

Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters

The role of Disabled Persons Organisations and self-advocacy to provide equal opportunities under UNCRPD implementation

08/04/2024

Dear Chairperson, Deputies and Senators, the DPO Network welcomes the opportunity to be here today.

The DPO Network is an alliance of five national Disabled Persons' Organisations in Ireland. We work together to help ensure that the UN CRPD in Ireland is fully implemented. All member organisations have expertise informed by lived experience of disability.

The five DPO member organisations are:

- As I Am – Ireland's National Autism Advocacy Organisation
- Disabled Women Ireland (DWI)
- Independent Living Movement Ireland (ILMI)
- Irish Deaf Society (IDS)
- National Platform of Self Advocates

The DPO Network relies on disabled people's collective lived experience, expertise and analysis. We are led and informed by the active input and participation of disabled people in accordance with the UN CRPD and facilitate cross-impairment analysis of the issues disabled people face.

Today we have been asked to address the question:

How can DPO development be more inclusive to achieve human rights and meaningful participation for people with disabilities, across all groups, including those with complex disabilities?

In answering this question we would like to focus on the words "inclusive" and "meaningful participation" or we prefer to say "meaningful engagement". What do these terms mean? What do they mean in practice? Is there a gap?

From our perspective, too often there has only been lip service paid to participation. Often this amounts to little more than tokenism and a box ticking exercise. Change is needed, it is needed now and to be fair, we can see this change happening. We have had very successful engagements and work with the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Disability Matters and the

Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. We are currently working closely with the Department to co-create the new National Disability Strategy.

We are asking for all State Departments, bodies and related services to focus changing their attitudes, their processes and workflows to include universal design, meaningful engagement and co-creation of plans, strategies and policies. This includes DPO participation in their monitoring and evaluation. Disabled people must be deeply involved in CRPD implementation.

DPO's have a central role to play in the State's implementation of UN CRPD in order to advance equality, inclusion and human rights of disabled people. We invite you to visit our website to review our recent publication "The Role of Disabled Person's Organisations (DPOs) in Ireland at www.dponetwork.ie.

Although DPOs have been established in various ways for many years, it is only recently that the State is starting to understand its responsibility to place them at the centre of policy development and implementation. Currently, many DPOs are not adequately resourced, are led by volunteers and need State support in order to participate in an appropriate way. DPOs need multi-annual funding in order that we can ensure the collective voice of disabled people informs policy development and to monitor the implementation of the UNCRPD in Ireland at a local and national level.

To achieve meaningful engagement we have a number of key recommendations which are described in more detail in our position paper:

1. Establishment of a national register of DPOs
2. Design and implementation of a Co-creation Framework.
3. Recognition of the role of DPOs as the authoritative representative voice of disabled people. While the DPO Network acknowledges the role of disability service providers in the provision of services, they have no mandate to speak on behalf of disabled people.
4. Requirement that systems for structured engagement and consultation entail representation from recognised DPOs and not individuals. An example of good practice in this area is the national Civic Forum.
5. Provision of adequate, multi-annual core funding to DPOs to effectively engage in policy development, implementation and monitoring.
6. Provision of support to DPO to develop technical and organisational capacity.

I would like to thank you for your time and interest in this important topic and look forward to engaging with you to ensure meaningful engagement with DPOs.