



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais
National Disability Authority

Annual Conference 2026

Article 11 UNCRPD

**Disability inclusive responses to natural
and man-made emergencies**

Meet the Speakers



Introduction and Opening Addresses



Dr Aideen Hartney

Director

National Disability Authority (NDA)

Aideen joined the NDA in 2016 and became Director in 2020.

She has a long career in research, working in UCD and in the private sector.

She managed a number of major research projects.



Kathryn O'Donoghue

Chairperson, NDA

Kathryn has been a member of the Board of the NDA since 2018.

She is Chairperson since 2022.

She worked in important management and information technology roles.

She worked in different companies in Ireland and Europe.



Norma Foley T.D.

Minister for Children, Disability and Equality

Norma was a teacher in Kerry and a councillor on Kerry County Council.

She was also Mayor of Tralee.

Norma was Minister for Education from 2020 to 2025.

As Minister for Children, Disability and Equality, she published the new National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People.

Keynote Address



Catherine Naughton

Executive Director

European Disability Forum

Catherine has over 30 years' experience in the area of disability.

She has an interest in EU law and policy, accessibility, and the rights of disabled people in Europe.

She wants to make sure that people with disabilities can take part and be included in society.

Session 1: Inclusive emergency responses in comparative contexts



Chair: Keith Leonard

National Director

**National Directorate for Fire and
Emergency Management**

**Department of Housing, Local
Government and Heritage**

Keith worked in the fire service for over 30 years.

In 2006, Keith joined the National Directorate for Fire & Emergency Management.

In 2010, he took on responsibility for Emergency Management.

Keith chairs the National Emergency Coordination Group.

This group leads the whole-of-government response to major flooding and severe weather emergencies.

He became National Director in 2021 and leads on fire service policy.



Dino Zuppa, Ph.D.

Chief Executive Officer

Accessibility Standards Canada

Accessibility Standards Canada is a leader in accessible and inclusive standards which are supported by research.

Dino works with governments, standards development organisations, researchers, disability communities and partners in Canada and other countries.



Lourdes González Perea

Head of Accessible Technologies

Fundación ONCE, Spain

Lourdes has been working in the field of accessibility since 2003.

She has a particular interest in accessible technologies, inclusive education, and accessible communication.

She leads training to improve support for disabled people in emergency situations.



Kealan McMoreland

Head, Office of Emergency Planning Department of Defence

Kealan works at the Department of Defence. His work supports the Government Task Force on Emergency Planning.

Kealan has worked with Local Government, the Permanent Defence Forces, An Garda Síochána, Irish Aid and Civil Defence. He holds an MSc in Emergency Management.



Professor Michelle Villeneuve

Deputy Director, Centre for Disability Research and Policy

The University of Sydney, Australia

Michelle is an advocate for disability-inclusive emergency management.

She leads research on a person-centred approach to getting ready for emergencies.

Michelle works with disability, health, community, government, and emergency management sectors.

Session 2: Inclusive emergency responses in communities



Chair: Pauline Mulligan

Chief Executive Officer

Local Government Management Agency

Pauline has been Chief Executive since January 2025.

Before this, she was on the Management Board of the Department of Enterprise, Trade & Employment.

Pauline's experience includes developing Innovation 2020, a national research and development policy.

Pauline led the Department's response to Brexit and Covid.

She also led out on a culture of innovation in the public service.



Laura O'Callaghan

Community Development Officer Disability Federation of Ireland

Laura has more than fifteen years' experience as a disability advocate.

She began her career working with the Deafblind community.

Laura is the coordinator of the Disability and Inclusion Steering Committee at Wicklow County Council.



Dónal Rice

EAA Implementation Manager

Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg)

Dónal joined ComReg in 2025.

He works on putting the European Accessibility Act (EAA) into action.

Before this, Dónal worked at the NDA and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

Dónal has provided accessibility advice on a number of EU research programmes.



Lianne Quigley

Chair, Irish Deaf Society (IDS)

Lianne holds a Certificate in Equality Studies for Deaf People from UCD.

She was co-chairperson of a campaign to recognise Irish Sign Language in law.

Lianne is a Deaf interpreter and a Deaf artist. She represents IDS on the Disabled Persons Organisations Network.

She is on the DPO Group for the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People.



Lindsay Sharpe

Senior Manager for Customer Service & Experience

ESB Networks

Lindsay leads the Customer Service & Experience team in ESB Networks.

The team wants to deliver better customer outcomes and experiences.

Lindsay has over 20 years of experience in marketing, communications, strategy, and customer experience.

Ministerial Address



Emer Higgins T.D.

Minister of State with responsibility for Disability

Department of Children, Disability and Equality

Emer Higgins took up this role on 18 November 2025.

Before this, she was Minister of State at the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation.

She was elected Fine Gael TD for Dublin Mid-West in the 2020 General Election.

Emer also has experience of working with both small and medium sized businesses and multinational companies.

Report Launch



Dr Lorcan Kenny

Senior Research Officer

NDA

Lorcan joined the NDA in 2024.

He led research projects on Children's Disability Network Teams and therapists in special schools.

Lorcan has experience in autism research.

He has a PhD from University College London.



Dr Aoife O'Neill

Statistician

Central Statistics Office (CSO)

Aoife works in the Children and Disability Division in the CSO.

Aoife is leading on the development of the new national survey on disability.

This is called the Irish Disability Survey (IDS).

Before this, Aoife worked as a researcher in the Ageing Research Centre.

Session 3: Designing inclusive systems for future emergencies and crises :



Chair: Jane Ann Duffy

Principal Officer, Disability Equality Policy

Department of Children, Disability and Equality

Jane Ann leads the Disability Equality Policy Unit of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

This unit coordinates the National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People.

It is responsible for developing disability equality policy.

This unit is also responsible for laws such as the Assisted Decision-Making Capacity Acts, the Disability Act and the Irish Sign Language Act.



Gerry Tully

Assistant National Director for Disability Services for Adults

Health Services Executive

Gerry works in specialist Disability Services in Access and Integration.

He has 36 years' experience in delivering supports from frontline to national services.

Gerry chaired a national group between the HSE and other organisations on a weekly basis throughout the Covid-19 Pandemic.

Boakai Abu Nyehn, Jr

Community Development Worker

Independent Living Movement Ireland

Boakai joined ILMI in September 2024, and has worked on a number of different projects.

Boakai is a disabled person and an advocate for disability rights and social inclusion.

He is Assistant Director for disabled people in Liberia.

Boakai has worked with many national and international organisations.



Dr Caroline Jagoe Sherman

Associate Professor, Clinical Speech & Language Studies, Trinity College Dublin

Co-Founder of the SADIE Network

Caroline's work focuses on disability rights and inclusion in emergency action.

She has worked with many different organisations in countries experiencing crises. She is on the Disability Advisory Committee of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.



Dr Mary Keogh

Advocacy Director

Christian Blind Mission Global Disability Inclusion

Mary holds a PhD in Law and Public Policy. She works with global, national and local partners on advocacy plans and partnerships. Mary is chair of the board of the International Disability Development Consortium. In Ireland, she is on the board of Áiseanna Tacaíochta, an independent living organisation.



Dr. Sarah Bell

**Senior Lecturer in Health and
Disability Geography**

University of Exeter

Sarah's research looks at the links between disability, wellbeing, social inequality and changing environments.

Her current project is called Sensing Climate. It looks at responses to the climate crisis and ways to build safe and fair communities for everyone.