making was stressed as important by a number of the key informants. Key informants also highlighted the importance of structured and consistent consultation processes. Effective engagement ensures that policies and practices are inclusive and responsive to the needs of disabled people. One key informant highlighted this good practice “*Sligo County Council worked with DPOs through its Disability Consultative Committee while developing their strategy, making sure that the real-life experiences of disabled people were front and centre in shaping the plan and action steps for 2024-2027.*” **Key Informant 3.**

A key informant also highlighted, “*how important it is to get the stakeholder inclusion piece right and I think the capacity building around ... needs to be done.*” **Key Informant 4**

Another key theme raised by informants focused on existing local networks. Both the Public Participation Network (PPN) and Strategic Policy Committees (SPCs) were frequently highlighted as useful platforms that could be better used to ensure that the voices of disabled people were heard at the community level. It was noted that these platforms allow for more structured and meaningful involvement of disabled people in local government. Key informants highlighted how a structured approach was important to effectively implementation of the UN CRPD at the local level. These forums bring together diverse stakeholders, including local authorities, voluntary providers, and the HSE etc, to coordinate efforts and share best practices. This key informant noted “*PPNs, with their National Advisory Council, offer a great chance for building capacity and sharing lessons on disability inclusion across counties.*” **Key Informant 9**

4.1.4. Monitoring and Compliance

All key informants highlighted the need for more structured and consistent monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of disability inclusion efforts within local authorities. This participant observed, *"I'm not really sure how local authorities contribute to the state's reporting to the UN Committee on Disability in Geneva. I think every council should have to report to the national focal point, which is the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration, and Youth. That would be great because it would make councils take a good hard look at how well they're doing on disability and accessibility."* **Key Informant 5**

Regular reporting and evaluation were suggested as measures necessary to ensure that policies are being effectively implemented and achieving their intended outcomes. This informant noted, *"...national strategies on disability or housing don't clearly describe the role of councils in delivering on these plans. Every national strategy needs to explicitly outline what local authorities are responsible for and include clear mechanisms for reporting and performance management to ensure accountability."* **Key Informant 7**

4.1.5. Summary of Findings from Key Informant Interviews

Several themes emerged from the key informant interviews. These include the challenges and opportunities faced by local authorities in implementing the UN CRPD. A growing awareness of the UN CRPD was noted, with informants highlighting how it is beginning to shape housing policies, particularly around choice and independence for disabled people. However, this awareness alone was seen as insufficient, with informants sharing concerns about the structural challenges in embedding disability inclusion across all local authority functions and across all local authorities. Implementation challenges were also identified, and these include varying levels of knowledge of the UN CRPD across local authorities and limited resources for disability initiatives. The need for dedicated roles within councils to drive disability inclusion efforts was a recurrent theme. Limited and insufficient financial and resource constraints were identified as a significant barrier, and informants cited innovative approaches, like the Age Friendly model, as examples to improve how local authorities perform better for disabled people.

Key informants frequently discussed issues with the housing adaptation grants, criticising the insufficient funding and complex application processes, particularly given rising construction costs. Finally, improved engagement with disabled people and their representative organisations, as well as structured monitoring and reporting, were seen as critical to ensuring the UN CRPD is effectively implemented at the local level.

4.2. Findings form Focus Group 1 with Disability Activists and DPOs

The first focus group for this project, was conducted on the 29th of July 2024, online using Zoom. Participants for the focus groups were recruited through multiple channels, including the Disability Federation of Ireland's extensive networks. The researchers actively promoted the focus groups on social media and through their professional networks. Additionally, the Advisory Group for this project assisted with participant recruitment, which ensured a diverse range of voices participated in the focus group. The focus group was attended by 10 participants with a good geographic spread across both city and county councils from various regions of the country. The main themes that emerged from the first focus groups are presented here. The discussions revealed a range of views and experiences, which are grouped into overarching themes.

The discussion at this focus group highlighted several themes, including the lack of awareness among local authorities, challenges in the built environment, inadequacies in housing adaptation schemes, and the need for more effective collaboration with Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs). The focus group included a range of participants, all of whom had direct lived experience with disability, worked for a DPO or worked as advocates with disabled people.

4.2.1. Lack of Awareness and Understanding of the UN CRPD

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from the discussion was the general lack of awareness and understanding of the UN CRPD amongst both local authority staff and councillors. The participants expressed frustration over the limited knowledge that local authorities seem to have about the Convention, which significantly impacts their ability to fulfil their responsibilities under it. Participants highlighted Article 19 of the UN CRPD the right to live independently and be included in the community and Article 9 the right to accessibility, which they considered were particularly relevant for local authorities, but they had little understanding of. The consensus in the focus group was that many local authorities are either unaware of these rights or do not fully grasp their implications. This participant noted, "*[t]he councils have no idea about the UN CRPD. They're massively confused by it. People are coming at them with different articles, and they have no idea what it means.*" **Participant 1**

It was suggested that the lack of awareness translates into a lack of effective action. Several participants indicated that councillors and local authority staff, from planners to engineers, often see the UN CRPD as something external to their core duties. As a result, there is a disconnect between policy and practice, where local authorities may acknowledge the existence of the UN CRPD but fail to meaningfully implement its provisions within in areas of responsibility. Participants suggested that the Government's failure to adopt the Optional Protocol of the UN CRPD, which would allow disabled people to submit complaints to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reflects a broader reluctance to fully commit to the UN CRPD's objectives.

Participants suggested that the widespread lack of awareness points to a systemic issue within local government structures. The absence of effective training for councillors and council staff on the UN CRPD suggests that disability rights are not seen as a priority, which in turn limits the ability of local authorities to address the needs of disabled people. Participants noted that the UN CRPD is supposed to guide how services are delivered to disabled people, but without an understanding of the Convention's provisions, local authorities cannot effectively ensure compliance. Participants suggested that this gap between knowledge and action perpetuates inequalities and exclusion, as it prevents disabled people from enjoying their rights on an equal basis with others within their communities.

4.2.2 Barriers in the Built Environment and Public Spaces

The discussion also identified significant challenges related to the built environment and public spaces, which remain largely inaccessible to disabled people. Participants shared numerous examples of poorly designed infrastructure that fails to meet the needs of people with mobility impairments or other disabilities. These challenges were framed within the broader context of local authorities' failure to prioritise accessibility in urban planning and design. Many participants shared stories about issues like poorly designed ramps, insufficient curb cuts, and inaccessible public transportation systems. *"In rural villages like the one I live in, they put in a ramp for wheelchair access, but they did it around a telephone pole. So, if you're actually in a wheelchair, there's no way to use it."* **Participant 2.**

The built environment, whether it is rural or urban, was identified as a significant barrier to the inclusion of disabled people. Several participants noted that even when accessibility measures are included in new projects, they are often implemented in a way that makes them impractical or dangerous for disabled people to use. For example, participants pointed out that bus stops in some areas do not have accessible ramps, or that curbs are too high, making it difficult for wheelchair users or those with other mobility impairments to navigate. The lack of accessible public toilets, such as Changing Places facilities, was frequently mentioned as a major issue in public spaces like shopping centres and beaches. *"There was a changing space built in Salthill recently, and while it was a positive step, it wasn't accessible when it first opened. The measurements were off, and further work had to be done to fix it. It's frustrating because if proper planning had gone in from the start, we wouldn't have had these issues. If we were involved (as disabled people) we would have made sure that accessibility was correct from the planning right through to completion."* **Participant 3.**

Participants highlighted the built environment is as key in enabling or disabling access. It was suggested that local authorities were failing to ensure basic accessibility in their planning and design processes, which suggests that there is a lack of accountability and oversight. Participants emphasised that accessibility should not be an afterthought or an optional extra in the design process, rather local authorities need to understand it required under the UN CRPD. Participants also noted that failures to create inclusive spaces compounds the social exclusion of disabled people and restricts their participation in community life. This was further compounded by the lack of awareness amongst planners and engineers in local

authorities about how to design spaces that meet the needs of all users. Participants repeatedly called for more rigorous enforcement of accessibility standards, as well as better training for council staff responsible for the built environment in local communities.

4.2.3. Challenges with Housing and Adaptation Schemes

Housing was another major theme that arose during focus group 1. Many participants expressed frustration with the housing adaptation grant scheme, which they felt was not fit for purpose. Several noted that the grants offered were insufficient to cover the costs of necessary adaptations, such as installing downstairs bathrooms or making homes wheelchair accessible. In addition, participants highlighted the bureaucracy and delays associated with the grant application process, which created additional barriers for families already facing financial and caregiving challenges. This participant a carer noted "*[t]he grant is insufficient to cover the cost of the work... we simply can't afford to do the work ourselves.*" **Participant 4**

Participants noted that the housing adaptation scheme is intended to provide financial support to disabled people and their families to make necessary modifications to their homes. However, participants felt that the scheme was not delivering on its promises. The costs of adaptations were often far higher than the grant amount, leaving families to cover the difference, it was noted that this was an impossible task for many. In addition, the grant application process was described as complex and onerous, requiring families to navigate a maze of paperwork and inspections before they could even access funds. For families with limited financial resources and income, this process was seen as a significant barrier to securing accessible housing.

It was suggested that the inadequacy of the housing adaptation scheme highlights the broader issue of housing inequality for disabled people. It was noted "*[t]he UN CRPD recognises our right to live independently and to choose where and with who we want to live with, but we cannot get the financial support needed to adapt our homes.*" **Participant 5.**

4.2.4 The Role of Disabled People's Organisations (DPOs)

The focus group also emphasised the important role of DPOs in advocating for disability rights and ensuring that the voices of disabled people are heard within local government. Many participants spoke positively about the work of DPOs in raising awareness of disability issues within local authorities. However, they also expressed frustration that local authorities often engage with DPOs in a superficial or tokenistic manner. Several participants mentioned that while they were invited to consultations, their input did not always translate into meaningful changes in policy or practice. This participant noted, "*[w]e're really working hard to inform our local council, but it's not always plain sailing. We had to push hard to get them to even listen to us.*" **Participant 6**

The engagement between DPOs and local authorities was described as inconsistent and often unproductive depending on the local authority. Some participants noted that while DPOs are

invited to participate in advisory committees or consultative processes, the outcomes of these processes are often unclear. There was a sense amongst the participants that local authorities may consult DPOs to check a box rather than to genuinely incorporate their feedback into decision-making processes. Some participants also felt that local authorities only engage with DPOs when it is convenient for them and are less willing to involve them in more substantive or challenging discussions such as delivering on accessible housing. This participant noted “[t]he council only calls us in when it's convenient. We never get the call to come in to discuss housing that is disability friendly.” **Participant 7**

Participants were critical of the tokenistic engagement with DPOs, suggesting this reflects a broader issue of exclusion and disconnection within decision-making processes. It was noted the UN CRPD emphasises the importance of the participation of disabled people in decisions that affect their lives, but this principle is often not realised at the local level. Participants shared the view that local authorities must move beyond superficial engagement and ensure that disabled people and DPOs are actively involved in shaping policies and practices that impact them. This participant noted

“[w]e need more than just formal consultations. It's about co-design and co-creation, where we actually have a say in decision-making. Plus, there needs to be way more transparency about how local authorities use the feedback from DPOs, so it's not just a box-ticking exercise, but something that brings real change.” **Participant 8**

4.2.5. Summary of Findings from Focus Group 1

The discussions revealed several themes related to the challenges faced by disabled people in engaging with local authorities. Key areas of concern included the lack of awareness among local authority staff and councillors about the UN CRPD, particularly regarding Articles 19 and 9 on independent living and accessibility. Participants also highlighted barriers in the built environment, such as poorly designed infrastructure that fails to meet accessibility standards, and frustrations with how local authorities administer the Housing Adaptation Grant, which is insufficient to cover actual building costs. The participants recurrently discussed the importance of more effective collaboration between local authorities and DPOs, calling for genuine co-design and co-creation processes instead of tokenistic consultations.

4.3. Findings form Focus Group 2 with the AILG and City and County Councillors

The second focus group for this project, was conducted on the 30th of July 2024, at the Offices of the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) in Maynooth. The AILG is the national representative body that represents and supports the role of elected councillors. The AILG were helpful in recruiting councillors who had an interest in disability rights and who were well placed to contribute their expertise. The focus group was attended by 10 councillors elected to represent a range of local government, providing a good geographic spread across both city and county councils from various regions of the country. The purpose of the focus group was to explore the awareness of the UN CRPD, how it is being applied in local

authorities, and the challenges they face in supporting disability rights at a local level. The main themes that emerged from the focus groups are presented here. The discussions revealed a range of views and experiences, which are grouped into four overarching themes.

4.3.1 Awareness, Understanding, and Training on Disability Rights and the UN CRPD

One of the most prevalent themes in the discussion was the varying levels of awareness and understanding among councillors regarding the UN CRPD. Some councillors demonstrated a strong knowledge of the convention due to their personal or professional experiences, while others admitted to having limited awareness. This reflects the findings discussed in chapter 3 regarding the awareness levels of the UN CRPD amongst Access Officers and others working in local authorities.

Councillor 1 who has both a personal connection to disability and a professional background in disability studies, and had an in-dept knowledge and understanding of the UN CRPD: *"I am aware of the UN CRPD... I have a few different caps...I've studied disability studies, equality studies... I delivered disability awareness training for councillors."* This councillor's knowledge, however, was not common among all councillors. They acknowledged being in the minority in their local authority and attributed their understanding to lived experience and academic background, indicating a gap in standard training for local government representatives.

Participants noted that the gap in knowledge and training is significant, as it affects how local authorities implement policies and allocate resources to improve accessibility and uphold disability rights. The discussion highlighted the need for more structured and widespread training to ensure that all councillors and staff are well-informed about the UN CRPD and its implications for them. Councillor 2 emphasised this, noting that awareness of the UN CRPD and its public sector duty remains limited across councils: *"There's very limited awareness across all councillors. There are obviously those of us who are heavily embedded in advocacy for people with disabilities, but for most, it's just not on their radar."*

Participants also mentioned that the trainings that are offered were insufficient as they did not reach all councillors. Many councillors emphasised that consistent and comprehensive training on disability rights, including the UN CRPD, was crucial for promoting a deeper understanding among public representatives and council staff. Councillor 3, for instance, proposed, *"We need refresher training every year in every council chamber to make sure councillors and executives are up to date."*

4.3.2 Challenges in Housing and Public Infrastructure for Disabled People

Housing emerged as a recurrent theme, with many councillors expressing concern over how housing developments and allocations were insufficient to address the needs of disabled people. Councillor 2 reflecting on their own experience as a parent of a child with a disability, noted the challenges facing disabled people when it comes to housing: *"Housing is an enormous elephant in the room. People with disabilities go to the bottom of the very long list."*

Councillors pointed out that even when housing is allocated to disabled people, it often fails to meet their needs. It was suggested that developments do not incorporate universal design principles, resulting in homes that are either inaccessible or require costly modifications. Councillor 1 shared their personal experience of one housing development *"there were eight steps up to the hall door, and the doors all had the width for turning space, but what good is that if you can't get in the front door?"*

Councillors highlighted the significant challenges associated with the Housing Adaptation Grant, particularly in meeting the needs of disabled constituents. They emphasised how the scheme often falls short in terms of both funding and the timeliness of adaptations, leaving many people waiting a long time for modifications needed in their homes. The councillors also discussed the categorisation of housing needs for people on the basis of medical need. Councillor 3 pointed out that assumptions are often made about the extent of modifications required for those on the medical list, stating: *"Sometimes you're on the medical list, but it might be that you need somewhere that's just ground floor with grab rails, not the whole package of ramps, hoists, and wet rooms."* They suggested that this overgeneralisation results in longer waiting times for housing allocations, as people who need fewer modifications are delayed by a system that lumps all accessibility requirements together.

Public infrastructure was discussed at length. Councillors highlighted the inadequacies of public spaces, such as footpaths and transportation hubs, which often lack proper accessibility. For example, Councillor 4 noted the effectiveness of assessing infrastructure from the perspective of a wheelchair user: *"I just sat in a wheelchair, pulled up the footpaths, and you don't realise the bad thing is when you sit in that wheelchair. The obstacles are so much more pronounced."* These experiences speak to the need for infrastructure that is designed led by the experiences of disabled people, rather than as an afterthought.

4.3.3 Structural and Systemic Barriers to Accessibility in Local Authorities

The councillors identified several systemic and structural barriers that hinder the effective delivery of disability services within the responsibility of local authorities. A recurrent concern was the absence of dedicated, full-time Access Officers in many councils. In some cases, Access Officers were only appointed temporarily or had other responsibilities, leading to inconsistent implementation of accessibility policies. Councillor 3 voiced their frustration: *"It can't be ad hoc. It cannot be somebody who's gone up a grade and is there for two years, and then they go up to a higher grade, and that person is gone, and we start off again."* Councillors expressed the need for permanent, dedicated positions of Access Officers who would focus on ensuring accessibility and addressing the needs of disabled constituents.

Funding was another major challenge discussed by the councillors. Several expressed concerns that without dedicated budgets for disability, progress in accessibility would remain slow and inconsistent. Councillor 3 expressed the view *"What we should have ... is ... a budget for disability, and that should be spent just on disability, nothing else."* This sentiment was

echoed by other councillors who noted that disability projects are often sidelined in favour of other priorities when budgets are limited. Councillor 1 added *"I try and encourage in my council when they're planning footpath repairs that it incorporates drop kerbs, tactile paving... but the money for these things isn't always there."*

Councillors also discussed the role of public representatives in advocating for disability rights. Councillor 5 pointed out that Chief Executives of councils are often unaware or unmotivated to prioritise accessibility, *"They don't give a damn. It's outrageous in this day and age to repair a footpath and not have it accessible."* Councillors expressed the view that the lack of accountability, combined with insufficient resources, makes it difficult for councillors to make an impact in improving accessibility.

4.3.4 Inclusion of Lived Experience and Collaboration at the Local Authority Level

Another recurring theme was the value of including the lived experiences of disabled people in decision-making processes. Councillors with personal connections to disability often had a deeper understanding of the issues and were more proactive in advocating for changes. Councillor 5, who has a family member with a disability, noted: *"People with disabilities have so much to give to society, and I think that needs to come out of it... we're not charity. We are very much part of where we live."* This observation emphasises the need to move beyond a charity model of disability and recognise people with disabilities as full participants in society, with valuable contributions to make in line with what is required by the UN CRPD.

Several councillors advocated for the establishment of more formal structures to include disabled people in decision-making. Councillor 1 shared an example from the UK where disabled people are paid to sit on panels and provide expert advice to public bodies: *"In the UK, it's seen as expert-led consultant work, and they are paid for their lived experience."* It was suggested that this model not only values the contributions of disabled people but also ensures that their insights are integrated into policies and programmes that affect them.

Collaboration between councils and Disabled Persons Organisations was also seen as essential for achieving better compliance with the UN CRPD. Councillor 3 suggested that councils needed to share best practices and resources to improve service delivery. It was also noted that sharing successful initiatives, such as South Dublin's award-winning natural play spaces, would allow councils to replicate good practices and ensure that accessibility improvements are not limited to specific councils.

4.3.5 Summary of Findings from Focus Group 2

The focus group discussion revealed several themes related to the implementation of the UN CRPD at the local level. Key issues included the need for greater awareness and training among councillors and council staff, challenges in housing and public infrastructure, systemic barriers to accessibility, and the importance of including lived experience in the decision-making processes of local authorities.

Councillors agreed that while some progress has been made, much more needs to be done to ensure that disabled people are fully included in their communities and that their rights are realised. Councillors suggested the need for dedicated resources, and better collaboration across councils.

4.4 Conclusions from Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups

The findings from both the key informant interviews and focus groups highlight a significant gap between awareness of the UN CRPD and the challenges in implementing its provisions within local authorities across Ireland. While there is an increase in the awareness of the UN CRPD, especially among staff who have undergone training, significant barriers remain. Both sources of data, the key informant interviews and focus groups, underscore the importance of resources, structural changes, and deeper engagement with disabled persons and their representative organisations (DPOs) to promote meaningful implementation of the UN CRPD.

4.4.1. Increased Awareness of UN CRPD but Limited Implementation

The interviews and focus groups consistently emphasised that awareness of the UN CRPD is growing, particularly in relation to Article 19 on living independently in the community. However, the key informants and participants from the focus groups agree that this awareness alone is insufficient to drive real progress. The interviews with local authority staff and key informants highlighted that training, while helpful, is not enough, particularly when there is no structured follow-up or system for ongoing training. This also emerged in the focus group discussions, where disability activists expressed frustration over the limited understanding of UN CRPD provisions, particularly in areas like accessibility and housing.

4.4.2. Insufficient Resource and other Barriers within Local Authorities

A recurrent theme emerging from both sets of discussions is the lack of financial and human resources dedicated to promoting disability inclusion. Both the interviews and focus groups identified a significant gap between ambition and resource allocation. The absence of dedicated roles, such as full-time Access Officers within local authorities, resulted in an inconsistent approach to disability rights across councils. Focus group participants highlighted the inadequacies in infrastructure and public spaces, while key informants pointed out the limitations of the Housing Adaptation Grant, which fails to meet rising construction costs and excludes many disabled people due to complex application processes. The interviews also revealed challenges with the engagement of key state agencies and other stakeholders, which hinder collaboration and progress. This perspective was shared also in the focus groups, where participants repeatedly stressed the need for better engagement with DPOs and people with disabled people. It was suggested that these collaborative mechanisms, when effectively used, ensure local authorities better meet the actual needs of disabled people.

4.4.3. Barriers in the Built Environment

The accessibility of public infrastructure was highlighted as a significant barrier in both sets of data. Key informants and focus group participants both expressed concern over how local authorities fail to prioritise accessibility in both rural and urban planning. Poorly designed infrastructure—such as ramps built around obstacles like telephone poles—was identified as a recurrent issue. The interviews underscored the technical challenges local authority staff face in understanding and implementing accessibility standards from the outset, while focus group participants detailed how such oversights further isolate disabled people from participating fully in community life.

4.4.5. Accessible Housing and the Role of Local Authorities

Both key informants and participants in the focus groups identified significant challenges with housing for disabled people. The Housing Adaptation Grant was frequently criticised for being insufficient, poorly implemented, and fraught with bureaucratic inefficiencies across local authorities. These concerns were raised both by key informants working within local authorities and by disabled participants and family members who have lived experience of these shortcomings. The need for universal design principles to be incorporated into all housing developments, and for greater allocation of accessible housing, was a recurrent observation. These are key changes needed if the right to independent living, as envisioned by the UN CRPD is to be implemented.

4.4.6. Engagement with Disabled People and DPOs

Both key informants and focus group participants called for more meaningful engagement between local authorities and DPOs. The key informants emphasised the need for structured, consistent consultation processes, while focus group participants criticised current engagement as often superficial or tokenistic. Participants called for co-design and co-creation, where disabled people have an active role in shaping the policies and practices that affect their lives. This theme of meaningful engagement was a recurring one, suggesting that local authorities must shift from viewing disabled people as passive recipients of services to active partners in the design and implementation of their functions as a local authority.

4.4.7. Need for Greater Monitoring and Accountability of Local Authorities

Both the interviews and focus groups stressed the importance of structured monitoring mechanisms to ensure compliance with the UN CRPD. Key informants noted the absence of clear reporting mechanisms, which makes it difficult to assess how well local authorities are contributing to national implementation under the UN CRPD. Focus group participants shared this concern, calling for more transparent and consistent accountability measures, such as regular reporting to the national focal point. The consensus was that without these measures there is a risk that the implementation of the UN CRPD will continue to be inconsistent across local authorities.

These conclusions reflect the findings in chapter 3 that while there is progress in terms of awareness and training on the UN CRPD in some local authorities, significant gaps remain in terms of resource allocation, structural barriers, and meaningful engagement with disabled people. The alignment of findings from the key informant interviews and focus groups reinforces the urgency of addressing these challenges to ensure that local authorities can effectively implement their obligations under the UN CRPD.

4.5. Good practices identified by Key Informants and Focus Groups

The key informant interviews and focus groups highlighted a number of good practices highlighting areas of progress. These are shared below

1. Kildare County Council – Access officer, network of access groups and strategy development

Access officer: Role is well-supported by a team, allowing them to dedicate significant time to accessibility tasks. The support includes regular management reports and dedicated budgets for disability-related projects, with additional funding from local property taxes.

Development of a Disability Strategy: In 2019, the Local Authority engaged 120 stakeholders in a workshop to develop a comprehensive strategy covering various areas, including communication, housing, infrastructure, employment, and disability awareness.

Local Access Groups: Seven local access groups were established in key towns, providing monthly feedback on local issues, which informs the authority's annual action plans.

Kildare Access Network: This network, composed of representatives from local access groups, helps shape policies and action plans, ensuring broad representation of disability stakeholders.

2. Sligo County Council - DPO dialogue, engagement and strategy development

Leadership: Commitment at senior level by the Local Authority to engage in the process.

DPO involvement: Sligo DPO formed with capacity building on the social model of disability and strong cross disability. DPO entered a structured dialogue with Sligo County Council. The disability committee is included in the county structure, and everything needs to go through the committee. Had to go through a proper AGM constitutional process.

Council's Disability Consultative Committee and Sligo Disabled Persons' Organisation (DPO) and Independent Living Movement Ireland. (ILMI) throughout the development process of this strategy has ensured that the "lived experience" of disabled people has been considered throughout the strategy formation and accompanying action plan for the period 2024-2027.

3. **Wicklow County Council** - Community Development Officer in partnership with disability organisation, formation of disability inclusion steering committee and strategy development
- **Dedicated role - Community Development Officer:** Which involves supporting Wicklow County Council (CoCo) and working in partnership with the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) to highlight local issues at a national level.
 - **Collaboration, Training Initiatives and Partnership:** Successful partnerships with County Wicklow Partnership to deliver self-advocacy training courses for disabled people, which have led to positive outcomes in empowering participants.
 - **Formation of the Disability Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC):** The DISC was set up in 2021, which formalised the adoption of the DFI staff role within Wicklow County Council, contributing to structured and focused efforts on disability inclusion at the local level.
 - **Development of a Strategy Informed by Disabled People:** The Disability Participation Grant in 2021 was used to develop a comprehensive strategy with input from disabled people, outlining a list of prioritised actions to be completed, ensuring that the strategy is reflective of the needs and priorities of the disability community.
 - **Increased Awareness of UN CRPD:** Through efforts such as the DISC committee, there has been an increase in awareness of the UN CRPD in Wicklow, which is starting to influence local policies and initiatives
4. **Dun Laoghaire County Council - Embedding statutory duty into Corporate Development Plans and disability inclusion into procurement**

Local Authority corporate development plan includes several references to the inclusion of disabled people:

- Goal 3 access in the community.
- Goal 7 eliminate discrimination, protect human rights and promote equality of opportunity through the implementation of the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

Inclusion of scoring on social good for social enterprise – Dun Laoghaire Baths

5. **Shared services model – a consistent standardised approach - Age Friendly Ireland**
- Age Friendly Ireland is a local government shared service, hosted by Meath County Council, involving collaboration with all 31 local authorities. Transitioned from funding by Atlantic Philanthropies to being hosted by local government, ensuring sustainability through a business case with the LGMA.

- Programme Structure and Coordination: A consistent programme structure across local authorities, ensuring uniform engagement and adherence to consistent KPIs through annual work plans and a national network.
- Engagement: creation of alliances, the appointment of programme managers, and the inclusion of Older People's Councils
- Promotion of the Age-Friendly Approach: Promoted the Age Friendly approach as a "whole of government" initiative, engaging multiple government departments and agencies to embed ageing considerations into their policies and practices.
- International link with the World Health Organization to align Age Friendly Ireland's programs with international standards and receive support and resources.
- Funding and Research: Oversaw the management of local programme budgets and facilitated access to national funding streams for age-friendly initiatives, ensuring alignment with age-friendly objectives.
- Partnership with a research unit in partnership with Maynooth University, focusing on issues related to ageing and older populations, and fostering links with other universities for new research
- Training and Capacity Building: Delivered accredited training modules on housing and public ground management to local authorities, raising awareness across various departments; Provided guidance, templates, and best practice standards for local authorities, particularly in planning and implementing age-friendly initiatives

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Overall Conclusions

While there is growing awareness of the UN CRPD among local authorities in Ireland, the implementation of its provisions remains inconsistent across the 31 local authorities in Ireland. Despite some positive examples of accessibility improvements in infrastructure and services, many local authorities have not fully integrated disability rights into their operational and strategic planning. The research suggests a significant gap between national-level commitments and local-level actions. This inconsistency reflects the varying levels of commitment across local governments but also the broader systemic challenges of limited resources for local authorities, insufficient coordination, and a lack of leadership on disability at the local level.

The findings from the qualitative data highlight the importance of the role of Access Officers in promoting disability inclusion at the local authority level. However, the current under-resourcing of these roles, both in terms of staff and training, undermines their effectiveness. Access Officers often lack the necessary authority and support to implement meaningful changes, and their roles are sometimes perceived as secondary to other responsibilities associated with their post. Effective implementation of the UN CRPD requires that the role of Access Officers needs to be strengthened through dedicated resources, structured support, and national coordination.

Housing is a key area where local authorities have struggled to meet the needs of disabled people. The Housing Adaptation Grant is often insufficient, and bureaucratic delays exacerbate the challenges faced by people in need of accessible housing. Additionally, poor design and the failure to incorporate universal design principles into planning have further marginalised disabled people, limiting their ability to live independently and be included in the community and access public spaces.

There is a clear inconsistency in how local authorities engage with disabled people and their representative organisations (DPOs). While some local authorities have developed successful models of engagement, such as the inclusion of disabled people in local decision-making processes, many others are criticised for tokenistic or superficial consultation. A more structured and consistent approach to engaging disabled people in policy development and service delivery is required to meet the obligations under Article 4(3) of the UN CRPD.

The lack of structured monitoring mechanisms is a significant barrier to the full implementation of the UN CRPD. Without clear accountability mechanisms for local authorities, it is difficult to assess how well they are progressing in meeting their obligations. Establishing transparent reporting and monitoring systems is essential for tracking progress and ensuring that local authorities adhere to their commitments under the UN CRPD.

Resource limitations was a recurring theme throughout the research. Local authorities in Ireland are underfunded compared to their European counterparts and other OECD countries, and this has a direct impact on their ability to implement disability rights effectively. For the UN CRPD to be meaningfully realised at the local level, increased funding and resources, both in terms of financial and human capital, are necessary.

Despite the barriers, blocks and challenges, there are examples of good practices across Ireland (see chapter 4). These examples highlight the potential for local authorities to provide leadership in creating inclusive communities. Replicating these successful initiatives across other local authorities could significantly improve the overall implementation of the UN CRPD.

5.2. Recommendations

5.2.1. Enforce and monitor existing statutory obligations

The research has identified significant gaps between the statutory obligations of local authorities and their actual implementation concerning disability rights. Local authorities have a range of statutory obligations under domestic legislation, including those related to human rights, equality, accessibility, and non-discrimination for disabled people. These obligations extend to budgetary decision-making, passing resolutions, and enacting by-laws etc. However, the research reveals that while these obligations are codified in law, there is often a disconnect between the legal framework and its practical realisation, leading to unmet needs and barriers to full participation for disabled people.

Recommendations to bridge the disconnect are as follows:

1. **Increase compliance of existing statutory duty by discussing the yearly monitoring by the National Disability Authority on compliance with the Disability Act at senior management level at local authority level including it as part of organisational metrics that are publicly available.** Statutory duties include ensuring compliance with various accessibility standards, such as the Web Accessibility Directive and the Disability Act. These regulations aim to improve accessibility in buildings, roads, pathways, and online services provided by local authorities. Stronger compliance and accountability is needed.
2. **Ensure public sector duty is fully implemented by putting in place metrics to measure budgets for social inclusion.** Local authorities have a statutory duty under the public sector duty to embed social inclusion, especially in community sections, ensuring they meet the needs of ageing communities and disabled people. This duty extends to their planning functions, housing delivery, and other community-based activities. The recently published report Joint Committee on Disability Matters Planning for inclusive communities for disabled people recommends equality budgeting must be developed

to deliver on the UN CRPD, and all Government departments must update their budgetary key metrics to include disability.

3. **Ensure enforcement of building regulations for accessibility local authorities have the statutory responsibility to enforce building regulations that include provisions for accessibility, ensuring that aging communities and people with disabilities can access public and private infrastructure.** Technical training for engineers is required and a public listing of where failure to meet building regulations could help improve accountability. Disabled people should be involved in the training and be paid for their time and expertise.
4. **Use the reserve functions as a positive measure within the authority of councillors on decisions about annual budgets, housing policy and other concerns to ensure that they are aligned with the national obligation and in compliance with the UN CRPD.** This requires as highlighted earlier a good understanding by city and county councillors of the UNCRPD.

5.2.2. Adopt foundational steps for building a structured approach to support local authority implementation of the UN CRPD.

Each local authority operates within its own local context, often far removed from the frameworks and obligations set out in international treaties, such as the UN CRPD. The research indicates that awareness of how their duties and actions align with the UN CRPD is not fully understood or prioritised by local authorities. The recommendations below are foundational steps that could support a national approach to ensure coordination of the implementation of the UN CRPD at local level. This research does not suggest what a national structure would look like as this would require further consultation but taking learnings from Age Friendly Ireland and the shared services approach between local authorities adopted by Age Friendly Ireland would a good starting point for building an overall plan.

The foundation steps that could be taken now include:

5. **Incorporate disability inclusion as a key area of focus of the Corporate Strategic Plans across the 31 local authorities.** At an operational level, this would include making sure disability inclusion is incorporated into all plans of the local authority support functions. It would also include developing localised disability strategies and setting key performance indicators on disability inclusion across the range of local authorities' plans.
6. **Implement a tailored approach to awareness training and capacity building on the UN CRPD and what this means for local authorities including county councillors.** It should be tailored to the specific functions and responsibilities of council staff and include mandatory training for all county councillors. The training should be regularly updated, ensuring continuous learning and engagement rather than being a one-time event. The training should be delivered by a diverse group of facilitators, including

Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs), civil society, human rights experts, and, most importantly, people with disabilities who are Disability Equality Trainers. The training should cover key technical areas critical for inclusive local governance, such as universal design principles, accessible housing, and the importance of incorporating disability inclusion into all aspects of local government functions, including planning, budgeting, and policy development etc. This holistic approach will equip staff and councillors with the knowledge and skills necessary to act in accordance with statutory obligations and in line with the UN CRPD. Regular training will help embed disability inclusion into the culture and practices of local government. Disabled people involved in the training should be paid for their time and expertise.

7. **Review the role of Access Officer with a view of uplifting it to a full-time decision-making leadership position with resources to act.** This role should be a dedicated, full-time role at grade (at least at Grade 7) which has decision making authority within each local authority, with the responsibility to drive accessibility and disability inclusion initiatives working with existing staff and where necessary additional staff in support. This role could be an expansion of its current remit within the Disability Act to be a cross-cutting role driving a mainstreaming of disability across other local authority programmes. In advance of this, a review of the Access Officer role and the associated personnel profile is essential to ensure that candidates have a strong understanding of disability rights, community development, social inclusion, and, where possible, lived experience of disability. The Local Government Management Agency (LGMA) should lead this review and standardise the role of Access Officer to align with local authorities' statutory obligations and the UN CRPD. This reform would align with best practices, as seen in the establishment of Local Authority Integration Teams (LAIT) across all local authorities under the guidance of the LGMA.
8. **Ensure a coordinated approach to disability inclusion through holding regular meetings between state agencies, services providers and people with disabilities and their representative organisations.** Different models that currently exist and which can be drawn from include the Older Persons Council which are representative groups of older people, established by local authorities. The good practices highlighted in chapter 4 of how Wicklow local authority established a Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee (DISC) and the approach Sligo County Council took are good models that could be replicated across local authorities depending on local context. These committees/forums would need to be resourced for ensuring meetings are accessible and inclusive.
9. **Structured and consistent monitoring mechanisms to assess the impact of disability inclusion efforts.** Adopting a national framework for tracking progress on disability inclusion and disability rights at local level is a minimum needed. Tracking progress on mainstreaming disability inclusion as a crosscutting issue and also mapping the disability specific efforts would be helpful to tracking progress and highlighting gaps.

This could be an initiative managed by the Local Government Management Association.

5.2.3. Enable and Resource Stakeholder Engagement for Inclusive Communities

Steering groups at various levels; national, regional, and local, play a key role in supporting the implementation of the UN CRPD. These groups bring together diverse stakeholders, including local authorities, voluntary providers, and the HSE, to coordinate efforts and share best practices. Recommendation to strengthen these different stakeholders' engagement include:

10. Replicate the good practice examples documented in this report of stakeholder engagement of disabled people and their representative organisations in co-developing local authority disability strategies. This could be lead through the initiative of the different local authorities.
11. The establishment where feasible of local access groups in key towns and a County Access Network to coordinate efforts and share best practices on accessibility. These groups ensure that local issues are addressed, and that disability inclusion remains a priority. In a number of local authority areas, these groups exist, and it would be important to build on them.
12. Ensure representation in local authority committees or consultative bodies is genuinely inclusive, ensuring that the voices of disabled people are fully heard, respected, and actively considered in decision-making processes. This representation should not cost disabled people to take up, resources need to be put in place for supporting representation. Staff and funding e.g. ISL etc.
13. The Public Participation Networks (PPNs) (or equivalents) should take pro-active measures to ensure full engagement for more structured and meaningful involvement of disabled people in local governance. Ensuring meaningful engagement means including budgets and resources for reasonable accommodation and accessibility to be built into the PPN funding which is allocated centrally.
14. Adopt a more unified approach, working together to advocate for broader changes. This collective effort is essential for effectively influencing policy and decision-making at the local level.

Appendix 1 Survey of Access Officers

Survey Access Officers in Local Authorities for Disability Federation of Ireland Research

Title of Research Study

“Implementation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) at Local Level”

Background to Study

The Disability Federation of Ireland is undertaking this piece of research on how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is being implemented by the 31 local authorities in Ireland.

Invitation

We are inviting you to participate in this research as you have been identified as a key stakeholder given your important role as an Access Officer in one of the 31 Local Authorities. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.

Deadline for Completion of Survey

5pm, 19/09/2024

1. Have you heard of the United Nations Disability Convention (UN CRPD)?

*

- Yes
- No

2. How aware are you of the United Nations Disability Convention (UN CRPD) and what it means to your role as Access Officer. Please choose from the following options, you can choose more than one. *

- Very aware, it is regularly referenced in my work as Access Officer
- It comes up occasionally in my role as Access Officer, in interactions with the public
- It comes up occasionally as part of internal meetings and communications in the Local Authority
- I received training on the UN CRPD but it hasn't come up since
- I received training on the UN CRPD and it has helped me in my role
- I have heard about the UN CRPD but don't fully understand it
- I wasn't aware of the UN CRPD before receiving this questionnaire
- Other

3. How aware are you of Irish anti-discrimination and equality laws, and what they mean for your role as an Access Officer? Please choose from the following options; you can select more than one." *

- Very aware, it is regularly referenced in my work as Access Officer
- It comes up occasionally in my role as Access Officer, in interactions with the public
- It comes up occasionally as part of internal meetings and communications in the Local Authority
- I received training on Irish anti-discrimination and equality laws but it hasn't come up since
- I received training on Irish anti-discrimination and equality laws and it has helped me in my role
- I have heard about Irish anti-discrimination and equality laws but don't fully understand
- I wasn't aware of Irish anti-discrimination and equality laws before receiving this questionnaire
- Other

4. How would you describe the knowledge of Disability Rights / the UN Disability Convention (UN CRPD) amongst Local Authority staff? *

- Excellent
- Very good
- Good
- Fair

- Poor
- Very Poor

5. How would describe the Local Authority management's understanding of disability rights / the UN Disability Convention (UNCRRD) and its implications for the work of the Local Authority? *

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Neither Good nor Bad
- Fair
- Poor
- Very Poor

6. How would you describe your Local Authority's understanding of its role in implementing the UN Disability Convention (UN CRPD) and implementing measures to support Irish anti- discrimination and equality law? *

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Neither Good nor Bad

- Fair
- Poor
- Very Poor

7. Can you identify specific areas where you have observed progress or improvements in supporting disabled people within your Local Authority since you have been in your current position? Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

8. Can you highlight any exemplary practices within your Local Authority (or another Local Authority) that promotes disability rights? Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

9. In your experience or opinion, are there any gaps or challenges in supporting the rights of disabled people at the local level in Ireland? Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

10. Does your role have Key Performance Indicators? If none of the options apply, select 'Other' and provide your explanation in the text box. *

Yes

No

Other

11. In your role as Access Officer, which of the following best describes your position. Please select one of the following options. If none of the options apply, select 'Other' and provide your explanation in the text box. *

Full-time with a defined job description

Part-time with a defined job description

Full-time without a defined job description

Part-time without a defined job description

Other

12. If your Access Officer role is not full time, are you given sufficient time to focus on your role as Access Officer? Please select one of the following options. If none of the options apply, select 'Other' and provide your explanation in the text box.

Yes

No

Other

13. Are you required to undertake tasks outside the scope of your role as Access Officer? *

Yes

No

14. If you answered 'Yes' to the question above, does being assigned additional tasks outside of your role affect your ability to effectively perform your duties as an Access Officer?

Yes

No

15. Have you received any training specifically focused on disability rights for your role? *

Yes

No

16. Please comment on the training / adequacy of training provided for your role. Please provide your thoughts in the text box below.

*

Enter your answer

17. How well do think your colleagues understand your role as Access Officer? Please select one of the following options. If none of the options apply, select 'Other' and provide your explanation in the text box. *

They understand the role well and reach out to me on relevant issues

They have some sense of the role and include me in communications related to work planning, consultation processes etc.

They are not very clear on the role and ask for support with unrelated matters

I rarely receive communications from my colleagues in relation to my role as Access Officer

18. What existing fora, structures, and stakeholders currently, or have the potential to, support and/or lead implementation of the UN Disability Convention (UN CRPD) / inclusion and equality for disabled people at the local level? Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

you or by members of the public)? *

Yes

No

20. If no, what additional support or resources would help you feel more supported in your role?

Please provide your thoughts in the text box below.

Enter your answer

21. How do you see your role from a human rights perspective? Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

22. Please list the most important actions or resources that would improve the implementation of disability rights at the Local Authority level. Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

23. How does your Local Authority engage and consult with disabled people to ensure their representation in decision-making processes? Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

24. Please include any other comments that you think are important for us to know for this research. Please provide your thoughts in the text box below. *

Enter your answer

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Appendix 2: Survey of Chief Executives of Local Authorities

Survey for Chief Executive Officers of Local Authorities

Title of Research Study

“Implementation of United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) at Local Level”

Background to Study

The Disability Federation of Ireland is undertaking this piece of research on how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) is being implemented by the 31 local authorities in Ireland.

Invitation

We are inviting you to participate in this research as you have been identified as a key stakeholder given your important role as the Chief Executive Officer of one of the 31 Local Authorities. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete this survey.

Deadline for Completion of Survey

5pm 19/09/2024

* Required

1. Please select your Local Authority from the list below *

- Carlow County Council
- Cavan County Council
- Clare County Council
- Cork County Council
- Donegal County Council
- Dun Laoghaire / Rathdown
- Fingal County Council
- Galway County Council
- Kerry County Council
- Kildare County Council
- Kilkenny County Council
- Laois County Council
- Leitrim County Council
- Limerick City & County Council
- Longford County Council
- Louth County Council
- Mayo County Council
- Meath County Council
- Monaghan County Council
- Offaly County Council
- Roscommon County Council
- Sligo County Council
- South Dublin County Council
- Tipperary County Council
- Waterford City and County Council
- Westmeath County Council
- Wexford County Council
- Wicklow County Council

- Cork City Council
- Dublin City Council
- Galway City Council

2. Are you aware of the UN Disability Convention (UN CRPD) and how it connects to the work of Local Authorities? *

Yes

No

3. How would you describe your knowledge of the needs of disabled people within your Local Authority area, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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4. What methods and processes do you use to collect data and information on disabled people within your Local Authority area? Please provide information in the text box below. *

5. Can you provide examples of successful initiatives or programmes that your Local Authority has undertaken to support inclusion and equality for disabled people? Please provide information in the text box below. *

6. Does your Local Authority have mechanisms in place to consult disabled people outside of the usual public consultations? Please provide information in the text box below. *

7. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in providing accessible information to disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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8. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in conducting disability awareness campaigns, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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9. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in realising the right to housing for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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10. Please rate how well your Local Authority is implementing accessible and inclusive housing strategies, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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11. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in adhering to accessibility standards for physical buildings, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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12. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in implementing accessibility standards for local transport, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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13. Please rate how well your Local Authority is providing accessible information about local government, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

14. Please rate how well your Local Authority is ensuring its website is accessible for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

15. Please rate how well your Local Authority is supporting living independently and being included in the community for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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16. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in supporting work and employment opportunities for disabled people, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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17. Please rate how well your Local Authority is performing in enabling disabled people to participate in cultural life, recreation, leisure, and sport, with 1 being terrible and 10 being excellent. *

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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18. In your opinion, how effective is the role of Access Officer in supporting the rights of disabled people within your Local Authority? *

Very effective

Somewhat effective

- Neither effective nor ineffective
- Very ineffective
- Somewhat ineffective

19. What specific improvements or changes would you recommend to enhance the effectiveness of the Access Officer role in supporting the rights of disabled people within your Local Authority? Please provide information in the text box below.

*

20. Are there any collaborative efforts with community organisations, disabled persons organisations or other stakeholders in your area to support inclusion and equality for disabled people? Please provide information in the text box below. *

21. What are the main challenges your Local Authority faces in ensuring the inclusion and equality for disabled people? Please provide information in the text box below. *

22. What hinders the inclusion and equality for disabled people within local communities? Please provide information in the text box below. *

23. How would you rate the support provided by the Government in helping your Local Authority understand its role in supporting inclusion and equality for disabled people? *

- Excellent
- Very
- Good
- Good

- Fair
- Very
- Poor
- Poor

24. Has your Local Authority received adequate support and guidance from the Government to effectively understand and fulfil its roles and responsibilities in supporting and enhancing inclusion and equality for disabled people? Please provide information in the text box below.

*

25. Do you believe that implementing a formal, standardised national approach to inclusion and equality for disabled people at the local level would be beneficial? Please select one of the following options. If none of the options apply, select 'Other' and provide your explanation in the text box.

*

- Yes
 No


26. Based on your experience, what recommendations would you make to improve inclusion and equality for disabled people at the local level? Please provide information in the text box below. *

27. What additional support or resources would be helpful for your Local Authority to enhance implementation of the UN Disability Convention (UN CRPD) and inclusion and equality of disabled people at the local level? Please provide information in the text box below. *

28. Discuss how your Local Authority manages and administers the housing adaptation grant for disabled people, including any challenges faced and areas for improvement. Please provide information in the text box below. *

29. Please include any other comments that you think are important for us to know for this research. Please provide information in the text box below. *

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