



## **Planning for Inclusive Communities**

Submission to the Joint Committee on Disability Matters

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### **About the DPO Network**

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.

The five DPO member organisations are:

- 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 and is led and informed by the active input of disabled people. Their input provides a unique opportunity for an analysis of the issues faced by disabled people that truly covers all areas of society.

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.

In this submission, the DPO Network uses identity first language (IFL). IFL refers to a person with their condition listed first, for example, a Deaf person or an autistic person and is used by disabled people to affirm the importance of disability experience and identity.

## Introduction

Planning for inclusive communities matters. It is based on the understanding that humans are diverse with individual and collective intersecting identities and that genuine inclusion requires transformative action.

The DPO Network welcomes the opportunity to provide the JCDM with information on planning for inclusive communities. Our focus in this submission is on the importance and centrality of DPO engagement in the creation of inclusive communities.

Community inclusion is about the meaningful participation of disabled people in all their diversity. It is about valuing individuals, giving equal access and opportunity to all and removing discrimination and other barriers to involvement. It is also about supporting disabled people to move beyond having a presence in community to actively contributing to community.

Planning for inclusive and non-disabling communities requires an acknowledgement of the social model of disability. This model recognises that societal attitudes, practices and structures, rather than an individual's impairment, can restrict and prevent disabled people from participation, social inclusion and equality.

In addition, planning for inclusion requires that disabled people, through their representative DPOs, play a central role in creating inclusive communities. Disabled people are first and foremost members of their local communities and given their lived experience and expertise have much to contribute.

In this submission we discuss the following:

1. The role of DPOs in making community inclusion a reality
2. Local Area Co-ordination: A Model for Community Inclusion
3. Good practice in planning for inclusive communities: key considerations
4. Summary recommendations for planning for inclusion

Our submission is informed by a number of frameworks on disability inclusion. This includes the UN CRPD which promotes disability inclusion and tackles discrimination faced by disabled people.<sup>1</sup> The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with its principle of "Leave No One Behind" recognises the rights and inclusion of disabled people across several of the Sustainable Development Goals.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> General Assembly (2007). Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, A/RES/61/106.

<sup>2</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/2030agenda>

## **The role of DPOs in making community inclusion a reality**

*Planning for inclusive communities can only be effective when disabled people are actively involved in the design of 'community'.*

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

They have an overarching focus on promoting the rights of disabled people and defending 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.<sup>3</sup>

This gives them a unique viewpoint to speak on the collective strategic needs and issues of disabled people and as such are essential to the creation of inclusive communities.

This involvement of disabled people is clearly set out in the UN CRPD, which, through articles 4 and 33, ensures the principle of 'nothing about us without us'.<sup>4</sup>

(See the Role of DPOs in Ireland for additional information <https://dponetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-Role-of-DPOs-in-Ireland-2023-Digital.pdf>)

What must happen for DPOs to effectively engage in the creation of inclusive communities?

1. Embed co-creation with DPOs as the key practice in all planning processes

Co-creation is a collaborative process involving many stakeholders, working in equal partnership, in the design, implementation and review of policies, systems and services with a few to improving them. It acknowledges and upholds the direct collective experiences of disabled people, engaging in dialogue, to bring about positive change. Co-creation is more than consultation and is a process that engages DPOs as representative organisations rather than individuals.

We believe that co-creation not only leads to more inclusive policies, it is more cost effective by developing strategic priorities that disabled people want delivered.

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<sup>3</sup>The Role of Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs) in Ireland, 2023 <https://dponetwork.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/The-Role-of-DPOs-in-Ireland-2023-Digital.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> General Comment No. 7 (2018) on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organisations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention. Adopted on 9 November 2018. UN Doc CRPD. C/GC/7.

DPOs can be effective strategic partners to deliver social services that not only are based on the collective needs of disabled people, but that recognise that not every issue can be dealt with simultaneously. DPOs are best placed to this support prioritisation of issues identified by disabled people.

#### Suggested actions

- inclusion of DPOs representatives on Housing & Disability Steering Committees in all local authorities.
- development and implementation of co-creation engagement strategies as part of Local Economic and Community Plans (LECPs) as per Pobal guidelines on engaging marginalised communities.  
(See [https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2023/04/Guide-to-Incl.-Community-Engagement\\_2nd-Edition\\_Oct23\\_Final-2-1.pdf](https://www.pobal.ie/app/uploads/2023/04/Guide-to-Incl.-Community-Engagement_2nd-Edition_Oct23_Final-2-1.pdf))
- establishment of advisory/policy committees at national and local authority levels to enable disabled people to collectively identify issues and engage with policy makers and planners.
- ensure PPNs, LCDCs and other planning/consultative structures include representation from DPOs rather than individual disabled people.
- Exploration of the value of the Local Area Co-ordination (LAC) as a model of community inclusion. (*See text box on p.5 below*)

2. Recognise and resource local DPOs as the key structure with which to engage disabled people on all aspects of inclusive community life.

Where DPOs do not exist locally, engage with national DPOs to guide and provide expertise. The establishment of local DPOs is a process that requires time and resources. A planned, sustained funding approach to resourcing the development of local DPOs through the principles of community development is needed. The emergence of DPOs is a relatively recent phenomenon, especially at a local level. Similar investment has been made to support the development of local autonomous community groups for socially excluded communities (Travellers, migrants etc.) in order to effectively engage in policy formation and development.

3. Involve DPOs in the development/improvement of inclusive data collection methodologies and disaggregation.

Having access to relevant data supports good planning.

DPOs have a valuable role to play in the production and use of disability-inclusive data. Lack of data can be a large obstacle in disability inclusive policymaking and planning. Lack of data on disability also increases marginalisation and failure to address the challenges and discrimination encountered by disabled people. Both the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development have created a legal and policy push for better data on disabled people. Article 31 of the

Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) highlights the need to collect and disaggregate appropriate disability data and make them accessible to disabled people.<sup>5</sup>

### **Local Area Co-ordination: A Model for Community Inclusion**

Local Area Co-ordination is an approach to working with people, families and communities who experience exclusion. It was originally developed in Australia in the 1980s and has since been replicated in Scotland, Northern Ireland, England, Wales and New Zealand.

It is a system of community-based supports to disabled people whereby a local co-ordinator enables and supports disabled people (across impairment) to move beyond having a presence in the community to actively participating in the community and developing leadership roles. It is also about building the capacity of local community structures and focuses on reinforcing natural and community supports.

The vision of the LAC model is that disabled people will determine their own needs and goals, become leaders and advocates and live meaningful and happy lives in inclusive communities. The LAC approach brings together elements of personal advocacy, community development, capacity building and case management and is underpinned by the principles of self-determination, citizenship, rights and inclusion.

In 2015, under the Dormant Accounts Fund, the State piloted a number of LAC projects. One of these was called Community Inclusion, Capacity and Development: A Community Development Approach to Local Area Co-ordination. This was developed by DESSA, the Disability Equality Specialist Support Agency in 2016/17. The project was delivered in County Leitrim in collaboration with a range of civil society organisations including Leitrim Local Development Company and a local DPO, Leitrim Disability Equality Network.

The project was hugely successful in creating real opportunities for social inclusion and in building local community capacity. (See <https://www.dessa.ie/projects/dessa-lac-project/> for more information).

For the LAC model to successfully support community inclusion it should be based on community development principles, operate in mainstream communities (rather than disability services) and actively involve DPOs.

In 2015 the National Disability Authority developed a briefing paper on LACs - <https://nda.ie/publications/local-area-coordination-nda-briefing-paper>.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-31-statistics-and-data-collection.html>

## **Good practice in planning for inclusive communities: Key considerations**

1. Accessibility and universal design - ensure that the physical environment, transportation, information and communications is accessible to all. A barrier free environment for everyone is very important to disability-inclusive planning because a community accessible for disabled people is one accessible to all. Universal Design involves designing products and environments so that they can be used by the widest range of people possible without need for adaptation or specialised design. Universal Design evolved from Accessible Design but goes further by recognising that there is a wide spectrum of human abilities.

2. Co-creation – engage DPOs as partners in the planning, design and implementation of policies and programmes. This process will bring new perspectives, foster collaborations between civil society, DPOs and public services and bring trust and transparency to the planning process.

3. A twin-track approach to inclusion – this approach recognises the need for a) providing disability-specific initiatives to support the empowerment and inclusion of disabled people on a timeline-specific phased basis to support the inclusion of disabled people into mainstream services; and b) integrating disability-sensitive measures into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all planning, policies and programmes. In other words, mainstreaming. This approach can only lead to successful outcomes for disabled people, if emphasis is put on both tracks, as they complement each other.

5. Intersectionality – it is vital to take an intersectional approach to planning for inclusive communities. Understanding how disability, gender and other identities intersect is key to identifying and dismantling root causes of discrimination for disabled women, men, girls and boys and also other marginalised groups.

6. Competent workforce - build capacity on disability inclusion to create a competent and knowledgeable workforce. Capacity building should be led by DPOs with a commitment from statutory bodies to proactively engage in social model-led Disability Equality training with DPOs.

(See ILMI's Strategies for Change <https://ilmi.ie/strategies-for-change/> and DESSA's eLearning <https://www.dessa.ie/an-introduction-to-disability-equality-inclusion-and-human-rights-elearning-course/>)

7. Leadership – effective planning for inclusive communities requires leadership and commitment.

8. Multi sectoral approach – engage diverse stakeholders. Disability is a cross-cutting issue that requires collaboration across sectors (health, education, local government etc) to address barriers to inclusion and offer solutions in a holistic way.

### **Summary recommendations for planning for inclusive communities**

1. Invest in and sustain local DPOs to inform local planning for inclusive communities.
2. Recognise the role of DPOs as representative collective voice of disabled people.
3. Establish effective policy-making forums to collaborate with disabled people, through their representative DPOs, in the development and implementation of effective policies locally and nationally.
4. Move beyond consultation to co-creation by embedding co-creation and the principle of 'Nothing About Us Without Us' in State and local government's decision-making processes.
5. Involve DPOs in the development/improvement of inclusive data collection methodologies and disaggregation.
6. Adopt a twin-track approach to planning.
7. Introduce an intersectional approach to planning.
8. Create a workforce knowledgeable and competent on disability, inclusion and equality.