

Annual Report 2023

This is a Plain English Report



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais
National Disability Authority

Chairperson's Statement

Kathryn O'Donoghue is the Chairperson of the National Disability Authority (NDA).

I am delighted to present the National Disability Authority's Annual Report for 2023. This report shows the work of the NDA in 2023.

A new Authority was chosen by Minister of State with Responsibility for Disability, Ms Anne Rabbitte TD, in November 2022. 2023 was their first full year of work. I want to thank all my colleagues on the Authority for their hard work during the year.

There were a number of important changes in the law during 2023. One important change was the passing of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015 in April 2023. This means that the Decision Support Service can start their work. There is now a new way to support people that find it hard to make their own decisions. This might be because of their age or disability.

Late in the year, we saw progress with the European Accessibility Act (EAA). This law makes sure that goods and services across the European Union are accessible for all.

I welcome these developments. They are part of building a more inclusive and accessible society in Ireland. The NDA will keep working to support this goal.

The development of a National Disability Strategy is very important to our work. This will guide our efforts to put the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) into action in

Ireland. While the Strategy will not be published until 2024, a lot of work happened during 2023 to talk to people about the Strategy and how it will work. The NDA looks forward to playing its part in the work on this Strategy in the coming years.

Our Annual Conference in 2023 was about Article 29 of the UNCRPD – Participation in Political and Public life. We were pleased to highlight some of the things that stop people from taking part, including polling stations that are not accessible, and the challenges for disabled people who wish to stand for election themselves. We hope this conference helped guide the Electoral Commission as they prepare for a busy year.

Our annual listening event for 2023 heard from disabled people and their representative organisations. It focused on Article 8 of the Convention – Awareness Raising. There were lots of good ideas on how to build awareness of the rights of disabled people.

I hope you enjoy reading the many updates in this report. I would like to pay tribute to all the staff at the NDA. The staff work hard to bring high quality research, advice, and guidance to government and the public sector. I look forward to working with the team in 2024.

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2023 in Review

In 2023, the NDA kept working on the five main areas in our Strategic Plan 2022-2024:

1. To give advice to government on national policies, programmes, and plans that are important to the lives of persons with disabilities. To help achieve the goals of UNCRPD.
2. To check how policies, plans, and codes of practice are working across government.
3. To encourage people to be aware of and use Universal Design across Ireland.
4. To have strong and open ways for consulting with persons with disabilities and the wider disability community.
5. To keep being an organisation that works well.

Our work-plan was developed around these five areas. We talked to different people about the plan, including Disabled Persons' Organisations. We also had to think about other policies in Ireland during the year.

UNCRPD

During 2023, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) worked on a National Disability Strategy. This will follow the National Disability Inclusion Strategy (2017-2022). It is an important way to achieve the goals of UNCRPD in Ireland.

The NDA was asked to support the Department in this work. We carried out consultations at the end of 2023. We talked with many different people, including people that are seldom heard. There will be more work on these consultations in early 2024. We look forward to the new Strategy as early as possible in 2024. We will give advice on ways to check that the Strategy is working.

We published our final independent assessment of progress under the National Disability Inclusion Strategy that ended at the end of 2022. Our report offers areas of learning for the development of the new Strategy and ways to check if it is working.

Our Annual Conference in 2023 was about Article 29 of the UNCRPD – Participation in Political and Public Life. The conference was an opportunity to focus on good practice from other countries. It was a chance to hear about the plans of the Electoral Commission, called An Coimisiún Toghcháin.

Employment

The NDA has advised that employment is a very important part of inclusion. It can help to cut down the poverty that disabled people experience. Disabled people experience more poverty than non-disabled people. We were disappointed that there was not more progress on a final action-plan under the Comprehensive Employment Strategy in 2023. We note that the National Disability Strategy will have employment as a key focus.

The NDA published its independent assessment of progress with the Comprehensive Employment Strategy during 2022. We said which areas

need more focus. It is important that these areas are picked up under the National Disability Strategy so that the progress made to date is not lost. We thought carefully about how targets for the employment rate of disabled people could be agreed and set. We thought about how progress could be tracked over time. We shared a paper on this with key people and look forward to discussing it more during 2024.

During 2023 we were pleased to see more progress with the employment of disabled people in the public sector. The NDA publishes an annual report that shows if organisations follow Part 5 of the Disability Act. For 2022, this report showed that 4.1% of the public sector employees said that they had a disability. By 2024, 4.5% of the public sector workforce should be made up of people with disabilities, and this will increase to 6% by 2025. We look forward to collecting this data using a changed system during 2024. We tested this system during 2023.

Assisted Decision-Making

Following the passing of the Assisted Decision Making (Capacity) Act 2015, the NDA was pleased to see the Decision Support Service start their work. The new law means that people who are Wards of Court will no longer be Wards. The NDA started a research project on these changes during 2023. We wanted to understand how the new system was experienced by people who had been Wards of Court, their Committees, and other key people and organisations. We want to record what happens and to say where improvements could be made. We want to understand how people can move to supported decision-making arrangements or return to making decisions fully for themselves. The research project will continue into 2024.

Oireachtas Committee Hearings

During 2023, the NDA was invited to present before a number of Oireachtas Committees. We presented on topics ranging from Assisted Dying to Autism to Ireland's performance in relation to UNCRPD.

We were pleased that our information and advice continue to be helpful to the work of these Committees. We were pleased that we are recognised as trusted advisors.

Standards and Monitoring

We continued to check that people and organisations follow the law in 2023. We were pleased to publish a report on how many public bodies followed Part 3 of the Disability Act 2005 (Section 26(2)). This is about the availability of Access Officers in public bodies. A survey in 2021 showed 35% of public bodies had an Access Officer and had details of how to contact this officer on their websites. We gave public bodies the opportunity to think about their performance and take extra steps if they needed to. We were pleased to see the number of public bodies that followed Part 3 going up to 59% by late 2022. We note that 41% still need to take steps to have an Access Officer in their organisation and publish the details. This will make sure that members of the public can be supported to access the services they offer.

We also checked on the EU Web Accessibility Directive (WAD). The 2022 monitoring report was published in early 2023. There were some improvements, but we found that many public bodies have more to do to make their websites accessible. We continue to talk with the public sector to raise awareness of how websites can be designed so everyone

can use them. As government continues towards its 'Digital First' goal, this is very important.

The NDA also did a lot of work on the development of a Code of Practice for Accessible Public Buildings during 2023. We consulted with a range of disabled persons and their representative organisations. The Code will offer practical guidance to public bodies on how to make their buildings accessible. We look forward to presenting the final version of the Code to the Minister in 2024. Once the Code has been agreed, we can start checking if public bodies are following it.

The European Accessibility Act (EAA) was passed into Irish law in late 2023. Ahead of this, the NDA has been supporting work on developing standards. These standards will give guidance on how to follow the Act if you are developing goods and services.

We also made progress with work on a Universal Design Standard for Housing. This is part of our advice on how housing should be developed to provide lifetime homes for disabled and older persons. This is instead of expensive changes being made to houses as someone's ability changes over time.

Data and Statistics

Census 2022 results were published during 2023. This showed that over 20% of the population experience a long-lasting condition or difficulty. Disabled people are a significant group in society. For the first time, people were asked if they had their long-lasting condition or difficulty to some extent or to a great extent. Almost 8% reported having at least one

condition or difficulty to a great extent, and many of these people need a range of different supports.

The NDA was pleased to publish its own report on a survey of Wellbeing and Social Inclusion during 2023. This report shows the experiences of over two thousand people, two thirds of whom had a disability. It found that disabled people are more likely than non-disabled people to experience barriers to social inclusion and lower feelings of well-being. A follow-up report on barriers to social inclusion was published at the end of the year and showed how issues around transport and accessibility stopped people from taking part in the life of their local communities. We hope this information will be useful during the development of the National Disability Strategy.

We were very pleased to continue our partnership with the ESRI during 2023. We published two reports on a project that looked at public attitudes to disability. The reports showed how people can over-state their positive attitudes in some circumstances, and looked at ways in which better data could be captured. The findings highlight that attitudes are more positive when people have close contact with disabled people. This shows the importance of making sure that disabled people can live, work, and take part in our communities.

Universal Design

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design is a very important part of the NDA. The Centre worked in 2023 to drive awareness and use of Universal Design across sectors. We welcome that more professional groups know about Universal Design. Our work ranges from educating students on good design as early as possible in their education, to

providing learning for professionals working in the area. We also work to make sure that Universal Design is part of standards that guide professionals in areas such as Information and Communication Technology and service design.

Universal Design of the built environment is a key way to support social inclusion for disabled people. The NDA has continued to give advice to departments and professional bodies on how this can be achieved in housing and other developments. Work started during 2023 on a standard for Universal Design housing. This will give a useful toolkit for departments, local authorities, and developers on how to make sure our housing stock is liveable for everyone, and form part of sustainable communities.

We spent a lot of time talking with people about accessible transport during 2023. This is a very important area across people's lives. We gave advice to the Department of Transport, National Transport Authority, and local authorities. This advice talked about the importance of meaningful and accessible consultation events, taking a co-design approach to transport projects, and considering the most vulnerable road-users – i.e. pedestrians – from the start.

Ways of working

The NDA welcomes the moving of specialist disability services from the Department of Health to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. It is a clear sign that disability is an equality matter rather than a medical or health-related matter. We know it is important to keep up links with the Department of Health that focus on older persons and mental health. It is important to develop policies in a

joined-up way. We look forward to seeing more change in 2024 as the HSE starts work on a re-organisation.

The NDA enjoyed its first full year under its Blended Working Policy during 2023. The policy was agreed in 2022.

We also changed our IT systems from the Department of Justice to the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer. We hope this change will allow us to explore opportunities to use technology more in our work in the years to come.

Finally, we were delighted to launch a revised universaldesign.ie website in late 2023. This is the end of a major project to make sure the organisation's websites are both accessible and fit for purpose. The websites are a key way for us to communicate information.



This Annual Report is from the National Disability Authority.



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