



Disability Federation of Ireland

Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government, and Heritage:
Universal Design in new projects and public realm planning

Tuesday 21st June 2022, 3pm

Opening Statement

The right to a home

The right to a home is one of the most fundamental human rights.

Without accessible housing, this right is not available to disabled people. Developing sufficient universally designed and wheelchair liveable housing is essential to realise the right of disabled people to live independently in their own homes, in line with Article 19 of the UN CRPD.

Without a home, people cannot access their other rights- they cannot access the health services they need to enable independence, can't access education or employment, and face exclusion from their communities.

National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027

The publication of the new National Housing Strategy for Disabled People, 2022-2027 is an opportunity to realise disabled people's right to a home. The Strategy and the open consultation process have both been praised by disability groups. However, **the success of the Strategy will depend on its implementation.**

The implementation plan currently being developed must have clearly defined targets. For example, the Strategy states that 50% of new pipeline delivery in each local authority will meet Universal Design standards. The implementation plan must break down the proportion of these houses that will meet Universal Design ++ standards (i.e. wheelchair liveable). The Strategy will also fail if there is not sufficient resources put in place to deliver it. **The implementation plan must commit to the necessary funding needed to deliver on the Strategy, starting in Budget 2023.** We are now halfway through the current programme for government, and disabled people need to see action.

Need for joined up housing and supports

The right to a home must operate in tandem with other rights. **Without cross-Departmental and cross-agency working, the Housing Strategy will fail.** Many people with disabilities end up in the ludicrous situation of being told that they cannot receive Personal Assistance services from the HSE without a home, and will not be offered a home by their Local Authority without a guarantee that they will receive services. **The inability to deliver accessible, universally designed and wheelchair liveable housing along with supports is the driver of the over 1,300 people under the age of 65 living in nursing homes.** If this issue is not resolved, the numbers of people with disabilities entering nursing homes will continue to outnumber those being supported to move out.

Housing For All

Accessible housing for people with disabilities cannot and should not be seen as something separate from the right to housing for the general population. The lack of housing for people with disabilities is part of the housing crisis. 27% of the homeless population have a disability. **Housing For All represents a significant commitment to investing in housing. If people with disabilities do not benefit from this investment, Ireland is failing in its UN CRPD obligations.** Housing being built under Housing For All must include the appropriate levels of universally designed and wheelchair liveable housing to meet people's needs. Sadly, to date people with disabilities have not been sufficiently included in attempts to address the housing crisis. The waiting time for people with disabilities on the housing waiting lists has increased in recent years, while it has decreased for others. This is unacceptable.

Reform of Part M

DFI are coalition partner's of IWA's Think Housing, Build Accessible campaign and fully back them on the need to reform Part M Building Regulations to ensure higher wheelchair accessibility standards in new houses and apartments. This is essential to ensuring that a sufficient proportion of new developments meet the needs of people with disabilities. Under current regulations, housing must be suitable for wheelchair users to visit but not to live.

Conclusion

5,057 people with disabilities are now on social housing waiting lists, and there are many more not captured on waiting lists, such as those in congregated settings, nursing homes, and living in their family homes who should be able to aspire to independence. **Accessible homes, along with necessary social care supports are needed to make a real difference in the lives of people with disabilities.**