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.

**Kevin McCarthy**

**Secretary General**

**Department of Children, Disability and Equality**

Kevin makes sure that the Department operates in an effective way, gives the Minister good advice, and works to improve the lives of people in Ireland.

Kevin has also worked in the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Department of Education.

In the earlier part of his career, he worked in the Departments of Health and Finance and in the health sector.

# 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 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.

**Sharon Commins**

**Head of National Services**

**Irish Red Cross**

Sharon leads the organisation's Disaster Risk Management team at the Irish Red Cross. She has held senior leadership positions in organisations in Ireland and other countries. She has experience in community development and has worked with Concern and GOAL.

During her career, Sharon has worked on delivering good changes for disadvantaged and marginalised communities.

# Session 2: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.

**Andrea Podruski**

**Chief Operating Officer and Director General of Standards and Research**

**Accessibility Standards Canada**

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

Andrea has been with Accessibility Standards Canada since 2020.

Before this, Andrea was a social worker.

Andrea is a parent to a child with disabilities.

**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.

# 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.

# New Report

**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**

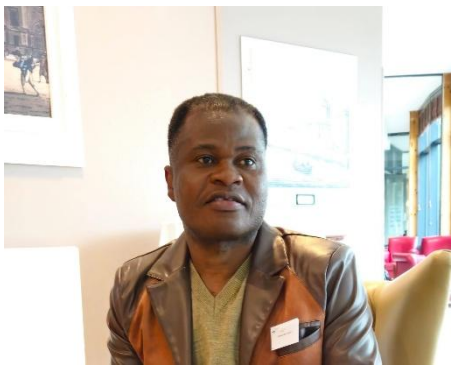
**Assistant National Director for Disability Services for Adults**

**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.