



INDEPENDENT LIVING
MOVEMENT IRELAND

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Submission to the Committee on Disability Matters
30th March 2023

Opening Statement

Independent Living Movement Ireland

Climate change is the decisive challenge facing humanity and urgent action is required to stabilise the planet for this and future generations. Failure to act nationally and globally will have disastrous effects on billions of people's lives. But climate change does not discriminate, it does not pick and choose whom to affect for our mishandling of our home. Discrimination; that is the job of our species.

As a national Disabled Persons Organisation, we are concerned that failure to treat climate change as a global emergency will have even greater consequences for people who are pushed to the edges of society, and precisely the lives of disabled people nationally and internationally.

Independent Living Movement Ireland's vision, as a cross impairment DPO, is an Ireland where disabled persons have liberty and self-determination over all aspects of their lives to fully participate in an inclusive society. We recognise and welcome that measures need to be urgently developed to drastically reduce our carbon emissions; however, it is crucial that any climate change actions do not undermine our commitments to the inclusion of disabled people in Ireland under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).



We appreciate that the development of climate change actions could potentially be transformative. Investment in sustainable housing and effective and efficient transportation systems are key to moving from environmental disaster to a more sustainable future. However, there is an urgent need to engage with Disabled Persons Organisation to ensure that any public investment is fully inclusive and ensure that exchequer funds are designed to meet the needs of everyone. Climate change and environmentalism are as much about social justice as it is about correcting the damage we have done to our planet. But disabled people are often disregarded in discourses and decisions of this environmental social justice. We are frequently seen as an afterthought or an energy burden rather than being part of a whole societal transformative effect for our shared future.

Analysis of Disability Inclusion in National Climate Commitments and Policies shows that few state parties to the Paris Agreement currently refer to disabled people in their climate mitigation policies. The report notes that the failure to include disabled people in climate mitigation actions may lead to outcomes that are inconsistent with our rights. In Ireland we note that the Climate Action Plan 2023 *Changing Ireland for the Better* has a solitary reference to disabled people in relation to minimum levels of disabled parking. This systematic invisibility of disabled people in climate planning reflects that lack of structured engagement with DPOs on this issue.

The lack of engagement with DPOs in relation to local and national plans to decarbonise Irish society has and will have unintentional impacts on our lives. Nationally and internationally, environmental grassroots organisations have historically have been led by non-disabled people, who, through a genuine attempting to save the environment, do not take into account those less access to resources than themselves.



For example, ILMI recognises the need to reduce our carbon footprint by trying to reduce reliance on cars in towns and cities. However, due to the lack of engagement with Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) as per State commitments under the UNCRPD, some measures are having unintended negative consequences on the lives of disabled people. Hard-fought gains by disabled people over decades in terms of the safety of our pedestrian areas and parking spaces were steadily eroded over the last two years. Temporary changes to our public areas made during the phases of managing Covid-19 are now translating into sometimes unwelcome permanency. Disabled people are being denied access to our towns and cities by pavements restricted to our ease of movement due to new allowances permitted for unregulated external dining. Why not wholly pedestrianize these spaces for the real inclusion of all rather than the enjoyment of the few.

Our disabled parking spaces are being removed to locations with no reference to where and why the original location was a place of most assistance to facilitate disabled people to access the centres of towns and cities. The promotion of floating bus stops which impede disabled people and people with limited mobility in safely accessing public transport and the promotion of dangerous “shared spaces” are directly impacting our ability as disabled people to participate with our accustomed ease of freedom in society. These are but a sample of a massive problem of restricting the mobility of tens of thousands of disabled people and older people.

ILMI recognises the need to promote active mobility and reduce our national carbon footprint. What alarms us, however, is that the many measures which were initially trialled as experimental, are now implemented with little or no recognition of earlier objections to their design, and with no new consultation



with disabled people through representative Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) as per the States commitments under Article 4.3 of the UNCRPD.

This has led to a mix of local initiatives without meaningful consultation with disabled people, resulting in a lack of uniformity and hybrid measures which undermine disabled people's right to access and inclusion. Article 9 of the UNCRPD specifically places obligations on States to take appropriate measures to ensure disabled people "access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation, to information and communications, including information and communications technologies and systems, and to other facilities and services open or provided to the public, both in urban and in rural areas. These measures, which shall include the identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility".

Many disabled people are everyday environmentalists and are passionate about combating damaging effects on our environment. However, banning plastic straws will have a huge negative impact on some disabled peoples' lives.

Straws are part of disability history. Straws were one of the first examples of universal design. They were made for use in hospitals. Once disabled people achieved greater independence to live in non-medical facilities, we promoted plastic straws as an access tool. As a result, any disabled person can go in to any bar or restaurant and get a drink. Being able to get a hot or cold drink in Irish social settings is important for all disabled people.

There are biodegradable plastics being designed but as yet none of them meet our needs. The current biodegradable plastic straws melt in our coffees and teas, and at the moment in order that they are fully recyclable they then



should be then collected by the café, restaurant or pub and sent-off to the USA for biodegradable processing by specially adapted ovens. They do not biodegrade in compost heaps. None of the current alternatives work right, some are even highly dangerous. Some disabled people need something that is affordable, flexible, high temperature safe, with a low choking and injury risk.

So far, the only thing that meets these criteria is the single use drinking straw. Banning plastic straws hurts some disabled people and has serious consequences on people being able to consume liquids.

It is these types of decisions, made with good intentions to make life more sustainable, but have a serious negative effect on disabled people's lives that are an example of the real lack of a consultative process with disabled people and their DPOs in Ireland. Moreover, without mechanisms to engage meaningfully with authentic DPOs, there is a tangible concern that climate change policies will actually reduce the inclusion of disabled people in society.

We in ILMI believe that there is a need for a national blueprint of standards to ensure that proposed changes to improve the environments of our cities and towns reflect our commitments to “develop, promulgate and monitor the implementation of minimum standards and guidelines for the accessibility of facilities and services open or provided to the public”. ILMI feels that Government departments, with the oversight of our National Human Rights Institute (the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission), should undertake a review of the Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets to reflect expectations and commitments under the UNCRPD.



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We in ILMI recognise that change is necessary to reduce our carbon emissions, but feel that this can and should be done with our existing commitments under the UNCRPD to ensure that disabled people are not further marginalised and excluded from society through a failure to recognise that disabled people must have accommodation made to provide for transport and mobility needs. Better transport systems, better and more efficient homes, towns, cities and rural areas benefit all -

We have fought long and hard to have systemic barriers removed that denied us our right to access and inclusion. These hard-won rights cannot be undone through the lack of Strategic thinking that fails to embed inclusion in the development of sustainable towns and cities going forward. Again, climate disaster does not discriminate, that is the job of humankind.