



The DPO Network's Response to the Disability Matters Oireachtas Committee Consultation

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

March 2024

Question: Are you a DPO or a Self-Advocate? Please provide as much detail as you can on why you are considered a DPO or Self Advocate?

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 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.

The DPO Network aims to:

- advocate for the Government to:
 - recognize DPOs
 - meaningfully engage with DPOs.
- represent our members' concerns and issues through:
 - strategic analysis

- policy recommendations.
- build Network members' skills through:
 - networking
 - training
 - peer support
 - partnership.
- Lobby for the following for DPO's in Ireland:
 - acknowledgement
 - resourcing
 - capacity building.

The DPO Network is committed to the human rights and social model of disability. This model says that the exclusion, inequality, and discrimination that disabled people experience is not because of a person's disability but due to economic, cultural, social, and political barriers that continue in society.

The DPO Network is underpinned by a set of values which guide what we do and how we do it. These are: Accessibility; Honesty; Recognition of multiple identities; Leadership; Participation; Partnership; Respect; and Trust.

Question: What do you think is the role of DPOs, and self-advocacy is under the UNCRPD?

DPOs are independent, collective spaces for disabled people to bring about social and systemic change

DPOs have an overarching focus on promoting the rights of disabled people and defend the equal rights of disabled people in all aspects of life of political, community, economic and cultural life. The work of DPOs is based on a stated commitment to the human rights and social models of disability and the UN CRPD.

The DPO Network defines a DPO as:

An organisation that is governed, led and directed by disabled people and in which disabled people make up a clear majority at all decision-making levels of the organisation.

DPOs have the collective, shared expertise of lived experience. This gives them a unique viewpoint to speak on the needs and issues of disabled people. DPOs foster the empowerment of disabled people by making sure they take part in the decision-making processes that affect their lives. This can lead to better quality of life outcomes.

The specific functions of DPOs can vary from group to group. However, the general roles of DPOs include the following:

- campaigning together for social change;
- capacity building and provision of technical guidance on disability inclusion;
- education and awareness-raising within society;
- collective empowerment of disabled people through the development of shared analysis and strategic policy work;
- facilitating access to information and in some cases offer membership support services;
- monitoring human rights/acting as a 'watchdog' on disabled people's rights;
- collaboration with other DPOs, civil society organisations and State bodies;
- partnership building;
- providing peer support to members;
- participation in policy analysis and development on a local, national and international level and in measuring its impact.
- representing and mobilising organisations of disabled people.

Question: What do you think is important to be on the agenda for an event like this?

DPOs play a strategic role in overseeing how the UN CRPD is put into practice which is why it is so important to actively engage with and contribute to the work of the Disability Matters Oireachtas Committee. DPOs like the DPO Network have a role to play in identifying and 'bringing to the table' the key issues and challenges experienced by disabled people in Ireland.

Question: What ways are available to you to provide your feedback and participate in bringing about change in relation to human rights in your local area?

As an alliance comprising 5 national representative organisations, the DPO Network engages with the State through participation in a range of policy fora and by making policy submissions on relevant issues. .

It is essential to note that State engagement structures should require representation from recognised DPOs and not individuals. Representatives from DPOs are accountable to their organisations and are informed by strategic policy objectives whereas individuals can only bring their own issues to the table and are not held to account by anyone.

Question: What are the key issues that you believe are affecting your human rights and having equal opportunities like everyone else in your local area?

Research on the lived experience of disabled people undertaken by DPOs in 2021 and feedback from DPO Network members identified the following key issues:

- Lack of access to ways and supports to counter discrimination;
- Presence of structural, environmental and attitudinal barriers to participation;
- Lack of supports such as Personal Assistance and communication supports such as ISL interpretation;
- Inaccessible public services including transport and employment supports;
- Limited access to employment opportunities and mainstream employment supports;
- Lack of access and right to independent living;
- Lack of access to timely and appropriate healthcare;
- Limited access to education and healthcare supports for children and young people;
- Lack of recognition, supports and services to disabled women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination; and
- Lack of access to justice.

From a DPO perspective there are several important issues that impact on the realisation of disabled people's rights.

- Lack of recognised and resourced local DPOs for disabled people to collectively inform local decision-making structures.
- The need to build the capacity of DPOs to effectively engage with the State, state bodies and local decision-making structures.
- The need for facilities and procedures related to decision-making and consultation processes to be accessible to DPOs.
- Lack of reasonable accommodations, such as personal assistance services (PAS) and information in accessible formats such as Irish Sign Language interpretation, screen reader assistive technology, Easy to Read and plain English, to support collective engagement.
- Lack of ringfenced funding to enable DPOs to develop and support the collective capacity of their membership to engage and actively take part in policy discussions, consultations and decision-making processes.
- Lack of understanding of the clear obligation of the State and state bodies to engage and consult with DPOs in the development and implementation of legislation and policies as set out the CRPD (Art 4.3).

Question: What are the solutions that you believe would help make things better and that Government should be supporting?

Specific requirements to support DPOs in the collective realisation of disabled people's rights include:

1. Establishment of a national register of DPOs by the National Disability Authority (NDA), as the independent statutory body that provides evidence-based advice and research to Government on disability policy and practice. This register of recognised DPOs should be informed by the definition of a DPO set out by the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in GC 7 and the DPO Network's position paper '*The role of Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs) in Ireland*'.
2. Design and implementation of a Co-creation Framework. Co-creation is a process whereby disabled people, through their representative DPOs, work in partnership with the State to develop, implement and monitor legislation, policies and programmes. This is an essential element in the realisation of the CRPD.
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. Having access to adequate core funding and resources to support their operations, organisational development and advocacy priorities will enable DPOs perform their role(s) with independence and adequate capacity.
6. Provision of support to DPO to develop technical and organisational capacity. Such support will allow DPOs to acquire skills and to meaningfully engage in local level and national policy development and monitoring. This should include targeted support to foster representation of the most marginalised and underrepresented groups of disabled people.

Question: Would you like to be considered to attend this event in person or would you like to attend this event online?

Both

Question: Would you like to speak at this event?

Yes