



Ireland – ANED country profile

The information contained in this summary was compiled by the Academic Network of European Disability experts (ANED) in April 2009.

Academic networks and resources

There is no national academic network but the following institutions are active in disability research:

[Centre for Disability Law and Policy, National University of Ireland Galway](#)

The Centre is dedicated to producing research that informs debate on national and international disability law reform.

[Disability Studies Centre, University College Dublin](#)

The Centre aims to promote the inclusion and independence of people with disabilities through research, teaching and service to the wider community.

[National Institute for Intellectual Disability, Trinity College Dublin](#)

The mission of the NIID is to enable people with intellectual disability to develop their potential by a through a combination of research, dissemination of new knowledge and professional training.

[Sligo Institute of Technology](#)

Sligo Institute of Technology offers a Higher Certificate in Arts in Advocacy Studies, delivered by distance education in partnership with the Citizens information Board and The Equality Authority.

[National University of Ireland, Maynooth](#)

The National University of Ireland, Maynooth offers a Certificate Course on Disability Studies which is designed to examine current models of disability. The course critically evaluates issues of oppression, power and gender and explores barriers to inclusion experienced by persons with a disability.

Policy and enforcement bodies

The key national bodies with responsibility for disability law and policy implementation include:

A number of government departments have specific responsibility for disability issues under the [National Disability Strategy](#) (a framework of supports for people with disabilities launched in 2004). These include the [Department of Health and Children](#), the [Department of the Taoiseach](#), the [Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform](#) and the [Department of Social and Family Affairs](#).

The [National Disability Authority](#) is the lead state agency on disability issues, providing independent expert advice to Government on policy and practice.

The [Equality Authority](#) is an independent body set up under the Employment Equality Act 1998.

The [Irish Human Rights Commission](#) was set up under the Human Rights Commission Act 2000 and keeps under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State.



The [National Council on Ageing and Older People](#) advises the Minister for Health on all aspects of aging and the welfare of older people and assists the development of national and regional policies and strategies.

The [National Council for Special Education](#) was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with special educational needs arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children.

The [Health Information and Quality Authority](#) (HIQA) is responsible for driving quality and safety in Ireland's health and social care services and for ensuring standards in disability services.

[Foras Aiseanna Saothair](#) (FAS) is the National Training and Employment Authority in Ireland and is responsible for providing vocational training and employment services for people with disabilities.

The [Economic and Social Research Institute](#) (ESRI) produces research that contributes to understanding economic and social change and that inform public policymaking and civil society in Ireland and throughout the European Union.

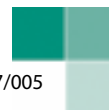
The [Health Research Board](#) (HRB) is the lead agency in Ireland supporting and funding health research. The Disability Databases Unit of the HRB manages the National Intellectual Disability Database (NIDD) and the National Physical and Sensory Disability Database (NPSDD). The disability databases aim to provide an information base for decision making in relation to the planning of specialised health and personal social services for people with disabilities.

The [National Economic and Social Development Office](#) (NESDO) established under the National Economic and Social Development Act 2006 incorporates the National Economic and Social Council (NESC), the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) and the National Centre for Partnership and Performance (NCPP). The primary role of NESDO is to add value to the work of its constituent bodies by creating the conditions under which synergies can be released, joint projects pursued and the potential for duplication minimised.

- The [National Economic and Social Forum](#) is a government appointed social partnership body that provides advice on economic and social policies, especially those that seek to achieve greater equality and social inclusion in our society.

- The [National Economic and Social Council](#) analyses and reports on strategic issues relating to the efficient development of the economy and the achievement of social justice.

- The [National Centre for Partnership and Performance](#) promotes and facilitates partnership-led change and innovation in Ireland's workplace.



Organisations of disabled people

The national organisation representing disabled people at the European level (European Disability Forum) is: [People with Disabilities in Ireland](#), which is a national cross disability organisation funded by the Government.

There are a number of significant national organisations of disabled people, as well as of their families and carers. These include:

[The Centre for Independent Living](#) - The Centre for Independent Living was established by and for people with disabilities, with the aim of ensuring that people with disabilities achieved Independent Living, choice and control over their lives and full participation in society as equal citizens. There are 26 Centres nationwide.

The [Association for Higher Education Access and Disability](#) (AHEAD) is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.

[Irish Deaf Society](#) - This is the national representative organisation of Deaf and hard of hearing people, serving the interest and welfare of the Deaf Community.

[Down Syndrome Ireland](#) - Down Syndrome Ireland promotes inclusion, equality and choices for people with Down syndrome and their families.

[Caring and Sharing Association](#) - This is a voluntary organisation of people with disabilities and voluntary members, which aims to develop friendships between members through regular events.

[National Parents and Siblings Alliance](#) – The NPSA campaigns for the right to equal opportunities for people with an intellectual disability and autism.

[Caring for Carers Ireland](#)- This is a national organisation supporting Family Carers and those for whom they care.

[Mental Health Ireland](#) – this is a national voluntary organisation which aims to promote positive mental health and to actively support persons with mental illness, as well as their families and carers.

National law and strategy

Ireland has signed the [United Nations Convention](#) but not the [Optional Protocol](#).

Important national laws, policies and strategies concerning disabled people include: The [National Disability Strategy](#), launched in 2004, aims to improve the lives of people with disabilities in Ireland. It consists of:



The [Disability Act 2005](#). This Act established a statutory basis for improving access to mainstream public services for people with disabilities, as well as placing obligations on public bodies to promote and support the employment of persons with disabilities. Some of the key features of the Act include provision for an individual right to an independent assessment of need and a related service statement, provision of a statutory basis for access to public buildings and services and the imposition of a 3% quota on public bodies for the employment of people with disabilities.

The [Education for Persons with Special Needs Act 2004](#). This Act provides for the assessment of children's educational needs and the allocation of resources to meet those needs, with an emphasis on integrating children into mainstream education where appropriate.

The [Citizens Information Act 2007](#). This Act gives legislative responsibility to the Citizens Information Board to develop advocacy services for people with disabilities, particularly a personal advocacy service to deal with the most complex cases. As of yet however, no personal advocacy service has come into existence under this legislation.

The Strategy also includes six sectoral plans, which are statutory action plans in key government departments. The relevant departments are – The Department of Health and Children, the Department for Social and Family Affairs, the Department of Transport, the Department of the Environment, Heritage and Local Government, the Department for Communications, Marine and Natural Resources and the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

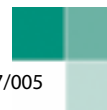
The Senior Officials Group on Disability, which reports to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, monitors progress on the implementation of the National Disability Strategy. This group consists of officials representing the six government departments responsible for implementing the Sectoral plans as well as the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform, the Department of Finance and the Department of Education and Science.

A National Disability Strategy Stakeholder Monitoring Group has also been established to monitor progress on the overall implementation of the strategy. This group is comprised of the Senior Officials group on Disability, a number of stakeholder groups, the National Disability Authority as well as the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Irish Business and Employers Confederation.

Other important laws and policies include:

The [Equal Status Act 2000](#) outlaws discrimination against disabled people in accessing goods and services, accommodation and education.

[The Employment Equality Act 1998](#) and [The Equality Act 2004](#) cover nine protected grounds against discrimination, one of which is disability. The Acts covers all issues



related to employment, including: advertising; equal pay; access to employment; vocational training and work experience; and terms and conditions of employment. Employees in both the public and private sector are covered.

The most recent social partnership agreement, [Towards 2016](#), came into effect in 2006 and runs for a period of 10 years to 2016. The agreement sets out a number of long term goals for people with disabilities, for example, that every person with a disability would, in conformity with their needs and abilities, have access to appropriate care, health, education, employment and training and social services.

The [Mental Health Act 2001](#) reformed the existing law on involuntary admission to psychiatric hospitals of people suffering from mental disorders, including those with a significant intellectual disability, as well as providing for the independent review of involuntary admission of such persons.

The [Health Act 2007](#) provides for a new system of inspection and registration for residential centres for people with disabilities.

The [National Report on Strategies for Social Protection and Social Inclusion](#) identifies measures for increasing the numbers of people with disabilities in employment. Also relevant is the [National Employment Reform Programme](#) and the National Council for Special Education's [Implementation Report for the EPSEN Act 2004](#).

Facts and figures

Data on population:

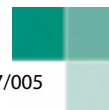
The [2006 Census of Population](#) indicated that 9.3% of the population or 393,8000 persons reported a disability. 62% of these persons had more than one disability.

The [National Disability Survey 2006](#) adopted a broader range of disabilities than provided for in the Census, resulting in a total population estimate of 18.5% for persons with a disability. The nine disability types for the purposes of the National Disability Survey are seeing, hearing, speech, mobility and dexterity, memory and concentrating, intellectual and learning, emotional, psychological and mental health, pain and breathing. Males accounted for 48% of those with a disability, while 52% were female. While 11% of those with a disability fell within the 0-17 age group, 36% of people with a disability were aged over 65.

Data on employment:

According to the [2006 Census of Population](#), the number of people with disabilities who are in employment in relation to the total number of people in employment is 4%. 21.6% of those with a disability aged 15 and over were in employment compared with 57.2% of all persons in this age group. ([Equality in Ireland 2007 Report - CSO Publication](#))

The Central Statistic's Office carried out research on Disability in the labour force in the second quarter of 2002 and again in 2004. The 2004 survey found that just over 37% (110,800) of all persons aged 15 to 64 with a disability or health problem



indicated that they were in employment compared with an overall rate of 63.8% for the total population in the same age category.

The 2004 research indicated that persons reporting a disability or health problem worked on average 34.9 hours a week, compared to 36.8 hours a week for the total population in employment in the same age category. ([Quarterly National Household Survey on Disability in the Labour Force](#))

Data on education:

The 2006 Census revealed that persons with a disability were less likely to have third level education than the overall population across all age groups. In the 25-44 age group, 28.3% of persons with a disability had completed third level education compared to 42.9% of all persons in that age group. ([Equality in Ireland 2007 Report - CSO Publication](#))

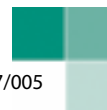
A joint report from the National Disability Authority and the Equality Authority on [Disability and Social Inclusion in Ireland](#) (2005) provided statistical analysis of a 2001 Economic and Social Research Institute Living in Ireland Survey and the special module on disability included with the 2002 Quarterly National Household Survey. The 2001 Survey revealed that 49.6% of those reporting chronic illness or disability had no formal educational qualifications, significantly higher than the rest of the adult population, 20% of whom had no formal qualifications.

The 2002 Survey which provided data for those in the 15-64 age group revealed that 41.9% of those with chronic illness or disability had no qualifications, compared with 17% for those with no illness or disability. While only 22% of those with illness or disability indicated that they had a third level qualification, 34.3% of the rest of the working age population had such a qualification.

An [AHEAD](#) survey carried out in 2003 in which approximately half of all second level schools in the country took part, reported that 99% of these schools had students enrolled with one disability or more. The type of disability that was most prevalent was a specific learning disability (35% of schools). Only 4% of the schools in the survey reported having a child with a physical disability.

Data on accessibility:

[Part M of the Building Regulations 2001](#) provides for Access for People with Disabilities requiring that adequate provision be made for people with disabilities for access and use of buildings, sanitary conveniences and audience or spectator facilities. A 2005 [Review of the Effectiveness of Part M](#) conducted by the National Disability Authority surveyed 110 people with experience of disability. While 54% of respondents believed that the building regulations made a difference to accessibility of non-residential buildings, 68% felt that the regulations were not being enforced. The Review also included a survey of forty-eight single one off houses around the country to determine the rate of compliance with the regulations. Only eleven were noted as having level entrances, indicating a compliance rate of only 24%. Of fourteen housing schemes observed, a 64% compliance rate was recorded.



In relation to access to transport, a National Disability Authority report on [How Far to Equality?](#), measuring how equally people with disabilities are included in Irish society, stated that two thirds of adults with disabilities are unable to access public transport, compared to 28% of non-disabled adults. Furthermore, just under half of adults with disabilities drive a car regularly compared to about three quarters of non-disabled people.

Data on poverty and incomes:

A joint report from the National Disability Authority and Equality Authority [Disability and Social Inclusion in Ireland](#) (2005) provided statistical analysis of the 2001 ESRI Living in Ireland Survey. This survey revealed that the average weekly pay for employees with chronic illness or disability was €367.66 compared with €387.66 for those with no chronic illness or disability. The disparity in income was more severe for females, with those women reporting a chronic illness or disability earning €25 per week less on average than other women. For men, there was effectively no difference in average weekly earnings between those with a chronic illness or disability and those without.

Again in relation to hourly earnings, the Survey found that for men there was little difference in average hourly earnings between those reporting a chronic illness or disability and other employees in the sample. For women, those reporting a chronic illness or disability actually earned more per hour on average, about €1.25 more per hour, than other employees.

The 2007 CSO [Survey on Income and Living Conditions in Ireland](#) reported that persons who were unemployed or unable to work due to disability had one of the highest at risk of poverty rates at 37%, compared with 6.7% for people at work. The [CSO Statistical Yearbook of Ireland 2008](#) reported that households in which the principle economic status of the head of the household was ill or disabled, had a risk of poverty rate of 44.4%.

Data on attitudes:

In 2007 the National Disability Authority reported the findings of its research on [Public Attitudes to Disability in Ireland](#).

When asked without prompting what illnesses, conditions or disabilities the term 'people with disabilities' referred to, 86% of respondents mentioned 'physical disability'. Next most frequently mentioned was 'intellectual or learning disability' by 54% of respondents and this was followed by mental health difficulty by 43%. 61% of respondents agreed that it was society which disables people by creating barriers, with only 45% of respondents feeling that people with disabilities were treated fairly in Irish society.

52% of respondents thought people with disabilities did not receive equal opportunities in terms of education. In relation to whether children with disabilities



should attend the same schools as children without disabilities, the highest level of acceptance at 75% was for those that had physical disabilities. The lowest level of acceptance was for mental health difficulties with only 36% of respondents agreeing that they should be in the same schools as children with disabilities.

71% of respondents thought people with disabilities do not receive equal opportunities in terms of employment, with 32% thinking that employers were most willing to employ people with physical disabilities. Only 7% of respondents however thought that employers would be willing to hire people with mental health difficulties.

34% of respondents were aware of the National Disability Authority, an increase from only 12% in 2001, while 22% of respondents were aware of the Disability Act 2005.

Data on public spending:

In 2007 Disability Benefit accounted for 755.3 million of Social Welfare expenditure, Disability allowance for 901.1 million and the Blind Person's Pension for 15 million. The number of recipients of Illness, Disability and Caring Payments rose by 54% between 1999 and 2007.

([Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services 2007](#))

Social protection

Key features of the national system include (including adapted items from the [MISSOC](#) database December 2008):

Disability benefits

In 2007, 264,890 people were in receipt of Social Welfare payments under the Illness, Disability and Caring programme. This constituted 25% of the weekly Social Welfare payments. Of these, 70,404 were in receipt of Disability Benefit, 89,048 were in receipt of Disability Allowance and 1,474 were in receipt of the Blind Person's Pension. ([Statistical Information on Social Welfare Services 2007](#)).

The [Department of Social and Family Affairs](#) outlines the rules applying to qualifying for disability allowance, illness benefit and the blind pension.

To qualify for disability allowance, you must have an injury, disease or illness, or have a physical or learning disability that has continued or is expected to continue for at least one year and causes you to be substantially restricted in doing work that would otherwise be suitable for a person of your age, experience and qualifications.

To qualify for illness benefit (previously disability benefit), you must be unable to work due to illness and have made the required number of pay related social insurance (PRSI) contributions while working.

To qualify for the blind pension, you must be impaired to such an extent that you cannot perform any work for which eyesight is essential or you cannot continue in your ordinary occupation due to poor sight.



A full overview of benefits available to people who are sick or have a disability is available from the [Citizens Information website](#).

Rehabilitation and re-training

The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment has overall responsibility in Ireland for the provision of vocational training and employment services for people with disabilities. Responsibility for the delivery of these services rests with [FAS](#). FAS provides a number of employment supports specifically for people with disabilities, including a Wage Subsidy Scheme and job interview interpreter grants. FAS also operates a [Supported Employment Programme](#) to facilitate and support the integration of people with disabilities who are 'job ready' into paid employment.

Also relevant are:

The [Irish Association of Supported Employment](#) - a national voluntary organisation with the aim of promoting and developing supported employment throughout Ireland.

The [Workway](#) project - a joint IBEC (Irish Business and Employers Confederation) and ICTU (Irish Congress of Trade Unions) initiative to promote the employment of people with disabilities in the private sector.

The Department of Health and Children has responsibility for rehabilitative training (training that is not linked to the labour force) and sheltered work. Responsibility for the delivery of these services rests with the Health Service Executive ([HSE](#)). In its [Annual Report for 2008](#) the HSE reported that 6,937 persons per month were in sheltered work, and 2,808 per month were in rehabilitation training

Preferential employment and quotas

Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 requires public bodies to ensure, unless there is good reason to the contrary, that at least 3% of staff employed are people with disabilities. A [2007 National Disability Association Report](#) indicates that 51.3% of public sector bodies had achieved or exceeded the statutory minimum target for employing staff with a disability. The best performing parts of the public sector were the Government Departments of which 87.5% have achieved or exceeded the target.

Long-term support and care

The 2007 National Physical and Sensory Disability Database Committee Annual Report based on records from 27,185 people with disabilities revealed that 86.7% of them lived with family members, 9.1% lived alone and 2.4% lived in full time residential services.

The HSE and voluntary organisations may provide long-term residential care for people with disabilities who are unable to live at home. Care may be provided in a residential centre or in community homes with house parents and other supports. Some people with disabilities are in public hospitals or in private nursing homes.



Some people with disabilities are in psychiatric hospitals but it is accepted that this is not appropriate and there is an ongoing programme to provide more appropriate placements for this group.

The 2007 Annual Report of the National Intellectual Disability Database Committee reported that the 329, or 1.3% of people with an intellectual disability are accommodated in psychiatric hospitals.

[Information on Health Services for People with Intellectual, Physical or Sensory Disabilities - citizensinformation.ie](#)

The HSE also provides funding through the [Centre for Independent Living](#) for Personal Assistants for persons with disabilities. Personal Assistants assist the Leader (persons with a disability) in order to help them achieve independent living.

There are also a significant number of service providers for those with disabilities in Ireland. While the obligation to provide health services to persons with disabilities rests with the State, most of these services are provided by not for profit organisations in contractual relations with the government. Some of these organisations are:

The [Irish Wheelchair Association](#) – founded in 1960 by a small group of wheelchair users, the IWA has gone on to become an important provider of services to people with limited mobility in Ireland.

[DeafHear.ie](#) has a national network of resource centres providing a range of accessible services to deaf and hard of hearing people and their families.

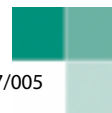
[KARE](#) - provides services to children and adults with intellectual disabilities throughout Kildare, East Offaly and West Wicklow.

[Enable Ireland](#) – provide services for people with disabilities their families from Personal Assistants to Speech and Language Therapy.

The [National Council for the Blind](#) – is a not for profit charitable organisation which provides support and service nationwide to people experiencing sight loss. The [Disability Federation of Ireland](#) is the national support organisation and advocate for voluntary disability organisations in Ireland who provides services to people with disabilities and disabling conditions.

The [National Federation of Voluntary Bodies](#) is the national umbrella organisation for voluntary/non-statutory agencies who provide direct services to people with intellectual disability in Ireland.

A number of the above organisations also provide advocacy services to people with disabilities, alongside dedicated advocacy providers such as:



The [Irish Advocacy Network](#) – provides advocacy services in the area of mental health.

The [Citizens Information Board](#) – funds regional advocacy workers. Information providers advocate in relation to difficulties with access to social welfare, housing, health and employment.

The [Irish Association of Advocates](#) – a representative organisation for people who act as advocates