

The Disabled Person's Organisation (DPO) Network

Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Tourism, Culture, Arts, Sport and Media

Inclusion in Sport

21st June 2023

Dear Chairperson, Deputies and Senators, the DPO Network welcomes the opportunity to be here today. The DPO Network is an Irish alliance of Disabled People and their organisations (five DPOs) who have joined together as we have a common interest in the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Ireland.

The five DPO member organisations of the DPO Network 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 is committed to the human rights and social model of disability which says that the exclusion, inequality, and discrimination that disabled people experience is not the consequence of our impairments but a result of the economic, cultural, social, and political barriers which are created and persist in society.

Barriers to Inclusion in Sport

A recent report from Active Disability Ireland (formerly Cara Sports Inclusion Ireland) carried out research in 2022 and will shortly publish their findings which include:

- 82% of disabled people said physical activity was a priority
- 76% say that they have a right to be involved in sport
- 66% say they face barriers to participation

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- 73% say they do not have enough support to become active

These are stark figures and clearly show that disabled people face multiple barriers to inclusion in sport.

Disabled people have the same motivations to be involved in sport and physical activity, they want to stay fit and strong, they recognise that activity is good for mental health and that it creates social opportunities.

Yet disabled people face barriers others do not. These range from a lack of accessible facilities and equipment, to a lack of disability awareness, limited access to relevant information and prohibitive costs.

In addition to a lack of support structures, equipment and information, disabled people also face negative attitudes when attempting to get involved in sport. This can be seen as an expression of a medicalised view of disabilities and is a symptom of a lack of disability awareness training in sports organisations, schools, gyms and communities.

Disabled people do not have access to resources and information that show how they can be involved in sport and activity, either at home or in a sports setting. This leads to a lack of confidence which is a barrier to involvement. In addition, sports organisations do not advertise when events are inclusive and ensure that the information itself is presented in accessible formats.

Accessibility at sports is a problem with most general sporting equipment is not selected with inclusion in mind or indeed, designed based on the principles of Universal Design. The cost of specialised equipment or personal assistance needed for disabled people creates a financial barrier to involvement.

Sport in UNCRPD

Article 30 of the UNCRPD says that Government must recognise the right of persons with disabilities to take part on an equal basis with others in cultural life, recreation and sport.

Among other things Article 30 calls on the Government:

- To encourage and promote the participation of disabled people in mainstream sporting activities at all levels
- To ensure that disabled people have the opportunity to organise, develop and participate in disability-specific sport
- To encourage appropriate instruction, training and resources on an equal basis with others
- To ensure that disabled people have access to sporting, venues
- To ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure and sporting activities, including those activities in the school system
- To ensure that disabled people with disabilities have access to services from those involved in the organisation of sporting activities.

Irish Deaf Society Submission

One of our members, the Irish Deaf Society made a submission to the Committee on 18th May. This submission has more detailed information in relation to language barriers, the importance of Irish Sign Language communications and interpretation, Deaf awareness training, the Sign Language Interpreting Service Voucher Scheme, and calling for government support for the Deaf Olympics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

We call for the development of a long-term strategy to deliver on Ireland's obligations under Article 30 of UNCRPD to achieve the following recommendations:

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- To create positive attitudes to inclusion through education and training including disability awareness training including Deaf awareness training.
- To improve accessible transport infrastructure for access to sporting organisations and settings
- To develop a strategy to increase inclusive opportunities for disabled people and ensure that information about them is widely communicated in an accessible manner.
- To support and promote the development of accessible facilities, environments and equipment
- To engage early with disabled children to ensure positive and inclusive sporting activities and environments.