



# **Invest in Inclusion**

## Key Political Priorities for Disabled People

July 2024

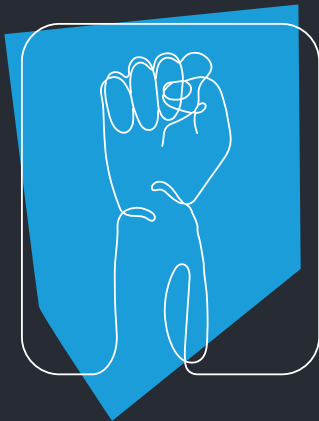


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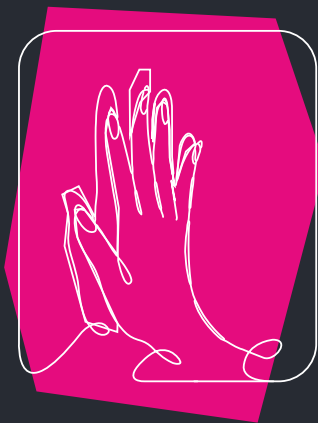


INDEPENDENT LIVING MOVEMENT IRELAND



### Human rights

Promote and support disabled people's involvement in activism and their participation in collective action and decision-making.



### Collective empowerment

Secure a recognition of and supports for DPOs and their value as authentic autonomous spaces.



### Social justice

Shape and secure the policies, plans, legislation, services and resources that would ensure the full and active participation of disabled people in society.

**Nothing about us without us**

## Introduction to Independent Living Movement Ireland

**Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI) is a national cross-impairment Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO). Our vision is an Ireland where disabled persons have freedom, choice and control over all aspects of their lives and can fully participate in an inclusive society as equals.**



Our work is informed by our strategic values of human rights, collective empowerment and social justice.

ILMI is led by disabled people and promote a rights-based social model of disability, challenging the unacceptable charity / medical model of disability. We are working towards the removal of societal barriers that prevent active equal participation of disabled people, challenging the denial of people's rights and the promotion of the philosophy of Independent Living

As a Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO), we have worked with members to develop a manifesto for key policy asks as political parties and independent politicians begin to develop their election manifestos for the impending by-elections and next General Election.

We will work with disabled people across the country in the lead into the election to ensure disabled people are mobilised to have our voices heard.

## **Our members have identified the following as the key policy areas to progressively implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**

### **1. Ensure that all decisions in relation to disabled people's lives are made in direct consultation with Disabled People through DPOs locally and nationally**

“Nothing about us without us”: For far too long, decisions and supports framed for us around our disabilities in all aspects of our lives are decided by others. Ireland has ratified the UNCRPD, and there are specific articles (4.3 and 29b) that relate to the role of Disabled Person's Organisations (DPOs). These are separate from disability service provider organisations as DPOs are led by Disabled People and this forum is where we need to have our contributions heard and recognised in policy development.

#### **Actions**

- **Recognise and resource the development of DPOs to build strategic, sustainable engagement with cross-impairment DPOs locally and nationally.**

### **2. Invest in accessible housing for Disabled People to live in our communities**

Ireland is currently in the midst of a housing crisis, but there always has been a crisis for disabled people due to the lack of accessible housing. We are more than twice as likely to report discrimination relating to housing and over 1.6 times more likely to live in poor conditions, such as living in damp housing, lacking central heating or living in an area with neighbourhood problems. We are also particularly over-represented in the homeless population: more than one in four homeless people are disabled.

There are concerns about the disabled people who are the “hidden homeless” where disabled people who live in other people's homes and who are not on any housing list or where there is no expectation that they should live independent lives. There are also thousands of disabled people in residential and congregated settings who are denied a right to their own home, and lack of delivery of policy in terms of housing means that their needs are not being met.

Reliance on the Private Sector will not work and does not work for us, due to our particular accommodation needs and therefore many of us require investment in Public Housing. Those of us in private rented accommodation cannot access supports to adapt the houses we live in as grants can only be accessed by the owner of the property.

#### **Actions**

- **Ensure that 10% of investment in public housing is a sufficient amount for universally designed UD+ & UD++ for wheelchair liveable accommodation.**
- **Urgently publish the review of Housing Adaptation Grants and implement changes to increase funding, increase the maximum grant amount to reflect building costs, and reform the means testing process.**
- **Ensure that local HDSGs set clear, costed and transparent targets for housing for disabled people that can be monitored for implementation by local DPOs.**

### 3. Recognise and resource the right to Personal Assistance Services (PAS)

The Personal Assistance Service (PAS) is a vital resource for many disabled people in having control over our lives to participate in our communities. The PAS is the most fundamental investment that the State can make in committing to realising our participation in society. It is recognised nationally and internationally as not only the service we need but the most cost-effective investment to delivering inclusion.

Sadly, in the absence of a structured approach to obtaining a personal assistant and a rational service to support it, many disabled people do not know about a PA and, as a consequence, are denied the right to live lives of independence and inclusion in the fashion non-disabled people take for granted. Many access day and residential services that segregate us and deny us the choices to participate in mainstream education, employment and social activities are the product of this absence.

Many disabled people are forced to rely on family members for supports to do the things that can't be done by ourselves. There is ample research on the stressful impact on disabled people and family members who provide support to disabled people.

Investment in supports that liberate disabled people will also liberate family members to move from roles where they provide support for their partners, children, or siblings, and can focus solely on their family relationships.

We need to build a PAS system that is fair, with clear definitions, a social-model informed assessment of need which is invested in as a priority for the National Disability Services Action Plan.

#### **Actions**

- **All policy and legislative commitments must be truly reflective of the UNCRPD, the ethos of independent living and the rights of disabled people to live a life of self-determination.**
- **Commitment to ensure DECDIY and HSE develop a national PAS service based on the principles of the ILMI PAS NOW campaign.**
- **Commit to year-on-year increase in PAS hours.**
- **Synchronise supports for disabled people to live independent lives from accessing education. Standardise our supports in school with PAS so that we become accustomed to effective supports that meet our needs by renaming and restructuring SNAs to become PAs in the education system.**
- **Ensure that DPOs are resourced to engage with families so that they become aware of and drive demand for PAS as a transformative enabler of the rights of disabled people and our families.**
- **Ensure that personalised budgets become accessible and readily available for disabled people to manage their own resources to live independent lives.**

#### 4. Build an inclusive education system for all

While there has been positive increases in the number of disabled people in further education, Ireland needs to move from equality of access towards equality of participation and equality of outcomes for disabled students in education. An inclusive education system needs to raise expectations for disabled children and young adults and requires systemic investment in disability equality training for professionals within schools, including the crucial role of guidance counsellors.

A core message for politicians and political parties is that mainstream education is crucial for the inclusion of disabled people in society. Disabled people find the term “special education” and “special needs” deeply offensive, and want to move to social model language about the need for supports to participate fully in the education system.

“Special schools” do not have the expectations for disabled people. We need to remove the term “special” from education and the barriers caused by term “special needs”. Schools are not just about learning for academic qualifications, it is where we can build friendships and begin our journey to feeling part of our communities.

Too often parents choose schools based on “additional resources” or that there will more acceptance of disabled children when they go to a “special school”.

##### **Actions**

- **Resource and invest in real inclusion in mainstream education.**
- **Work with DPOs to develop a vision for social-model led education at all levels. The resourcing of the development of Local DPOs will provide a sustainable connection between disabled activists and school settings to connect with staff and students (regardless of impairment) to talk about what is possible for disabled people in education and employment when barriers are removed to build and sustain expectations for disabled students.**
- **Career guidance needs to be a multi-pronged approach which links the aspirations of disabled students with the supports they need to achieve their goals, and links with disabled people through local DPOs to build confidence and shift expectations.**



## 5. Invest in inclusion of disabled people in employment

Ireland has 39.5% of disabled people living at risk of poverty and social exclusion (EU average: 28.8%). The disability employment rate in Ireland is 32.6%, almost 20% below the EU average of 51.3%. We need political will to invest in systems that will increase the confidence and self-belief of disabled people to set ambitious goals for employment. It is about ensuring reasonable accommodation supports are accessible and managed by disabled people within employment. It is about increasing the numbers of disabled people in employment, improving opportunities within employment and ensuring that the demands of disabled people as a collective inform future employment policies in reaction to disabled people.

### Actions

- **The Wage Subsidy Scheme needs to be overhauled. It needs to be redefined as a Support scheme that goes to and is directly managed like a direct payment to the disabled employee. This will allow disabled people to utilise this for the supports they need in their workplace (AT, ISL, Personal Assistance).**
- **There needs to be a target for private companies in relation to employment of disabled people. There is good practice in other jurisdictions based on size of companies and fines for non-compliance.**
- **Public sector 6% employment rate at minimum needs to apply to publicly funded organisations that provide services to us.**
- **We need a social clause for Private employers who are seeking to procure services for the State. If they receive or are looking for State funds to provide a service they need to prove how they will engage and employ disabled people.**
- **We need to have a DPO employment agency that is designed and controlled by us. This is an employment support service led and staffed by disabled people. It needs to be a commercial entity not a charity so we can access supports such as the Wage Subsidy Scheme. This body needs to have access to funds and supports in relation to staff, management costs and so on. This entity would have authenticity to engage with employers, HR structures and so on and employ disabled people and be managed by disabled people. We have the lived experience and we should lead these organisations and we should be employed within them and lead them so that they will meet our needs.**
- **Medical test for public services jobs need to be removed. It is a barrier for many of us in applying and often is completely irrelevant to the jobs we are applying for.**
- **Disabled people need to retain access to medical card and other benefits even when employed.**
- **Disability allowance cannot be means tested if we are married. Removal of our DA can lead to financial dependency and potential increases in domestic violence and financial abuse.**

## 6. Ensure all disabled people have access to travel

Inclusion in society as equals means that we can access transport in both rural and urban areas. Investment in inclusive transport is vital but ensuring that where public transport is unavailable, disabled people are supported to access their own transport or private transport.

### Actions

- **Ensure that any State investment in Public Transport Services meets accessibility standards, in conjunction with DPOs.**
- **Ensure that all disabled people have access to free travel, without means-testing. It will encourage greater inclusion of disabled people in society.**
- **The primary medical certificate process needs to be overhauled and made transparent for disabled people.**
- **The proposed legislation for Health (Transport Support) Bill to realise a new Transport Support Scheme and associated statutory provisions announced in 2018 to replace the motorized transport grant needs to be advanced urgently.**
- **Whereby private transport companies are in receipt of any State subsidy, they need to clearly state that free travel pass for disabled people will be accepted.**
- **Minimum standards for accessible private transport companies needs to be enacted.**
- **Department of Transport (Aviation) work with the Irish Aviation Authority and relevant stakeholders to ensure equitable access to airports and travel for disabled passengers.**

## 7. Recognise and support older disabled people

We do not stop being disabled when we reach the age of 65, yet most of us have our supports removed or reduced. Some of us acquire our impairments as we age or our impairments change as we age. We need to have the right to access appropriate supports, regardless of our age.

### Actions

- **Ensure that disabled people over the age of 65 continue to access our relevant supports as we age.**

## 8. Develop villages, towns and cities are accessible for all

Local authorities need to directly engage with us through our DPOs to inform what we need from our built environment. We are the expert in our lives. Local authorities have obligations under the UNCRPD to ensure that public investment in infrastructure meets our needs and that disabling barriers such as lack of dipped kerbs, absence of pelican crossings and the installation of kissing gates are addressed by Local Authorities.

What is convenience for non-disabled people is essential for us. By designing and building public infrastructure that meets our needs you ensure it meets everyone's needs.

Arts centres and public spaces need to be accessible to us. Local authorities need to ensure that over the lifetime of the new Local Development Plans that there are at least one Changing Places in every town in Ireland as local public buildings are designed and built. Investment in public spaces such as playgrounds need to take into account how to ensure all public services are accessible and inclusive.

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

Local authorities need to recognise that active travel can work in tandem with our needs but only by ensuring that there are no shared spaces between cyclists and pedestrians. Investing in accessible public transport and accessible bus stops are essential but not at the expense of provision of disabled parking spaces which we will need to access goods and services in our villages, towns and cities.

### Actions

- **Invest and resource in multiannual funding for Local DPOs to engage in all relevant local structures about our lives such as the Public Participation Networks (PPN), Local Community Development Committees (LCDCs), Housing Disability Steering Groups (HDSGs).**
- **Review the Design Manual for Urban and Rural Spaces with DPOs in conjunction with DPOs to ensure compliance post- ratification of the UNCRPD.**
- **By working with local DPOs, ensure that essential carbon-reduction plans for towns and cities do not impact on our participation in our communities.**

## **9. Ensure all Public authority information is accessible for all**

State agencies need to ensure that all public information is available in accessible formats. All information should be available to us and all websites of public bodies should meet web accessibility standards.

## **10. Disability Equality at the design and deliver of State services**

Effective and inclusive well-resourced public services are vital to realise the UNCRPD. Making Ireland inclusive needs the active engagement of disabled people through our DPOs but also by the direct employment of disabled people in delivering services as per targets set out in the National Disability Inclusion Strategy.

### **Actions**

- **Each Local Authority should employ qualified disabled people as disability liaison officers as focal points for disability inclusion, including data collection to monitor access and inclusion issues locally.**
- **Government Departments, State agencies and Local authorities need to engage with local DPOs and national DPOs like ILMI to ensure disability equality training is delivered to staff and elected representatives of councils.**
- **DPOs need to be resourced to adequately respond to the roll out of DET locally and nationally.**

**Nothing about us without us**

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