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## **An Comhchoiste um Nithe a Bhaineann le Míchumas**

Cuairt an Chomhchoiste um Nithe a Bhaineann le  
Míchumas ar Aonad Oiliúna Phríosún Mhoineo

Nollaig 2023

## **Joint Committee on Disability Matters**

Joint Committee on Disability Matters  
Visit to Mountjoy Prison Training Unit

December 2023



## Membership

### Deputies



CATHAOIRLEACH

Michael Moynihan  
Fianna Fáil



LEAS-CHATHAOIRLEACH

Pauline Tully  
Sinn Féin



Seán Canney  
Independent



Dessie Ellis  
Sinn Féin



Frankie Feighan  
Fine Gael



Gary Gannon  
Social Democrats



Emer Higgins  
Fine Gael



Brian Leddin  
Green Party



Jennifer Murnane  
O'Connor  
Fianna Fáil

### Senators



Tom Clonan  
Independent



Eileen Flynn  
Independent



Erin McGreehan  
Fianna Fáil



Fiona O'Loughlin  
Fianna Fáil



Mary Seery  
Kearney  
Fine Gael

## Table of Contents

<b>Membership.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Introduction.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Briefing from the Irish Prison Service .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Overview of the visit to Mountjoy Training Unit.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Appendix: Terms of Reference.....</b>	<b>7</b>

## Introduction

1. The role of the Joint Committee on Disability Matters (the Committee) is to monitor the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). The Committee's Work Programme 2023 was developed in line with the emerging themes from the UNCRPD.
2. Article 13 of the UNCRPD requires State Parties to ensure effective access to justice for people with disabilities on an equal basis with others, including through the provision of procedural and age-appropriate accommodations, in order to facilitate their effective role as direct and indirect participants, including as witnesses, in all legal proceedings, including at investigative and other preliminary stages. Article 12 of the UNCRPD requires that people with disabilities be given equal recognition before the law while Article 13 provides for the effective access to justice.<sup>1</sup>
3. Under the theme 'Accessing Justice', on the 2 March 2023, the Committee heard directly from representatives from the Irish Prison Service (IPS) to discuss the topic of access to justice for people with disabilities.
4. At this public meeting, the Committee accepted an invitation from the Director General of the IPS to visit a prison to see the service first-hand, and to speak to the staff on the ground and the men and women in the care of the IPS.
5. IPS forms a key component of the criminal justice system. Its fundamental role is to help achieve a safer and fairer Ireland. It is important to ensure that prisoners can access safe and secure custody with dignity of care. By providing access to rehabilitation for people in prison there is a reduced risk of harm to the public and reduction in the likelihood of reoffence. The IPS works with the Probation Service allowing prisoners to avail of an integrated offender management programme. Prisoners have the right to maintain family relations and contact with the wider community.

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<sup>1</sup>United Nations (2006) *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol* Available at: [enable convention cover \(un.org\)](https://www.un.org/en/about-us/enable-convention-cover) (Accessed 11 December 2023).



6. A delegation of the Committee visited the Mountjoy Training Unit on Tuesday, 26 September 2023 and included the following Members:
  - Deputy Sean Canney
  - Deputy Pauline Tully
  - Senator Erin McGreehan.
7. Brenda McCauley, the policy adviser to the Joint Committee on Disability Matters', and another member of the Committee secretariat team accompanied the delegation.

## **Briefing from the Irish Prison Service**

8. The Committee met with the following representatives from the IPS:
  - Caron McCaffrey, Director General of the Irish Prison Service
  - Alan Armstrong Press & Communications Manager, Director General Office
  - Dave Mulligan, Assistant Governor of the Training Unit
  - Orlagh Finn, Chief Nursing Officer of the Training Unit.
9. The Training Unit is a semi-open, low security prison located on the grounds of the Mountjoy campus in Dublin and it re-opened in July 2022 as an older person prison, to cater for the needs of an ageing prison population who often present with complex medical conditions.
10. Rooms are adapted to meet the needs of various disabilities and medical presentations, including wheelchair accessibility. The Training Unit is designed to accommodate 96 male prisoners over 55 years old in single occupancy rooms. It has two high dependency rooms for prisoners with mobility and serious health issues. The Training Unit has an enhanced prison healthcare department to provide appropriate levels of care with a strong focus on early screening and prevention.

11. The Training Unit has all of the services commonly associated with closed prisons such as;

- Integrated Sentence Management
- Probation Service
- Prison School ran in conjunction with the Educational Training Board which operates a timetable more suited to its older population such as Wellness, Literacy, Computers, Choir, Arts and Crafts, Book Club, Bridge, Decoupage and Mosaic
- Red Cross, Prison Programme - four Volunteers currently in training to provide peer support to fellow prisoners
- Work Training activities and certification in the areas of Catering, Industrial Cleaning and Waste Management.

12. There are a number of areas where the Training Unit differentiates from a closed prison including;

- Prisoners are not locked into their rooms and have a key for their own rooms
- Access to communal dining where all meals are served
- Open visits are available with family and friends
- Access to gardening and horticulture
- The Training Unit is currently in the process of being affiliated with Men's Shed Ireland. Currently staff and prisoners are involved in upcycling and restoring and redesigning furniture, bicycles, crafts, picture framing, painting/ decorating, candle making, woodwork, pyrography and engraving.

13. The Training Unit actively encourages everyone to get involved and contribute to the running of the Unit.

## Overview of the visit to Mountjoy Training Unit

14. The visit consisted of a tour of the Training Unit located in Mountjoy Prison and included the following;

- 10:30am - Tea/Coffee/Refreshments
- 10:45am - Introduction by the Director General
- 11:00am - Meeting with Governor and staff along with facilitated tour of the Training Unit including;
  - Education centre
  - Surgery
  - Men's shed
  - Accommodation
  - Communal dining hall
  - Both indoor and outdoor recreation areas

15. The Committee wish to thank the Director General and staff of the of the Irish Prison Service Training Unit for the informative presentation and engaging discussion. The Committee will continue to explore this further under its Work Programme.



## Appendix: Terms of Reference

### **Orders of Reference - Dáil Éireann**

(1) That a Select Committee consisting of 9 Members be appointed by Dáil Éireann to form the Joint Committee on Disability Matters to consider all disability matters including monitoring the implementation (by Ireland) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

(2) That the Select Committee on Disability Matters shall consider and report on-

(a) the 'Implementation Plan' for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and national strategies including the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and sector strategies for the purpose of-

- (i) ensuring implementation plans are configured to advance the UNCRPD while delivering outcomes for persons with disabilities in their lived experience and planning into the future;
- (ii) making recommendations which align the plans and strategies of Ireland's international obligations;
- (iii) monitoring progress of the drafting and initiation of required and relevant legislation;
- (iv) engaging with Ministers and the Secretaries General of relevant Government departments regarding implementation measures and budgetary measures;
- (v) aligning the UN Sustainable Development Goals with the provisions of the UNCRPD;
- (vi) supporting the embedding of a rights-based approach to disability as provided by the UNCRPD within Ireland's economy, society, and culture;
- (vii) reviewing Ireland's Report/s to the UNCRPD Committee;
- (viii) monitoring and ensuring the timely implementation of the Optional Protocol of the UNCRPD;

(b) the effectiveness of-

- (i) all national processes established to implement the UNCRPD;
- (ii) the National Framework for Monitoring the implementation of the Convention including engagement with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission and the National Disability Authority.

(3) For the purposes of paragraph (2) the Committee shall-

- (a) engage with persons with disabilities, family carers, Disabled Persons Organisations, service providers and advocates in the Committee's work;
- (b) consider other topics that the disability community identifies as key as agreed by the Committee;
- (c) have regard to Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Committee) with respect to Ireland's periodic reports, review the Government response to the Observations of the UN Committee and make its own recommendations with respect to same.

(4) The Joint Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 96, other than paragraphs (3) to (9) inclusive thereof;

(5) The Chairman of the Dáil Select Committee shall also be Chairman of the Joint Commit

## **Orders of Reference - Seanad Éireann**

(1) That a Select Committee consisting of 5 Members to be appointed by Seanad Éireann to form the Joint Committee on Disability Matters to consider all disability matters including monitoring the implementation (by Ireland) of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities.

(2) That the Select Committee on Disability Matters shall consider and report on-

(a) the 'Implementation Plan' for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and national strategies including the National Disability Inclusion Strategy and sector strategies for the purpose of-

- (i) ensuring implementation plans are configured to advance the UNCRPD while delivering outcomes for persons with disabilities in their lived experience and planning into the future;
- (ii) making recommendations which align the plans and strategies of Ireland's international obligations;
- (iii) monitoring progress of the drafting and initiation of required and relevant legislation;
- (iv) engaging with Ministers and the Secretaries General of relevant Government departments regarding implementation measures and budgetary measures;
- (v) aligning the UN Sustainable Development Goals with the provisions of the UNCRPD;
- (vi) supporting the embedding of a rights-based approach to disability as provided by the UNCRPD within Ireland's economy, society, and culture;
- (vii) reviewing Ireland's Report/s to the UNCRPD Committee;
- (viii) monitoring and ensuring the timely implementation of the Optional Protocol of the UNCRPD;

(b) the effectiveness of-

- (i) all national processes established to implement the UNCRPD;
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(3) For the purposes of paragraph (2) the Committee shall-

- (a) engage with persons with disabilities, family carers, Disabled Persons Organisations, service providers and advocates in the Committee's work;
- (b) consider other topics that the disability community identifies as key as agreed by the Committee;
- (c) have regard to Concluding Observations of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN Committee) with respect to Ireland's periodic reports, review the Government response to the Observations of the UN Committee and make its own recommendations with respect to same.

(4) The Joint Committee shall have the powers defined in Standing Order 72, other than paragraphs (3) to (9) inclusive thereof;

(5) The Chairman of the Dáil Select Committee shall also be Chairman of the Joint Committee



### **Houses of the Oireachtas**

Leinster House  
Kildare Street  
Dublin 2  
D02 XR20

[www.oireachtas.ie](http://www.oireachtas.ie)

Tel: +353 (0)1 6183000

Twitter/X: @OireachtasNews

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