

**Policy Objective :** To ensure people with a disability can participate fully in society and that disability issues are not considered in isolation, but integrated into all areas of public policy.

### Some key facts

- A total of 595,335 people have a disability in Ireland<sup>1</sup>; equivalent to 13% of the population (1 in every eight people).
- There are significant variations within this number, with the disability rate for people in their 20's being less than 10%, and the disability rate for people aged 85 and over just above 72%.
- 5.4% of the population aged under 15 has a disability.
- People with a disability are one of the groups in Ireland at highest risk of poverty with an 'at risk of poverty' rate of 22.8%, a deprivation rate of 51.3% and a consistent poverty rate of 13.2%<sup>2</sup>.

### Cost of disability

People with a disability experience higher everyday costs of living because of their disability when compared to others in society. There is a very strong case to be made for introducing a non-means tested cost of disability allowance.

This proposal, which has been researched and costed in detail by the National Disability Authority (NDA, 2006) and advocated by the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI), would provide an extra weekly payment of between €10 and €40 to somebody living with a disability (calculated on the basis of the severity of their disability). It seems only logical that if people with a disability are to be equal participants in society, the extra costs generated by their disability should not be borne by them alone. Society at large should act to level the playing field by covering those extra but ordinary costs.

### Employment and training

Persons with a disability in the labour force have a participation rate of 30 per cent, less than half that for the population in general. This low rate of employment among people with a disability is worrying. Apart from restricting their participation in society it also ties them into state dependent low-income situations.

People with a disability also have a lower participation rate in education and training, also restricting their entry into the labour market. They are much less likely to have completed third level education, with 24.5% educated to this level compared with 38.7% of the overall population. In terms of training and labour market supports people with disabilities are at present excluded from accessing supports from Intreo, the Youth Guarantee and Momentum.

*Social Justice Ireland* believes that greater efforts should be made to reduce the impediments faced by people with a disability to obtain employment. In particular, consideration should be given to reforming the current situation in which many such people face losing their benefits, in particular their medical card, when they take up employment. This policy ignores the additional costs faced by people with a disability in pursuing their day-to-day lives. For many people with disabilities the opportunity to take up employment is denied to them and they are trapped in unemployment, poverty, or both.

## Older people

- The rate of disability for people aged 60-64 is 22.3%;
- The percentage of the population aged 85 and over who have a disability is 72.3 per cent;
- 41.2% (56,087) of persons aged 65 and over living alone have a disability;
- 33% of persons aged 65 and over with a disability have no access to a car.

The rate of disability increases sharply with age, with the two most common disabilities reported by the CSO being strongly age-related<sup>3</sup>. In light of this evidence it is clear that increased and sufficient resources must be allocated to primary care, community care, and community-based supports to ensure that older people with a disability can continue to live and participate in their own communities.

## Public policy

Disability issues are not just confined to health services, medical cards or the social welfare system. Disability issues impact on all of our public services and should be at the heart of public policy.

- In terms of housing all new build housing units should be smart housing units which are adaptable to people's needs. This means that these units can be adapted to support people with a disability or older people with mobility issues for example.
- All forms of public transport must be accessible for people with disabilities. It is unacceptable that a person with a disability should have to give 24 hours' notice of travel for some services<sup>4</sup>.
- Education at all levels and training courses should be accessible for people with disabilities<sup>5</sup>.
- Disability policy should not be considered in isolation, but integrated into public policy.

## Eight things Government can do

1. Ratify the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.
2. Introduce a cost of disability allowance to address poverty and social exclusion of people with a disability.
3. Subject all Government programmes and policies to an ex ante Disability Impact Assessment.
4. Allocate sufficient resources and investment to primary care, social care, community care and other community based supports to ensure that people with disabilities can remain in their local communities.
5. Ensure education at all levels and training opportunities are available to people with a disability and that people with a disability are supported to access the labour market.
6. Develop a job retention policy for people with disabilities as part of all future employment strategies.
7. Reform the welfare and employment systems so that people with a disability do not lose their benefits (including medical card) when they take up employment.
8. Implement a multi annual investment programme to support people with disabilities through income support, employment support, access to appropriate healthcare support, access to appropriate social care supports and access to appropriate housing. The implementation of the Congregated Settings report should also be a key focus of this programme.

<sup>1</sup> CSO (2012) *Census 2011 Profile 8: Our Bill of Health – Health, Disability and Carers in Ireland*.

<sup>2</sup> CSO (2015) *Survey on Income and Living conditions 2014*. The equivalent rates for the general population are 16.3%, 29%, 8% respectively.

<sup>3</sup> CSO (2012) *Census 2011 Profile 8: Our Bill of Health – Health, Disability and Carers in Ireland*.p.18

<sup>4</sup><http://www.irishrail.ie/travel-information/disabled-access>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.disability-federation.ie/index.php?uniqueID=11060>