National Disability Authority Presentation to the Joint Committee on Disability Matters

# Introduction

The National Disability Authority (NDA) thanks the Chair and the members of the Joint Committee on Disability Matters for the opportunity to present on the topic of **Employment and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).**

The NDA provides independent and evidence informed advice to Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of disabled people. We also incorporate a Centre for Excellence in Universal Design, promoting the design of buildings, products, services and ICT, so that they can be accessed, understood and used by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability or disability.

# Employment of Persons with Disabilities in Ireland: Key statistics

Data available from the CSO shows that only 36.5% of disabled people aged 20- 64 are in employment, compared to 72.8% of the non-disabled population[[1]](#footnote-1).

Among people with a disability who are employed, 14.8% are self-employed.

We know that over a third of people in receipt of Disability Allowance would like to work, if the conditions were suitable. About **three quarters** of people of working age with disabilities have acquired their disability between the ages of 18 and 65, many of whom have a prior connection to employment[[2]](#footnote-2).

People with disabilities experience consistent poverty at more than twice the rate of their non-disabled counterparts. Being at work helps reduce this risk, although we know that disabled people still experience deprivation at a higher rate than the rest of the population.[[3]](#footnote-3)

# UNCRPD and National Strategies

Article 27 of the UNCRPD recognises the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others.

In Ireland, progressive realisation of this Article is being driven through the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities (CES) - a 10 year whole-of-government approach to improving employment outcomes for disabled people. The National Disability Inclusion Strategy also has a commitment in this regard. The NDA carries out independent annual assessments of progress in relation to both Strategies.[[4]](#footnote-4)[[5]](#footnote-5)

The Disability Act of 2005 requires a minimum of 3% of public sector employees to be employees with disabilities. The NDA monitors compliance with this Part of the Act (Part 5) and our report for 2020 shows that the sector has achieved a level of 3.1%.[[6]](#footnote-6) Legislation to increase the minimum target to 6% by 2024 is expected to pass in the coming weeks.

The NDA welcomes progress to date on these Strategies and policies, but advises that there are some key areas where further focus is required, which could be captured in the final three-year action plan for the CES currently in development. These include addressing challenges around:

* Provision of effective **career guidance**
* Managing effective **transitions** between education, training and employment
* Providing **supports and reasonable accommodations** in the work- place
* Developing a coordinated programme of **vocational rehabilitation**
* Building the **capacity and competence of employers**
* Ensuring **self-employment is a viable option** for disabled people.

This year, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth will work to develop a UNCRPD Implementation Plan, and we advise this should include ambitious goals around employment. Relevant mainstream strategies must also include actions to meet the needs of disabled people, as the Pathways to Work Strategy does, for example.

# Reasonable Accommodations, Self-Employment and Employers

The **Employment Equality Acts 1998-2015** oblige employers to provide reasonable accommodations to job applicants and employees with disabilities, unless this would impose a disproportionate burden. Many accommodations cost little or nothing to provide, and simply require a flexible approach. NDA research on reasonable accommodations[[7]](#footnote-7) has shown that meaningful engagement with individuals is key to creating an inclusive work-place. We welcome the review of the Reasonable Accommodation Fund Scheme underway in the Department of Social Protection, as this will be relevant to those cases where a cost is required to provide an accommodation.

Research delivered by the OECD in 2021 in partnership with the NDA highlighted a number of ways in which the State could promote the employment of disabled people, both directly with employers, and through the public employment service, i.e. Intreo. Many of the recommendations made by the OECD are reflected in the Pathways to Work commitments, and we look forward to the implementation of this Strategy over its lifetime.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Self-employment and entrepreneurship are also routes to positive employment outcomes for disabled people. Barriers experienced here range from fears that income earned might put essential benefits - such as the medical card - at risk, to self-employed individuals not currently being eligible to access reasonable accommodation funding administered by the State,[[9]](#footnote-9) to lower disability awareness in some Local Enterprise Offices.

Over the past number of years the NDA has engaged with Enterprise Ireland on how their entrepreneur support programme can be made accessible, through Universal Design, for all those who have a business idea that can be developed to attract external investment, including entrepreneurs with disabilities. Work is also underway at the IDA to ensure that good practice in supporting employment for disabled people in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) firms is applied in their Irish locations.

# Conclusion: The challenge ahead

At the start of the CES, the Government committed to increase the percentage of people with disabilities in employment (including self-employment) to 38% by 2024, from its baseline level of 33%. The 2022 Census will tell us much about how close we are to achieving this target.

NDA analysis shows that over 15,000 additional disabled people in the 20-64 age range must be at work in 2024**10** relative to 2017 if we are to achieve this target.

These numbers show clearly where increased cross-sectoral cooperation is necessary in order to drive progress. The importance of the forthcoming final three year action plan for the CES cannot be understated.

**ENDS**

1. CSO Census 2016: [NDA Factsheet 2: Employment | The National Disability Authority](https://nda.ie/Resources/Factsheets/NDA-Factsheet-2-Employment/NDA-Factsheet-2-Employment.html) The NDA has also analysed data that shows that among 16-24 year olds, the percentage of disabled people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is also more than double that of those in this age group who do not have a disability – at 23% vs 10%. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [NDA Factsheet 4: Retaining people with a disability in the workforce | The National Disability](https://nda.ie/Resources/Factsheets/NDA-Factsheet-4-Retaining-people-with-a-disability-in-the-workforce/) [Authority](https://nda.ie/Resources/Factsheets/NDA-Factsheet-4-Retaining-people-with-a-disability-in-the-workforce/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. [Identification of skills gaps among persons with disabilities and their employment prospects |](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/identification-of-skills-gaps-among-persons-with-disabilities-and-their-employment-prospects.html) [The National Disability Authority (nda.ie)](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/identification-of-skills-gaps-among-persons-with-disabilities-and-their-employment-prospects.html) (pp.20-21) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Comprehensive Employment Strategy NDA Year-end Assessment 2021 | The National](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/comprehensive-employment-strategy-nda-year-end-assessment-2021.html) [Disability Authority](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/comprehensive-employment-strategy-nda-year-end-assessment-2021.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [Indicators for Monitoring Progress under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/indicators-for-monitoring-progress-under-the-comprehensive-employment-strategy-for-persons-with-disabilities-2015-2024.html) [Persons with Disabilities 2015-2024 | The National Disability Authority (nda.ie)](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/indicators-for-monitoring-progress-under-the-comprehensive-employment-strategy-for-persons-with-disabilities-2015-2024.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [2020 Report on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 | The National Disability](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-of-people-with-disabilities-in-the-public-service/reports-on-compliance-with-public-sector-jobs-target/2020-report-on-compliance-with-part-5-of-the-disability-act-2005-.html) [Authority (nda.ie)](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-of-people-with-disabilities-in-the-public-service/reports-on-compliance-with-public-sector-jobs-target/2020-report-on-compliance-with-part-5-of-the-disability-act-2005-.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. [Reasonable Accommodations: Obstacles and Opportunities to the Employment of Persons](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/reasonable-accommodations-obstacles-and-opportunities-to-the-employment-of-persons-with-a-disability1.html) [with a Disability | The National Disability Authority (nda.ie)](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/reasonable-accommodations-obstacles-and-opportunities-to-the-employment-of-persons-with-a-disability1.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. [Disability, Work and Inclusion in Ireland: Engaging and supporting employers | The National](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-engaging-and-supporting-employers.html) [Disability Authority (nda.ie)](https://nda.ie/publications/employment/employment-publications/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-engaging-and-supporting-employers.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [experiences-of-support-for-return-to-work-among-people-with-acquired-disabilities-or-](https://nda.ie/file-upload/experiences-of-support-for-return-to-work-among-people-with-acquired-disabilities-or-conditions.pdf) [conditions.pdf (nda.ie)](https://nda.ie/file-upload/experiences-of-support-for-return-to-work-among-people-with-acquired-disabilities-or-conditions.pdf) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)