**Overview of UNCRPD Article 29 in Ireland**

**Participation in political and public life**

June 2023



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# Background to the UNCRPD Article review papers

This paper is one in a series which the National Disability Authority (NDA) is developing on individual **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** (UNCRPD) articles. These papers detail the main data available relevant to specific Articles and provide an overview of key policies, programmes, services, supports and data that exist in the Irish context. They are not a critique of what is currently in place but rather a record of what exists. Nevertheless, there are instances where certain gaps or concerns are highlighted, including those expressed by the NDA or other stakeholders.

These papers were primarily developed through desk research. However, the papers were also informed by the NDA’s own work, updates and discussions at Departmental Disability Consultative Committees, the National Disability Inclusion Strategy Steering Group, and other relevant committees. They were also informed by interactions with the Disability Stakeholders Group and from Disabled Persons’ Organisations (DPOs), disability service providers and individual persons with disabilities, particularly through participation on a range of working and advisory groups across Government Departments on areas related to **National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-22** (NDIS) actions. Given their factual nature, a more direct consultation process with persons with disabilities was not conducted, however, the NDA conducts periodic consultations on issues related to articles of the UNCRPD and seeks to include the lived experience of persons with disabilities individually and through their representative bodies in our work.

The purposes of the papers are multiple. They were developed initially to support the development of Ireland’s State Party report to the UNCRPD Committee. In line with the NDA’s anticipated new statutory function under the UNCRPD, they are also intended to support the development by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) of the State’s parallel report to the UNCRPD Committee. They will be used internally as reference papers within the NDA. It is also likely that they will be of interest to DPOs and Civil Society Organisations with an interest in disability matters. The NDA has published these documents on our website to make them available to a wider audience to support any work underway to develop shadow reports on implementation of UNCRPD in Ireland.

The NDA has sought to ensure that the information is accurate as of May 2023 but recognises that the changing nature of policies, programmes, services, supports and data will require them to be updated periodically to reflect any changes. The papers are not intended to be exhaustive but seek to provide a broad overview of the main issues of relevance to each article.

# Introduction

Ireland ratified the UNCRPD in 2018. Article 29 sets out the framework for persons with disabilities’ participation in political and public life and stipulates that state parties shall “guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on equal basis with others.” To achieve this, state parties should: ensure that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate and easy to use for persons with disabilities; and protect the rights of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot, stand for elections and hold office as an elected representative.

Furthermore, under Article 29 state parties have the duty to promote an environment in which persons with disabilities can participate in the conduct of public affairs on an equal basis with others, including through the activities of non-governmental organisations, and forming and joining organisations of persons with disabilities.

Following the Convention text below, this paper examines the legislation, policies and services in place for disabled persons participating in political and public life. It also looks at data available to give further context to the realisation of this Article in Ireland.

# UN Convention Text

UNCRPD Article 29 (Participation in political and public life) states that:

States Parties shall guarantee to persons with disabilities political rights and the opportunity to enjoy them on an equal basis with others, and shall undertake:

a) To ensure that persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in political and public life on an equal basis with others, directly or through freely chosen representatives, including the right and opportunity for persons with disabilities to vote and be elected, inter alia, by:

i. Ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible and easy to understand and use;

ii. Protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot in elections and public referendums without intimidation, and to stand for elections, to effectively hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government, facilitating the use of assistive and new technologies where appropriate;

iii. Guaranteeing the free expression of the will of persons with disabilities as electors and to this end, where necessary, at their request, allowing assistance in voting by a person of their own choice;

b) To promote actively an environment in which persons with disabilities can effectively and fully participate in the conduct of public affairs, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others, and encourage their participation in public affairs, including:

i. Participation in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country, and in the activities and administration of political parties;

ii. Forming and joining organizations of persons with disabilities to represent persons with disabilities at international, national, regional and local levels.

# Type of Right

The UNCRPD includes economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights. States Parties that ratify the Convention commit themselves to immediate delivery of civil and political rights to people with disabilities, and to progressive realisation of social, economic and cultural rights. Article 29 is primarily a civil and political right, which needs to be delivered as soon as practicable.

It is important that all citizens are given an opportunity to participate in our democracy. This is never more important than when an election or referendum is taking place. Being able to follow election coverage and make an assessment of what is being said in election debates in order to inform one’s voting choices is a key part of citizenship.

# Key statistics

This section provides some general statistics from Census 2016 and 2022 and from various reports/studies/updates carried out by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage[[1]](#footnote-1). Based on the most recent release from the CSO on Census 2022[[2]](#footnote-2) a total of 1,109,557 people reported experiencing at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty to any extent, accounting for 22% of the population. This is an increase from 13.5% of the population identifying as having a disability in Census 2016, but there were changes in the questions relating to disability between 2016 and 2022. People when asked to indicate if they had a particular long lasting condition or difficulty had three response options ‘yes to some extent’, ‘yes to a great extent’ or ‘no’. Previously there was a yes/no option. It is very likely that some people who would previously have indicated ‘no’, are now indicating’ to some extent’.

We await the further breakdown of these figures by age, county, etc. which will be available later in the year, but in 2016, 16.2% of the population of voting age declared they had a disability, and this figure is likely to increase in the Census 2022 figures.

* At the May 2019 Local Elections, 51 buildings servicing 103 polling stations were not accessible to wheelchair users (1.6%, based on 6,500 polling stations)
* At the February 2020 General Election, this had reduced to 29 buildings servicing 43 polling stations (0.7%)
* Number of 2020 General Election postal votes issued: 27,665. Some of these would have been issued to voters with disabilities but the official figures from the Department of Housing, Local Government and heritage are not broken down on that basis

# Policy and legislative context

## UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

The NDA carried out a piece of desk research, (published in March 2021) in which it collated points frequently repeated by the UN Committee in its Concluding Observations in respect of several States Party reports on their implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

The findings come from the Concluding Observations received by a selection of EU Member States), the European Union itself, as a party to the UNCRPD, and Australia, Canada, Norway and the United Kingdom. The latter States were chosen due to the similarities in some areas of disability law and policy with Ireland, and to offer a sample of State Parties outside the EU.

The Committee has repeatedly focused on the following main points in respect of Article 29. Please note that not all these comments relate to every State Party, nor is the list of comments exhaustive:

* The automatic exclusion of persons with intellectual disabilities from voting.
* The lack of fully accessible voting centres and voting mediums such as polling cards.
* The absence of easy to read or accessible information in relation to being active in political life.
* The rights of persons with disabilities under guardianship to vote and be elected can be restricted by law.
* Persons with disabilities, especially those with psychosocial or mental disabilities, are often disregarded in all aspects of political life due to their presumed lack of capacity and capability to fulfil the role.

The related recommendations of the Committee have included:

* Recommending that all State parties immediately repeal all laws which create barriers and restrictions for persons with disabilities in relation to their participation in political life.
* Recommending that persons with disabilities and their representative organisations should be closely consulted in matters concerning political life.
* The Committee also notes that, in certain State parties, the cost of running a successful political campaign is expensive. This can present difficulties for persons with disabilities relying on social security payments and may mean that they cannot exercise their rights on an equal basis with others.

## Commission on the Status of People with Disability 1996

The issues affecting voters with disabilities in Ireland were first considered by the Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities in its 1996 publication: **A Strategy for Equality[[3]](#footnote-3)**. The issues raised around accessibility that were highlighted then still exist now; these are listed in the Appendix. The Commission noted that there would be some resource implications to improve accessibility for voters.

Over 25 years later, some persons with disabilities would have the view that they are still waiting to vote on an equal basis with other members of the electorate.

## National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-22

The National Disability Inclusion Strategy (NDIS) has been the Government’s primary vehicle for applying the provisions of the UNCRPD across all Departments and public bodies.

Action 29 of the **National Disability Inclusion Strategy 2017-22** pledges that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage will progress the accessibility of voting and voter information. The Department’s primary means of meeting its commitment under Action 29 has been the establishment of a Working Group on Accessible Voting as well as the enactment of the **Electoral Reform Act 2022**. Both of these initiatives are described in detail below.

The NDIS has reached the end of its lifespan and work is underway to develop a UNCRPD Implementation Strategy.

# Current EU approach to voting for persons with disabilities

Article 20[[4]](#footnote-4) of the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (inserted by the Lisbon Treaty)** gives all citizens of the EU:

“the right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections to the European Parliament and in municipal elections in their Member State of residence, under the same conditions as nationals of that State;”

Articles 39 and 40 of the EU’s **Charter of Fundamental Rights** state the same rights[[5]](#footnote-5).

The European Commission does not have a general power to intervene in electoral matters. Subject to the respect of certain basic principles, such as those laid down in Articles 2 and 14 of the Treaty, it is the competence and the responsibility of the Member States to lay down the specific conditions for the conduct of elections, and of the competent national administrative and judicial authorities to ensure compliance with applicable law and relevant standards.

## European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights

The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) published a paper entitled: **Who will (not) get to vote in the 2019 European Parliament elections?[[6]](#footnote-6)** It shows that two-thirds of EU Member States restrict the right of people who may have difficulties in exercising their legal capacity due to their disability to enact that capacity when it comes to voting. This undermines their ability to participate in elections on an equal basis with others.

However, the paper also points to the slow but steady progress in realising the right to vote for all. Member States are reforming their laws to remove voting restrictions for persons with disabilities deprived of legal capacity, however, the reforms do not always remove every restriction for all elections and some countries leave it up to courts to decide whether a person is entitled to vote.

To realise the right to political participation across the EU, the FRA’s paper highlights four key components, namely:

* lifting legal and administrative barriers to political participation;
* increasing awareness of the right to political participation of people with disabilities;
* making voting procedures, facilities and election materials more accessible;
* expanding opportunities for participation in political life.

More efforts are needed so that persons with disabilities can exercise their basic democratic rights on an equal basis with others. Addressing these issues will have a big effect on their lives. Based on the evidence in the paper, Ireland is acting in a similar manner to other EU members in introducing legislation that presumes capacity (see below) and removing restrictions on certain persons with disabilities standing for election (see below).

## EU Citizenship Report 2020

This EU Commission report[[7]](#footnote-7) highlights the fact that an estimated 800,000 persons with disabilities in 16 member states were deprived of the right to participate in the 2019 European parliament elections. The Commission has announced that it will be a specific focus of the Commission to support inclusive and equal participation for the 2024 elections.

## Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030

This EU Commission strategy[[8]](#footnote-8) recommends that good practice in improving voter participation is shared among member states and lists the following actions to help bring this about:

* work with Member States in the European Cooperation Network on Elections to support full electoral participation and accessibility of the European elections (both as voter and as candidate), addressing underrepresented citizens, including citizens with a disability in order to guarantee the exercise of political rights of persons with disabilities on equal basis with others
* discuss, in 2022, in the framework of the high-level event on elections announced in the Democracy Action Plan, practices on inclusive democracy with the aim that candidate lists reflect the diversity of our societies;
* establish, in 2023, on this basis and in close cooperation with Member States in the framework of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, a guide of good electoral practice addressing participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process;
* seek to address the needs of citizens with a disability in the compendium on e-voting envisaged under the European Democracy Action Plan;
* support inclusive democratic participation, including for persons with a disability, through the new Citizenship, Equalities, Rights and Values programme

## European Democracy Action Plan

Published in 2020, this European Commission project[[9]](#footnote-9) sets out to empower citizens and build more resilient democracies across the EU. In line with obligations under UNCRPD persons with disabilities are a group that particular attention will be paid to. Under the Plan the Commission will prepare a compendium of e-voting practices, together with Member States and in close cooperation with the Council of Europe.

## EU Electoral Act

On 3 May 2022, the European Parliament started the process towards reform of the EU Electoral Act which governs the conduct of elections to the European Parliament across the 27 Member States. The overall aim of the reform is to bring consistency to how the elections are run across the Member States[[10]](#footnote-10).

The European Parliament proposal includes a provision to ensure that polling stations are accessible to persons with disabilities.

## European Accessibility Act

Directive (EU) 2019/882[[11]](#footnote-11) of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 17 April 2019 on the accessibility requirements for products and services requires that, from 28 June 2025, a range of specified products and services are designed, and where necessary manufactured, to ensure that they are accessible to persons with disabilities. The directive is known as the European Accessibility Act (EAA). The directive focuses on private companies selling products or services that:

* Are seen as highly important for persons with disabilities, and
* Have wide ranging accessibility requirements across the member states.

It obliges providers to ensure the products or services they are marketing are accessible for disabled people – i.e. that they can be easily and readily used by disabled users. This will apply to any products and services procured to facilitate the running of elections in Ireland for example, if electronic voting machines were to be introduced in the future.

There are a series of harmonised standards that are being developed that will underpin the requirements on the provision of accessible products and services. The role of market surveillance authorities across the EU, including Ireland, will be vital in the implementation of the EAA.

# Oversight of elections in Ireland

### Electoral Commission

Until 2023 the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (and its predecessor Departments) has had the main oversight role of elections and referendums in Ireland. This is beginning to change.

The **Electoral Reform Act 2022** was signed into law on 25 July 2022. Certain parts of the legislation have been commenced to facilitate the establishment[[12]](#footnote-12) of a new Electoral Commission on 9 February 2023[[13]](#footnote-13). When this Act is fully commenced, it will introduce significant changes to conduct of elections in Ireland. The key elements of the Act include:

* the establishment of a statutory, independent Electoral Commission for Ireland
* the modernisation of the electoral registration process to deliver greater accessibility and greater integrity
* the regulation of online political advertising to provide for transparency during electoral campaigns and ensure that elections remain free from hidden influences on how people vote
* provisions to protect the integrity of electoral processes which will see the regulation of electoral process information and online electoral information in order to guard against manipulative or inauthentic behaviour during electoral campaigns
* the strengthening of the regulatory regime in respect of political donations and accounts, including the provision of new investigatory and enforcement powers to the Standards in Public Office Commission
* amendments to electoral law to provide that voting on the islands will take place on the same day as for the rest of the country
* the extension of flexible voting facilities which are currently available to persons with physical illnesses or disabilities to persons with mental health difficulties

Part 4 and Part 5 of the Act have been notified to the European Commission under EU Directive 2015/1535[[14]](#footnote-14), laying down a procedure for the provision of information in the field of technical regulations and of rules of information society services, otherwise known as technical regulation information system (TRIS) notification process. The process provides an opportunity for stakeholders and the European Commission to provide comments or observations on the relevant provisions in the Act and is standard practice in such pieces of legislation.

Parts 4 and 5, having been notified in accordance with the Directive, will require a Commencement Order to be made by the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage in order to come into operation and have legal effect.

This Act represents a major reform of the laws governing the management and conduct of elections and referendums in Ireland. The most significant change will be the establishment of an Electoral Commission, which, as well as taking over the management and conduct of elections, will have role in voter education and in encouraging voter participation. In particular, the Act extends voting facilities for persons with mental health difficulties in line with the facilities that are currently in place for persons with physical illnesses or disabilities. What follows is a list of provisions in the Act that are relevant to persons with disabilities:

* Section 67 assigns to the Commission a role of reviewing and reporting on the administration of electoral events. It provides that such reports include information on the assistance provided to persons with disabilities under existing legislation.
* Sections 88 and 92 make changes to postal voting provisions and special voting provisions in the Electoral Act 1992, including broadening the definition of illness and disability to those with mental health difficulties and, given the move to a rolling register, providing for a time-bound postal or special voting arrangement in line with medical certification.
* Sections 100 and 101 make amendments to facilitate voting by special voters if their place of residence is temporarily inaccessible. Section 113, among other things, provides for the insertion after Electoral Register Rule 47 of a new rule which relates to the making of arrangements for those on the special voters list where the place where they are ordinarily resident is not accessible.
* Section 114 amends the Local Elections Regulations 1995 by inserting a new Article 48A which relates to the issuing of a postal vote for those on the special voters list where the place where they are ordinarily resident is not accessible,
* The provisions governing entry to the postal voters list for a person with an illness or disability are updated.

There are also provisions in the Act to allow for multiple polling days which arose from concerns about a pandemic interfering with the election process. It will be important that any regulations drafted for this purpose take account of the needs of persons with disabilities who employ Personal Assistants to enable them to vote.

Until the **Electoral Reform Act 2022** is fully commenced the measures described below are still in place.

## Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters

In October 2022 the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters published a report entitled: **Participation of People with Disabilities in Political, Cultural, Community and Public Life[[15]](#footnote-15)**. The report contains a number of priority recommendations that are listed below:

* The Electoral Commission should be mandated to include the promotion, inclusion, facilitation, and participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral and political process and:
* undertake a review of the voting process to ensure compliance with the UNCRPD and Universal Design in consultation with DPOs and individuals with disabilities
* ensure that training in disability awareness and equality is provided for all Returning Officers and polling staff
* establish a complaints mechanism in line with the Ombudsman model to ensure accountability to the public and timely and appropriate remedies to those service users who have a justified complaint
* consider removing the need to renew access for postal voting on an annual basis
* examine international practices to support persons with disabilities participate in politics with a view to introducing similar initiatives in Ireland
* The Government must strengthen the application of Universal Design principles across the public service by introducing targets to ensure full compliance with Universal Design across all services, schemes and structures in consultation with DPO’s and the NDA.

# Access to voting in Ireland – current measures

This section looks at access to voting as it relates to voters with physical, sensory and capacity issues.

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters held a debate in September 2021[[16]](#footnote-16) that highlighted some of the difficulties persons with disabilities have in relation to voting. The following are some of the issues, raised by members of the Disability Stakeholder Group[[17]](#footnote-17), based on an unpublished survey of disabled voter experience during the 2020 General Election:

* Ad hoc arrangements at polling stations to allows persons with disabilities vote in private
* Inaccessible polling stations
* Lack of voter information in accessible formats
* Certain persons not being informed on how to vote due to inaccessible information
* Saturday voting meant personal assistants were not available to accompany potential voters to the polling station
* Incorrectly installed wheelchair ramps
* Postal voting system unnecessarily complicated and based on the medical model
* Postal votes being removed without notice
* 52% of respondents who declared a disability said they faced barriers to in-person voting. 12% of respondents reported using Postal Voting with 52% having faced barriers to Postal Voting

The remainder of this section looks at access for three specific groups

* Voters with physical disabilities
* Voters with vision impairments
* Voters with capacity issues

## Voters with physical disabilities

Access to voting, whether in person or by post, has been a prominent issue for years for voters with physical disabilities. The section below sets out the current situation and describes improvements that have been made.

### Polling stations

Returning officers in some rural constituencies have had to continue to select some polling stations that provide difficulties for wheelchair users because of the limited availability of centres with adequate accessibility. As these locations are usually school buildings under the remit of the Department of Education, Returning Officers have no power to dictate that they be made accessible for the purpose of voting.

Based on requirements in the Constitution to have a certain number of TDs per head of population, there has to be a certain number of polling stations per head of population in each electoral district (ED). There are a total of 3,440 EDs in the state, with an average population of 1,447[[18]](#footnote-18) per ED.

In the run up to elections and referendums advertisements are placed reminding voters who have difficulty gaining access to their local polling station that they may apply to have their vote transferred to a more accessible station in their constituency/local electoral area.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has engaged with those Returning Officers where the inaccessible polling stations are located. While the Department can provide guidance (see below) they have no statutory powers to compel them to look for alternative venues that may be accessible.

In the Department’s Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers, which issues in advance of electoral events, advice is provided about the selection of polling stations having regard to the needs of voters with disabilities. Where it has not been possible to acquire premises for polling stations that are or can be made accessible to wheelchair users, Returning Officers must give public notice of these premises as soon as they are selected as polling stations. They are advised to do so as soon as possible but, as a minimum, they are required to do so no later than 8 days before polling day so as to give electors adequate time to apply to have their vote transferred to an alternative accessible polling place if they so wish. The Guidance advises Returning Officers that the form of public notice could include advertising in national and local newspapers, use of appropriate websites, use of local media and communicating with local disability groups as well as other relevant local and national groups. Where practicable Returning Officers are trying to phase out the last few inaccessible polling stations. The circumstances exist to ensure that no new polling station can be situated in a premises that is inaccessible.

The Department’s Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers also addresses the need for awareness regarding the needs of voters with disabilities. Returning Officers are required to provide at each polling station an appropriate table and chair, located in such a position as to ensure secrecy in voting, at which electors such as wheelchair users, persons with a physical disability, persons with a vision impairment or the elderly can mark their ballot papers if they find it more convenient. Where feasible, they are asked to consider installing a low height voting compartment to facilitate voters who use wheelchairs or those who are short of stature.

The Department’s Manual for Presiding Officers, which also issues to Returning Officers in advance of electoral events for use in their polling stations, draws particular attention to the needs of voters with disabilities. The Manual sets out a number of practical measures in this regard.

### Postal votes and special votes

The current situation is that voters living in their own home who have a physical disability or illness that prevents them from going to a polling station, may qualify to vote by post. They must apply to their local authority to be included in the Postal Voters List, which is drawn up each year as part of the Register of Electors.

If a voter is living in a hospital, nursing home or similar institution and they have a physical disability or illness that prevents them from going to the polling station, they can vote at the hospital or nursing home. They must apply to their local authority to be included in the Special Voters List, which is drawn up each year as part of the Register of Electors. A first time application to be registered on the Special Voters list must be accompanied by a medical certificate.

The current system for postal and special voting means that those who have to vote this way must cast their vote often before the final hustings/debates are held, so they miss the opportunity to hear all the information and then make up their minds. For postal vote users, in particular, their name and address is included in the postal vote, therefore it is not a secret ballot.

The Department publishes a booklet after each election covering all the statistics, including the numbers of postal and special votes requested and cast. For the 2020 General Election the headline figures for postal and special ballots were:

* Number issued: 27,665. There is no breakdown available for the number of postal and special votes issued to disabled people
* Number rejected at opening of covering envelope: 393
* Total number of votes cast: 19,687. This is 0.9% of the total valid poll for the election which was 2,183,489

It is interesting to note that the overall turnout for postal and special ballots was 71.2%, higher than the overall turnout in the general election (62.9%).

## Voters with vision impairments

People who are blind or vision impaired encounter many barriers to voting. In recent years a number of efforts have been made to try and create the circumstances to remove these barriers through research, legal action and via statutory and non-statutory methods.

As it stands voters who are blind, who are vision impaired, who have limited mobility or are unable to read or write to such an extent that they are unable to vote without assistance may avail of companion voting or voting with the assistance of the Presiding Officer. Other measures in place include the requirement to have on display at the polling station a large print version of the ballot paper and the inclusion of candidates' photographs and party emblems on the ballot paper. Blind and vision impaired voters use a ballot paper template to enable them to vote independently. Local Returning Officers are responsible for providing necessary training for their staff, including Presiding Officers, in advance of polling day

### NDA Accessible Voting Trial 2014

This trial stemmed from the fact that many people with vision impairments are unable to vote independently in elections in Ireland. People with mild or moderate sight loss may be able to cast their own vote using the enlarged version of the ballot paper which is available in every polling station. People with severe or complete sight loss usually rely on a family member or a friend, or a polling station staff member, to help them to write their vote on the ballot paper. This means that their vote is not a secret, and they cannot be completely certain that their desired vote goes into the ballot box.

The NDA ballot paper trial was preceded by a NDA discussion paper on Accessible Voting in 2012 that looked at possible solutions to this issue, along with voting issues for persons with intellectual disabilities. Following discussions with the Franchise section of the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government and the National Council for the Blind of Ireland, the NDA agreed to carry out trials in 2014 of a number of alternative methods of voting for people with sight loss.

The results of the trial did not produce a clear recommendation for a secure voting method that would be likely to meet the needs of most voters with a vision impairment.

In a 2015 report, the NDA recommended that the Department undertake an examination of the feasibility, logistical and security/integrity issues for electronic vote casting, and explore these issues in partnership with the NDA and relevant disability organisations. In the same report, the NDA also recommended that a Ballot Paper Template be trialled at a forthcoming referendum where voters have a simple ‘yes/no’ choice, and that the results be monitored and evaluated. This was done for the referendums on the Eighth Amendment and on blasphemy, in 2018. A larger version of the template was also used for the six candidates in the 2018 presidential election. Voter feedback from the use of templates in the presidential election informed the deliberations of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage’s Working Group on Accessible Voting and led to further improvements to the template for the European and local elections in 2019 and the General Election in 2020.

With due regard to the integrity of the voting system, the new Electoral Commission could further explore whether technological advances could pave the way for a universally designed Electronically Assisted Voting system, considering practicality, usability, accessibility and costs.

### Sinnott Case

An Irish citizen, Robbie Sinnott, took a case against the then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government in 2014 asking the State to introduce measures that would enable him, as a blind person, to vote in secret. Despite the constitutional protection afforded to the right to a secret ballot, if a person with a vision impairment wishes to vote, they must do so through a ‘trusted friend’ or presiding officer.

While the **Electoral Regulations 2016[[19]](#footnote-19)** were a significant step in improving accessibility for voters with vision impairments, the verdict in the Sinnott Case expanded the matter further. Mr Sinnott had argued for wider changes to encompass voting by secret ballot for vision impaired people in local, general and European elections as well as in referendums. The court could not require the Minister for the Environment to adopt any particular arrangement, such as a tactile voting device, for such voting, however, it could make a declaration to guide the Minister about the relevant provisions of the **Electoral Act 1992,** in conjunction with the duty under the Constitution to assure a secret ballot as far as is reasonably practicable.

The High Court Order in the Sinnott case stipulates that the Minister has a duty to provide arrangements to facilitate voters with visual impairments to mark their ballot papers without assistance under section 94(5)(j) of the **Electoral Act 1992** (as inserted by section 3 of the **Electoral (Amendment) Act 1996**) where there are no disclosed reasonably practicable economic or effective reasons not to vindicate the right to mark ballot papers without assistance.

### Working Group on Accessible Voting

On foot of the Sinnott Case and the **Electoral Regulations 2016** a Working Group was established by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in December 2018. Its function is to examine and make recommendations on issues that arise under the following headings:

* Improving accessibility to polling stations for voters with physical disabilities, particularly wheelchair users, with the goal of all polling stations being fully accessible as soon as possible,
* Reviewing and updating, as required, the Department’s ‘Accessible Voting Checklist’, which addresses improved accessibility within polling stations for voters with physical disabilities, particularly wheelchair users,
* Developing and improving ballot paper templates so that they are in place for the European Parliament and local elections to be held at the end of May 2019, and
* Promoting measures to advance voting accessibility, as set out in Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

The Working Group - of which the NDA is a member – has made progress on some of the issues highlighted as a result of the Sinnott Case; this has been the primary focus of its work to date. The Working Group membership includes Department officials, representatives from disability service providers and a Disabled Persons’ Organisation.

Feedback from voters with vision impairments about the use of ballot paper templates in the 2018 presidential election informed the deliberations of the Working Group. The template allowed tactile voting with Braille printed beside each candidate’s name and a window for vision impaired voters to mark their preferences. The Working Group developed a larger template for use in the 2019 European and local elections. There was a standard template produced to cater for a ballot paper with up to 20 candidates. A smaller number of templates (approx. 500) were produced in order to cater for ballot papers with up to 30 candidates. This template was further refined for the 2020 General Election.

Feedback received by the Department after the 2020 General Election and a subsequent by-election, and reported to the Working Group, indicated the following:

* Some voters with vision impairments surveyed during the Dublin Bay South by-election found using the ballot paper template a more “dignified” experience
* It was considered difficult to use a ballot paper template if more than 15 candidates appeared on it
* Some voters still preferred assistance from the Presiding Officer
* Some welcomed the Freefone number set up with a spoken list of candidates’ names so that voters with vision impairments could familiarise themselves with the names before they voted
* Online list of candidates on Returning Officer’s website which was compatible with screen reader technology was welcomed

While some progress has been made it is still the case that many voters with vision impairments do not have the same opportunity to cast their vote in secret, as the vast majority of other voters do. It is to be expected that the Department and the new Electoral Commission will further examine options to ensure that, where practicable, all voters will be able to vote in secret.

### NDA Accessible Voting Checklist 2015

The NDA drew on its own resources and experience in other, similar jurisdictions to compile a checklist for use on voting days. The checklist was created in consultation with the Irish Wheelchair Association and was sent to all Returning Officers. There is some evidence below that more still needs to be done to get as much information as possible on accessible voting out to those people who work in polling stations on election and referendum polling days. The checklist (Appendix B) is a general guide on some of the issues that should be considered in planning for and checking the accessibility of polling stations. It does not constitute a legal interpretation of any statutory provision, rather it is intended to assist returning officers.

The checklist and guidance have the following objectives:

* To assist Returning Officers in advance of an election in choosing premises to be used as polling stations and in checking the accessibility of premises they plan to use as polling stations
* To identify practical actions to be taken to make polling stations as accessible as possible to people with disabilities and what can be done to remove barriers to accessibility
* To assist Returning Officers in maintaining the accessibility of polling stations that are currently considered to be accessible
* To allow for checks to be made on the accessibility of the polling station before the polling station opens, and to take any necessary steps to facilitate voters with disabilities on polling day.

NDA plan to update this checklist. We will seek to do so in cooperation with the Electoral Commission, while ensuring input from DPOs. We will advise that this work is included as an action under the Government’s proposed UNCRPD Implementation Strategy

## Voters with capacity issues

The **Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015** and the **Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) (Amendment) Act 2022** were commenced on 26 April 2023. The legislation has potential implications for all relevant public bodies – including the new Electoral Commission.

The Acts change the previous approach to decision-making capacity, to a flexible functional definition, whereby decision-making capacity is assessed only in relation to the matter in question and only at the time in question. The Acts increase people’s choice and control and are grounded on a will and preference rather than a best interest approach.

The Acts also propose three types of decision-making support options to respond to the range of support needs that people may have in relation to decision-making capacity. After the commencement date people can no longer be made a Ward of Court. Up until now the Ward of Court system has presumed that an individual doesn’t have capacity which means they have not been entitled to vote.

The Acts presume that a voter presenting at a polling station has capacity.

This **Electoral Reform Act 2022** hasn’t repealed subsection 103(6) of the **Electoral Act 1992[[20]](#footnote-20)**. This is where a Presiding Officer may refuse anyone coming to vote, access to vote, if they require assistance and arrive within the last two hours of voting. This is because a disabled person may require the Presiding Officer to spend some time with them, and this could obstruct other voters from voting. This provision impedes the right to vote for those voters who require assistance and should be removed as it may be particularly problematic for voters with capacity issues.

It will be important that all officials involved in the electoral process, generally, and in polling stations on election/referendum days are made aware of their roles under the legislation, and also the guiding principles of the Acts.

# Participation of disabled people in decision making

The UNCRPD outlines obligations on Government for how they include disabled people in the development, implementation and monitoring of policies and legislation and other decision making processes. It applies at the local, national and international level.

Article 4(3) of the UNCRPD states that:

In the development and implementation of legislation and policies to implement the present Convention, and in other decision-making processes concerning issues relating to persons with disabilities, States Parties shall closely consult with and actively involve persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations.

Article 33 addresses the participation of people with disabilities in national implementation and monitoring processes stating that:

Civil society, in particular persons with disabilities and their representative organizations, shall be involved and participate fully in the monitoring process.

The UNCRPD Committee can also issue something known as a “General Comment” which seeks to clarify Articles in the Convention and provide practical guidance on how to implement it. These General Comments are not legally binding, but are the interpretation of the Committee on a particular Article and countries are encouraged to apply them.

General Comment No. 7 on the participation of persons with disabilities was issued in 2018 to provide States Parties with guidance on how to implement Article 4(3) and Article 33. General Comment 7 states that the rights under these Articles are civil and political rights and therefore of immediate application.

Disabled Persons’ Organisations (DPOs) are a type of civil society organisation which are led, directed and governed by disabled people. A clear majority of its membership must be disabled people. The organisation should be rooted in, committed to and fully respect the principles and rights recognised in the UNCRPD.

It will be important that the Electoral Commission liaises with Disabled Persons Organisations, as appropriate, in line with the requirements of the UNCRPD.

There will be opportunities for political parties to engage with DPOs to ensure that all election information produced by parties is accessible for persons with disabilities, particularly those with intellectual or cognitive disabilities. This should include Plain English and Easy to Read versions as well as Irish Sign Language videos. There are examples[[21]](#footnote-21) of good practice from the 2020 General Election, however, these would need to be mainstreamed.

# Voter information and education

There are a number of statutory and non-statutory measures in place to improve access to information about elections and referendums for everyone.

## Referendum Commissions[[22]](#footnote-22)

The **Referendum Act 1998** and the **Referendum Act 2001** both contained similar statutory functions ensuring that, where practicable, all relevant materials and information relating to referenda were to be made accessible to persons with hearing and vision impairments.

These Acts have now been repealed and the functions of the Referendum Commissions have been transferred to the new Electoral Commission provided for in the **Electoral Reform Act 2022**. In its time, the Referendum Commissions took a proactive approach to making their materials and information accessible to persons with disabilities.

The Referendum Commissions made their materials available in Braille, on CD and in large text format through the National Council for the Blind of Ireland. They were also available in Irish Sign Language on the websites of organisations such as the Irish Deaf Society and Chime.

## EU Web Accessibility Directive

Under the EU Web Accessibility Directive (WAD) public bodies in Ireland must ensure their websites and mobile apps are accessible to all people, including persons with disabilities. It is already a requirement, under sections 26 & 28(2) of the **Disability Act 2005,** that websites and electronic communications, originating within this jurisdiction, are accessible to persons with disabilities[[23]](#footnote-23). The WAD, however, sets out specific timeframes and standards for web accessibility that have to be met under the Regulations.

The Web Accessibility Directive (WAD) was transposed into Irish law via the **European Union (Accessibility of Websites and Mobile Applications of Public Sector Bodies) Regulations 2020** which came into force on 23 September 2020.

Public sector bodies comply with the 2020 Regulations if for all websites and mobile apps they:

* Meet the relevant parts of the harmonised European standard EN 301 549 V2.1.2 (2018-08). This is the same as meeting all the Level AA Success Criteria from the international guidelines WCAG 2.1.
* Publish and maintain an Accessibility Statement about their websites or mobile apps.

The new online Electoral Register and all the websites and apps of the Electoral Commission will need to comply with the 2020 Regulations.

The NDA has been designated as the national monitoring body for the WAD by the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications.

## Universal Design Communications

Universal Design involves the design of the built environment, products, services and information and communications technology so that they can be accessed, understood and used by all, regardless of age, size, ability or disability

The NDA has produced, in partnership with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, a **Customer Communications Toolkit for Services to the Public - A Universal Design Approach[[24]](#footnote-24)**.

This document offers guidance on best practice in implementing Universal Design in a public body’s various means of communicating with its customers. Universal Design principles should be a key element in the design of the new Electoral Commission’s communications and the delivery of its functions, as this will address access, and ease of use of voting for all eligible voters, including those with disabilities. This Universal Design approach to communication would also need to be followed by Returning Officers at election time.

The NDA advises that the Electoral Commission would also be subject to the relevant sections in Part 3 of the **Disability Act 2005**.[[25]](#footnote-25) Part 3 places an obligation on public bodies to make their services accessible. Under section 26 of the **Disability Act 2005** there is a statutory requirement on public bodies to integrate, where practical and appropriate, their services for persons with disabilities with those for other citizens. Under section 28 public bodies must take steps to make their communications accessible to persons with disabilities.

There is a statutory Code of Practice that complements these provisions.[[26]](#footnote-26) This Code of Practice has been updated and a new version is currently awaiting signature from the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Until the revised Code is signed the current Code is still in force.

## Irish Sign Language Act 2017

This Act was fully commenced on 23 December 2020. The new Electoral Commission comes under the remit of this Act. As a public body under the remit of this legislation the Electoral Commission will need to provide access to their services through ISL when requested. They will also need to factor in the timeframes involved in meeting requests for face-to-face or remote interpreting, based on the circumstances of each request. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has legislative responsibility for this Act.

# Candidates with disabilities

There are many obstacles to disabled people who would like to run as candidates. As part of Ireland’s presidency of the European Union, the NDA hosted a conference on Participation in Public and Political Life at Croke Park on 24 May 2013, in partnership with the European Parliament Information Office.

The conference focused on challenges to political participation for persons with disabilities, including standing for elections, involvement in political parties, and voting. The keynote speaker was former UK Labour Party Cabinet member, the Rt Hon David Blunkett MP.

A further seminar on ‘Reaching Voters with Disabilities’ was held at the European Parliament offices in Dublin on 2 December 2013. This seminar helped support staff to ensure that the campaigns for the 2014 local and European elections reached all voters, including voters with disabilities.

In addition to these points the following issues were still being raised, in 2021, at a meeting of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters in relation to the participation of persons with disabilities in political life:

* Extremely low participation of persons with disabilities in public life
* Reasonable accommodations and a cost of disability payment should be available to increase participation in the electoral process

Further, unpublished information about the obstacles that candidates with disabilities standing in the 2019 local elections found that they faced:

* Extra costs due to their disability
* Unavailability of Sign Language Interpreters or PA’s
* Structural/accessibility barriers
* Failure of political parties to select disabled candidates
* Inaccessible information
* Difficulty engaging with local government structures without supports – thus no experience – not well known

The Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters published a report, in March 2022, entitled: **Ensuring Independent Living and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[[27]](#footnote-27)**. The Committee makes the point that they are aware that the voices of persons with disabilities in Ireland are often excluded from decision making, through low representation of disabled people in the Dáil and the Seanad and low uptake in voting through inaccessibility of voting procedures.

The **Electoral Reform Act 2022**, contains a section that deletes paragraph (i) in section 41 of the **Electoral Act 1992** to repeal the prohibition of a person of ‘unsound mind’ from standing for election to the Dáil (and thereby also removing the disqualifications for membership of the Seanad and for election to the European Parliament also).

The new Electoral Commission’s education and information function should consider encompassing ways of supporting more persons with disabilities to become candidates at all levels of the electoral system.

There are, currently, no measures to support those persons with disabilities who wish to run as candidates for election. It is important that persons with disabilities are not prevented from standing as candidates because of barriers they may face. It should be possible for a candidate who is deaf or hard of hearing to be able to access the services of an Irish Sign Language interpreter. A person with a physical disability may need help with transport (e.g. taxi fare) if they don’t have access to public transport or an adapted private vehicle. A personal assistant may be required to help a candidate with various activities associated with an election. A potential candidate may also need some form of assistive technology.

Straightforward measure like these delivered consistently over the course of an election campaign would begin to close the gap and allow disabled people to represent and to be represented.

# Conclusions

Some progress has been made on improving the voter experience for persons with disabilities in future elections and referendums.

Some of these changes have been written in to legislation, however, it appears that many potential improvements are being left to what the new Electoral Commission will do to improve access to voter information and to improve the participation of persons with disabilities in the electoral process. It would also be useful if certain pieces of information e.g. postal and special voting statistics, could be anonymously disaggregated for disability in order to see what percentage of disabled people use this facility, compared to the percentage who vote in person.

APPENDIX A

## Commission on the Status of People with Disabilities: A Strategy for Equality 1996

These are the recommendations the Commission made on political rights:

16.1 Many people with disabilities are unable to exercise their right to vote because polling stations are often inaccessible and because polling procedures, like cards and ballot papers, are not disability friendly. People with disabilities do not have a right to a postal vote.

16.2 A working party recommended in 1983 that a list of eligible postal voters (including people with disabilities) should be compiled each year alongside the electoral register. This recommendation was not accepted on the grounds that postal voting was open to abuse. No evidence was presented to the Commission that there is such a risk of abuse from postal voting by people with disabilities.

16.3 The Electoral Act 1992 provides for a very limited form of voting for people with disabilities. Those who are unable to vote in person at their polling station because of physical illness or physical disability can have their names recorded on a "special voters" list. A presiding officer together with a Garda calls to people on the 'special' list with the ballot paper which must be completed there and then. The legislation also provides that a person whose name is not on the special voters list who satisfies the returning officer that he or she is unable by reason of physical illness or physical disability to vote at the appropriate polling station may be allowed to vote at a more accessible polling station.

16.4 In view of the obvious inadequacies of the present arrangements, the Commission's recommends that all polling stations, booths and procedures should be made accessible for people with disabilities.

16.5 The Department of the Environment should provide a special budgetary allocation in order to ensure that this recommendation will be brought into effect as a matter of priority. A senior officer in the Department should review all voting procedures in consultation with people with disabilities and make sure that all necessary changes are introduced. This would include the printing of photographs of the candidates on ballot papers in order to assist people in voting; the design of polling booths; and the production of voting papers appropriate to the needs of people with disabilities (e.g. In braille).

16.6 People with disabilities who are unable to attend at a polling station should be entitled to be registered on a postal voting register and should be entitled to a postal vote.

16.7 People with disabilities are under represented amongst candidates for election and elected politicians at both local and national levels. Political parties have not taken sufficient positive action to encourage people with disabilities to stand for election and the Commission recommends that all parties should establish affirmative action programmes to encourage people with disabilities to participate fully in local, national and European politics.

APPENDIX B

This Accessibility Checklist was updated, in 2015, from a previous version. The checklist is based on the National Disability Authority's publication, Building for Everyone: A Universal Design Approach. The checklist has been circulated to returning officers by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Question** | **Yes** | **No** | **If "no", action to be taken** |
| **Is there directional signage to the polling station along all approach routes and at the entrance?** |  |  |  |
| **Is there a designated car parking space for people with disabilities near the main pedestrian entrance to the polling station and is it clearly marked?** |  |  |  |
| **Are the pedestrian routes to the building free of hazards? Are they free of obstructions such as bins, outward-opening doors or windows or overhanging trees or bushes? Is it adequately lit? Are there steps or steep changes in level?** |  |  |  |
| **Are access routes to the polling station of sufficient width and is the entrance to the building of sufficient width? Is the clear opening of the door at the entrance to the building at least 800mm width?** |  |  |  |
| **Is the entrance to the building sufficiently well-lit?** |  |  |  |
| **Is the entrance level? If not, is a slip-resistant smooth surface ramp provided with a maximum gradient no steeper than 1:20? Does it have landings, handrails and a textured surface?** |  |  |  |
| **Can the main doors be fully opened during the poll and be fully fastened?** |  |  |  |
| **Are routes from the entrance to the polling rooms slip-free, well illuminated, hazard free and even?** |  |  |  |
| **Are passageways wide enough for wheelchair users? Ideally passageways should be 1.8m wide to enable two wheelchair users to pass. A narrower corridor should have a turning space of 1.8m by 1.8m.** |  |  |  |
| **Are the rooms being used for voting located on the ground floor?** |  |  |  |
| **Are the floors of the voting rooms clear of potential hazards (e.g. storage boxes)?** |  |  |  |
| **Are there suitable chairs available to facilitate elderly or ill voters who may need to sit? Are these chairs placed where they do not pose an obstruction?** |  |  |  |
| **Is a low-height polling booth provided, to facilitate voters who use wheelchairs or are short of stature?** |  |  |  |
| **Are all polling booths well lit?** |  |  |  |
| **Are notices/ballot papers displayed in large print as required by law?** |  |  |  |
| **Is the route between the entrance, registration desk and low-height booth as short as possible, level and hazard-free?** |  |  |  |
| **Is assistance readily available to voters, upon request?** |  |  |  |
| **Does the Presiding Officer know how to assist people with disabilities in voting as outlined in the Manual for Presiding Officers?** |  |  |  |
| **Is there an emergency evacuation plan? Does it cover assistance to people with disabilities in evacuating the building? Are those responsible for evacuation aware of the different needs of people with disabilities?** |  |  |  |
| **Are emergency exits clearly marked and can people with reduced mobility use emergency exits?** |  |  |  |
|  | | | |

## 1. Assistance by Presiding Officers for People with Disabilities

The Presiding Officer is responsible for monitoring the voting arrangements for people with disabilities and the elderly. These are outlined in paragraph 14 of the Manual for Presiding Officers at the European Parliament and Local Elections, Friday 5th June 2009 issued by the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government (the Manual). Detailed guidance on voting by people with physical disabilities, impaired vision or literacy difficulties is set out in paragraphs 16 - 18 of the Manual.

A Presiding Officer may offer assistance if a voter with a physical disability, impaired vision or literacy difficulty requests assistance but does not wish to be assisted by a companion voter. In the first instance, a Presiding Officer should follow the guidance provided in paragraph 18 of the Manual and at (2) below when communicating with the voter in these circumstances. In addition, the Presiding Officer should be mindful of the following:

* In accompanying the voter, ask if they need help if you think that they might need it; offer your arm rather than taking theirs when guiding and warn them of any hazards on the route to the voting compartment;
* Alert the voter and seek permission if it is necessary to move crutches, canes or mobility aids.

## 2. Guidance for Presiding Officers and Poll Clerks on Communicating with Voters

Voters may feel daunted or confused by the electoral process. Bearing this in mind, every effort should be made to provide services in a manner that will enable each person to vote, through either the things you say (communication) or do (assistance). In particular, all staff should be sensitive to any special needs the voter may have because of their age, language, or disability.

The following may be of assistance when communicating with voters:

* Be patient and listen attentively;
* Look directly at voters, speak with a normal tone of voice (avoid talking loudly or shouting) and ask whether they understand or agree. If you don't understand something that is said to you, it is important to ask again and clarify the position;
* Speak slowly and carefully and avoid the use of technical terms and jargon by using clear and simple language; be descriptive - you may have to help orientate people with visual impairments and tell them what is coming up e.g. if they have to step up or down, and warn them of hazards;
* Where possible, ask short questions that require Yes/No answers, or a shake or nod of the head;
* Ask voters if they need help if you think that they might need it and offer to accompany them;
* If a voter with a visual impairment or mobility difficulties needs guiding, remember to offer your arm rather than taking theirs;
* If someone is deaf or hard of hearing use hand gestures as well as speech, e.g. by pointing to a voting booth; do not tap a person with a hearing impairment on the shoulder to get their attention.

1. Dept of Housing, Local Government and Heritage sourced from Returning Officers [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpsr/censusofpopulation2022-summaryresults/healthdisabilitycaringandvolunteering/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <http://nda.ie/Disability-overview/Key-Policy-Documents/Report-of-the-Commission-on-the-Status-of-People-with-Disabilities/A-Strategy-for-Equality/A-Strategy-for-Equality-Report-of-the-Commission-on-the-Status-of-People-with-Disabilities/Political-rights/> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://lexparency.org/eu/TFEU/ART_20/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <file:///H:/Downloads/fra-2019-right-vote-ep-elections-legal-capacity_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-12/eu_citizenship_report_2020_-_empowering_citizens_and_protecting_their_rights_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8376&furtherPubs=yes>, pp9-10 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/new-push-european-democracy/european-democracy-action-plan_en> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20220429IPR28242/meps-begin-revising-rules-on-eu-elections-calling-for-pan-european-constituency> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32019L0882> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2023/si/32/made/en/print> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2023/si/31/made/en/print [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/44555-statement-on-the-electoral-reform-bill/> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_disability_matters/reports/2022/2022-10-11_participation-of-people-with-disabilities-in-political-cultural-community-and-public-life_en.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_disability_matters/2021-09-23/2/> [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/e9122-disability-stakeholder-group/> [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. <https://data.gov.ie/dataset?res_format=CSV&q=cso> [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2016/si/537/made/en/print> [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1992/act/23/section/103/enacted/en/html#sec103> [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The Labour Party produced an Easy to Read and Plain English version of their manifesto for the 2020 General Election

    <https://www.labour.ie/assets/files/pdf/ge2020-labour-party-manifesto-easy-to-read.pdf>

    <https://www.labour.ie/assets/files/pdf/ge2020-labour-party-manifesto-plain-english.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. A new Commission was appointed for each referendum [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2005/act/14/section/28/enacted/en/html> [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. <https://universaldesign.ie/products-services/customer-communications-toolkit-for-services-to-the-public-a-universal-design-approach/> [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2005/en/act/pub/0014/sec0026.html>

    <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2005/en/act/pub/0014/sec0027.html>

    <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2005/en/act/pub/0014/sec0028.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/2006/en/si/0163.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/committees/33/disability-matters/> [↑](#footnote-ref-27)