

How Ireland can lead for inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families

Briefing for the Irish Presidency of the Council of the European Union

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Introduction

Ireland will lead the Council of the European Union from July to December 2026.

[Inclusion Europe](#) represents 20 million people with intellectual disabilities and their families across Europe.

[Inclusion Ireland](#) is a national advocacy organisation for people with developmental and intellectual disabilities and their families, and a member of Inclusion Europe.

This briefing will highlight:

- What Ireland needs to do for rights and inclusion during their Presidency
- What the situation in Ireland is, including good developments to be built on at the European level and what they can learn from other countries.

Action to be taken as the EU Presidency

In Europe, people with intellectual disabilities still face major challenges that prevent them from being independent and included. Their families often face isolation.

This is what [the Inclusion indicators](#) show every year.

Ireland should lead the European Union (EU) to progress toward full rights and inclusion.

So, this is what we want Ireland to do during their EU Presidency:

Assistive technology

Ireland has announced that it will focus on assistive technology for people with disabilities.

This is good news because assistive technologies are important to support people to live independently and be included in the community.

The condition, though, is that it is affordable and accessible.

The **EU Presidency Conference on Assistive Technology** in October 2026 in Dublin represents an opportunity to address this topic.

There are many areas that we recommend Ireland bring forward during this conference:

- **Education:** how assistive technology can be used to support inclusive education, academic skills development and communication.
- **Right to decide:** how it will be used to support the right to decide, for example, by helping communicate and understand will and preferences, especially for people with higher support needs.
- **Independent Living:** how assistive technology can be employed to access community-based support and housing, as well as support in using services like banking, healthcare, or transport.
- **Employment:** how assistive technology will be used to support access to work, adaptations of workplaces, and access to lifelong learning.

Participation

During the 6 months of EU Presidency, it is important that the Irish government involves people with intellectual disabilities and their families in activities.

Their voices are necessary to build inclusive policies that reflect their realities.

This concerns both:

- **Participation in policymaking:** self-advocates and their families have a say in policymaking discussions related to disability rights, but not exclusively those; they need to have a say in anything related to the community they live in.
- **Participation in events:** they should be able to participate and engage. This includes that events are accessible, including easy-to-read information, understandable discussions, and accessible venues.

EU disability policies

There are 5 policy priorities that we recommend Ireland lead on:

1. **The EU Disability Strategy:** Ireland should encourage Member States to take part in the EU Alliance on Independent Living. It aims to provide tools to support independent living and clear plans for closing institutions in the EU.
2. **The next EU Budget 2028-2035:** The next EU long-term budget should lead efforts to secure EU funding for the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities instead of using it to build new institutions.
3. **Equality Directive:** there should be a push to adopt the directive, showing renewed commitment to prevent discrimination from happening in education, housing, healthcare, and other public services.
4. **Supported decision-making:** Ireland should encourage Member States to commit to a transition from substitute decision-making to supported decision-making across the EU.
5. **EU Semester:** EU countries must be required to share data on institutionalisation and create clear recommendations to improve deinstitutionalisation and community-based services.

What the Inclusion Indicators say about Ireland

The [Inclusion Indicators](#) 2025 report scores 33 countries to see how they are doing on rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families.

This is what the report shows for Ireland:

Ireland (average score)

5.8

Out of 10

Right to decide and right to vote

Legal capacity can be partially removed, but it does not limit the right to vote or to stand for elections. There is a person with an intellectual disability elected to a national committee. There is some easy-to-read information to make voting more accessible.

7.3

Right to live independently and to be included in the community

Most adults with intellectual disabilities live in smaller institutions and few adults live in small care homes. There is a national plan to close institutions, but the process is slow.

5.7

Housing and support

Most adults with intellectual disabilities live with their family, few people live in their own place. Disability benefits go directly to the person with an intellectual disability. There is no mechanism to assess quality of services.

4.4

Education

Most children with intellectual disabilities go to special schools, few go to mainstream schools. There is no national strategy towards inclusive education.

4

Employment

Some people with intellectual disabilities have a job on the open labour market, most attend daycare and some stay at home. People risk losing part of disability benefits when they have a paid job. Some measures to make jobs accessible.

4.6

Healthcare

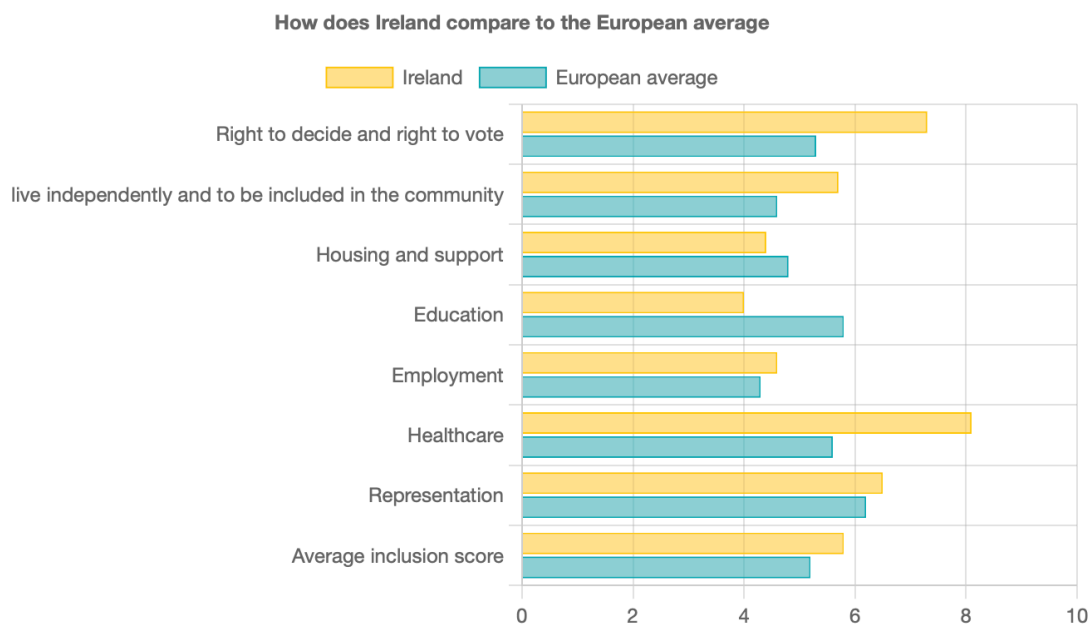
Most people with intellectual disabilities have access to healthcare. There are measures in place to make healthcare accessible, but staff are sometimes unaware about intellectual disabilities. People with intellectual disabilities cannot be forcibly sterilised.

8.1

Representation

People with intellectual disabilities are represented in the national cross-disability organisation, but there is no person with an intellectual disability on the board/council. Inclusion Ireland receives government funding for advocacy work.

6.5



More insights about the situation in Ireland

Rising poverty is a big concern

Many people with intellectual disabilities and their families face high costs in their lives that they struggle to cover.

These costs include housing, disability support, healthcare, etc.

Persons with disabilities spend between 207–€293 **more than non-disabled** people per week¹. For people with complex needs, this is 93% of their income².

Disability-related poverty rates are much higher than official figures suggest³.

The situation is **especially difficult for people with intellectual disabilities**.

- The maximum personal weekly rate of €254 for Disability Allowance is still below the national poverty line⁴.
- Working-aged people with intellectual disabilities have the lowest median income of any disability group at €12,260⁵, well below adequacy thresholds. The unemployment rate for people with intellectual disabilities is at 29%. This is one of the highest rates of any disability group⁶.

The current system discourages people from taking up paid work, as they can have their essential supports and benefits taken away.

¹ Adjusted for inflation by the [Disability Federation of Ireland in January 2026](#), the updated annual figures (€10,766–€15,221) equate to a current weekly cost of €207–€293.

² [Indecon International Research Economists \(7th December 2021\), The Cost of Disability in Ireland – Research Report, pgs.139 and 145](#)

³ [Doorley, K et al. \(13th March 2025\), Adjusting Estimates of Poverty for the Cost of Disability, pg.23](#)

⁴ In Ireland, the poverty line (defined as the "at-risk-of-poverty" threshold) is set at 60% of the national median equivalised disposable income. As of June 2026, based on the COS's [Survey on Income and Living Conditions \(11th March 2026\)](#), this threshold stands at €31,767 per year (or approximately €610 per week) for a single adult.

⁵ [Central Statistics Office \(16th December 2025\), Analysis of People Experiencing Long-Lasting Conditions or Difficulties 2022–2024](#)

⁶ [National Disability Authority \(November 2024\), Briefing Report for NDA Factsheet: Employment and Disability, pg.11](#)

The *1,000 Voices* national survey shows that **two-thirds** of adults with intellectual disabilities **felt their welfare payments did not cover their everyday needs**⁷.

“People with disabilities should be able to work as much as they want without losing their social welfare benefits”.

- Tamara Byrne, a self-advocate from Ireland.

The poverty of adults with intellectual disabilities also has an **important negative impact on their families**. Nearly 80% of families reported paying out-of-pocket for therapies, transport, and basic supports. This adds pressure on their household budget⁸.

These pressures are felt more by people with higher support needs, or families where a parent or carer is getting older and worrying about the future. This happens even more to women, who are more often the unpaid carers when services are not available or insufficient.

The **National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030** identifies the extra **costs of disability as a priority for the government**. This a good step that needs to be followed by concrete actions.

Right to decide and right to vote

People with intellectual disabilities are often left out of deciding about their lives⁹.

⁷ [Inclusion Ireland \(20th June 2025\), 1,000 Voices, One Message: Invest in Our Rights – Pre-Budget Submission 2026, pg.5](#)

⁸ *Ibid*, pg.5

⁶ [Department of Children, Disability and Equality \(3rd September 2025\), National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025–2030, pg.52](#)

⁷ [Department of Social Protection \(23rd March 2026\), Guidance Note for the Public Consultation on the Cost of Disability](#)

⁹ [Respect Our Rights consultation](#) Inclusion Ireland’s Respect Our Rights consultation (November 2021; pg. 24 and 54)

The Assisted Decision-Making Act 2015⁸ replaced substitute decision-making with supported decision-making¹⁰. **This is real progress¹¹.** However, **the implementation is not the same everywhere.** Many service providers still do not understand¹²real life¹³.

In February 2026, the deadline for moving people out of the substitutive decision-making was pushed to October 2027. This means that over 1,600 adults who live in institutions now must wait longer and ¹⁴.

One big obstacle to the right to decide is the lack of information in Easy-to-read and Easy-to-understand formats.¹⁵

Right to live independently and to be included in the community

In Ireland, **there are still many people with intellectual disabilities living in segregated institutions.**

Since 2011, the government has promised to close large institutions. The number of institutions decreased from 2,914 in 2019 to 1,941 by the end of 2025¹⁶. This shows some real but slow progress¹⁷.

However, **community-based day services often do not meet people's needs.**

- Waiting lists are long¹⁸.
- Opening hours are not flexible.
- There are not enough local services.

¹⁰ (Department of Children, Disability and Equality, February 2026

¹¹ [The Assisted Decision-Making \(Capacity\) Act 2015 \(ADMCA\)](#)

¹³ [Casey, et al., August 2023](#)

¹⁴ [Law Society of Ireland Gazette, February 2026](#)

¹⁵ [Respect Our Rights consultation](#) Inclusion Ireland's Respect Our Rights consultation (November 2021; pg. 24 and 54)

¹⁶ [Health Information and Quality Authority, January 2026](#)

¹⁷ The figures are also not broken down by disability type.

¹⁸ Nearly 2,000 adults cite intellectual disability as their primary housing need, marking an 18% increase in one year ([Housing Agency, Summary of Social Housing Assessments Report 2024](#), pg.36). Two major bottlenecks are down to inadequate coordination at local authority level and insufficient funding from national government.

People with intellectual disabilities often don't have personal assistance, home support or suitable housing, and they feel excluded from the community¹⁹.

Ireland does not have a legal right to community living written into its Constitution or laws. The number of residential places for people with disabilities has risen to 8,911²⁰. This is mostly happening because of emergency funding for families with older carers, not because of long-term planning based on people's rights.

In many of these settings, the support provided is service-led, not person-led. Residents often have little say over their daily schedules, who they live with or how they connect with their local community.

The consequences of this gap are starkest for those still living in institutional settings. Around 1,200 people with an intellectual disability remain in HSE-designated congregated settings²¹, and another 1,209 under 65 live in nursing homes – most over age 50²². These are adults living in settings intended for older people, often decades before they would otherwise need them, because the State has not provided the community alternatives it committed to. The scale of institutional provision still permitted to operate is wider still: HIQA records nearly 2,000 disabled people in congregated arrangements across the wider system as of January 2026²³. The UN Committee's List of Issues report for Ireland signals concern at the pace of change, seeking clear timelines and independent measures of progress on deinstitutionalisation²⁴.

Housing and Support

It is estimated that a²⁵?

40% of people had never heard of personalised budgets²⁶.

¹⁹ Inclusion Ireland, November 2021; pgs.31–32

²⁰ [Dáil Éireann Debate](#), March 2026

²¹ [Tully, G \(12th March 2026\), Letter to Richard Boyd Barrett TD regarding Parliamentary Questions 17976/26 –17982/26 and 18197/26](#)

²² [Brady, J \(26th February 2026\), 'Written Answer 454: Nursing Homes,' Dáil Éireann Debate](#)

²³ [Colfer, F \(28th January 2026\), Opening statement by HIQA to Joint Committee on Disability Matters](#)

²⁴ [UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(15th April 2026\), List of issues in relation to the initial report of Ireland, CRPD/C/IRL/Q/1, para.17\(a\)](#)

²⁵ [Before We Die Campaign](#);

²⁶ [Inclusion Ireland, June 2025, "1000 Voices" Campaign](#).

Separate research shows that the number of social housing applicants with an intellectual disability rose from 4% to 6% between 2016 and 2021²⁷; yet Budget 2026 covers only a fraction of the growing need. Many adults left waiting are those whose ageing parents can no longer provide support.

Education

Many disabled and neurodivergent students are in 'special classes' within mainstream schools.

- About **240,000 children and young people – or approximately 25% of the student population** – in Ireland get this support in mainstream schools²⁸. There, they can get specialist support while being part of the school community.

This is because the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act 2004 has never been fully commenced. The proposal is about a gradual progress toward inclusive education, but still keeps special schools as part of a range of school options. As of June 2026, the government has yet to indicate a firm legislative timetable for when it will bridge gaps identified within its statutory review of the 2004 Act²⁹.

This also happens because there is no clear ban on seclusion. This happens despite the recommendations from the UN and ongoing calls from Inclusion Ireland and other disability groups³⁰.

- **Young people with intellectual disabilities do not get enough support after school**³¹. Many go to daycare services instead of jobs or further or higher education.

²⁷ Bairéad, C and Norris, M (22nd August 2025), [Demographic and Socio-Economic Profile of Applicants for Social Housing and Recipients of Housing Assistance Payment](#), pg.72

²⁸ Ní Raghallaigh, S (24th February 2026), 'Written Answer 525: Special Educational Needs,' [Dáil Éireann Debate](#)

²⁹ Cummins, J (25th March 2026), 'Written Answer 74: Special Educational Needs,' [Dáil Éireann Debate](#)

³⁰ [Inclusion Ireland and AslAm](#), January 2025

³¹ [Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities](#)

Employment

Ireland has one of the biggest disability employment gaps in the EU (38.6%).

People with intellectual disabilities have one of the highest unemployment rates of any disability group in Ireland (29%)³².

People with intellectual disabilities can lose benefits if they accept paid work. This includes the Disability Allowance, a medical card, and free travel.

There have been recent changes:

- A rule that allowed lower pay for disabled workers was removed³³.
- The Work and Access Scheme now streamline previous accommodation grants into a single framework, offering up to €12,500 annually for job coaches and tools, and introducing an inclusive weekly minimum of 8 hours. However, it lacks a statutory right to independent appeal and enforces rigid support-hour caps, which create funding cliffs for workers with higher support needs.
- The Wage Subsidy Scheme was restructured in April 2026. The base employer subsidy is now €7.50 per hour and will increase to €10.00 per hour to incentivise inclusive hiring. However, the scheme continues to exclude workers with an intellectual disability – and others – by maintaining a strict 15-hour weekly minimum, which prevents participation in flexible, low-hour ‘micro-jobs’.

So far, though, these changes have not improved employment.

There is still no nationally supported employment program. Important supports are missing (job coaching, transition from school to work, information about job outcomes). Without these supports, progress in employment will stay slow and unequal.

³² [Central Statistics Office](#), September 2023)

³³ [Joint Committee on Children and Equality](#), October 2025; pgs.22–23

Healthcare

Families often wait months or even years for the therapies their child needs after diagnosis.

This is often because there is no legal right to get disability services after³⁴ Assessment of Need³⁵. The provision of such services remains uneven across the country. The government's response to the service demand has not been fulfilled, leaving many families without adequate support.

Many children with intellectual disabilities cannot get mental health support. This is because there are not enough resources for mental health support for people with intellectual and psychosocial disabilities³⁵. By the end of 2025, 815 children with an intellectual disability across the country were waiting to be seen by CAMHS-ID – up 66% in a year and almost five times higher over two years³⁶. The service has only 10 of the 16 specialist teams the HSE's Model of Services says are needed³⁷ and is funded at about 43% of the staff it requires³⁸.

Representation

The National Advocacy Service for Adults does not have enough money or staff to meet demand. It got some extra money in Budget 2026, but this does not help with the demand created by the ADMCA.

There is also no legal right to an advocacy service for disabled children in Ireland. This means families do not have a clear or reliable way to challenge decisions about their child's care³⁹.

³⁴ [Assessment of Need \(Inclusion Ireland, June 2025; pg.8\)](#). June 2025; pg.8

³⁵ [Families for CAMHS Reform, June 2024; pg.82](#). The national plan said there should be 16 **AMHS-ID** teams. By late 2025, only about 1 in 4 had enough staff. This means many children with intellectual disabilities in Ireland cannot get mental health support.

³⁶ [Brennan, C \(20th May 2026\)](#), 'Children with disabilities 'being failed twice' by lack of services and system 'that doesn't recognise their needs', [Irish Examiner](#)

³⁷ [Finnerty, S. \(26th July 2023\) Independent Review of the provision of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services \(CAMHS\) in the State by the Inspector of Mental Health Services, pg.81](#)

³⁸ [Brennan, C \(13th April 2026\)](#), 'Services for children with intellectual disabilities funded at half needed for functioning service' [Irish Examiner](#)

³⁹ [University of Galway, February 2025; pg.4\)](#)

Public consultations and government policies are often not accessible to people with intellectual disabilities. Local authorities also do not have clear ways to work with DPOs⁴⁰.

No person with an intellectual disability has been elected to public office as of March 2026. Disabled candidates face many barriers, such as high campaign costs, a lack of Easy-to-Read political information, and the "stigma of incapacity"⁴¹.

What Ireland can do to lead on rights and inclusion

Ireland should lead the way in the EU by supporting the inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families in Ireland.

Right to decide and right to vote

Ireland managed to adopt a new law to transition to supported decision-making. This is a good example for Europe.

Ireland should continue to lead in Europe by:

- implementing supported decision-making by properly funding the Decision Support Service and training professionals and families on the right to decide.
- making voting and public debate accessible for people with intellectual disabilities is a good example of participative democracy.

Right to live independently and to be included in the community

In Ireland, all large care institutions have been shut down. This is good because in many other European countries, this is not the case.

But there is still a long way to go when it comes to ensuring independent living in the community.

⁴⁰ [Disability Federation of Ireland, February 2025; pgs.11 and 105](#)

⁴¹ [Research from Trinity College Dublin and the University of Galway \(February 2025\)](#)

Ireland should lead the way in Europe by:

- guaranteeing community support and housing, through providing enough funding and resources in general.
- adopt a right to community services and a home in the constitution. Having this right in the constitution would demonstrate a commitment to human rights.

Housing

As in many other European countries, there are still many adults with intellectual disabilities relying on their families. Many of them are becoming old.

Ireland should lead the way in Europe by:

- ensuring that the law on affordable housing prioritises the construction of housing for people with intellectual disabilities, instead of building more residential places.
- promoting the collection of data on housing and homelessness by disability type. These numbers are very important to track those who need targeted help and create supported programs.
- providing support to families who take care of their loved ones with intellectual disabilities.

Education

Ireland has made efforts to include children with intellectual disabilities in mainstream schools. This is good. But efforts should not end there.

Now it is time to lead in Europe on making mainstream schools truly inclusive by:

- ensuring resources for inclusive education, including funding and training for school staff, as well as a feedback system⁴².
- developing an Inclusive Education plan with a clear budget and timeline.
- banning seclusion in education.

⁴² (Inclusion Ireland, Pre-Budget Submission 2026; pg.25).

Employment

Like in many other European countries, unemployment of people with intellectual disabilities is one of the most critical points in Ireland.

Ireland should lead the way in Europe by:

- making sure people with disabilities do not lose their benefits if they take up paid work.
- setting up a supported employment program, with data by disability type, to better address support needs.
- promoting supported internships and ‘Easy-to-Read’ tools on access to jobs.

Health

As in many other European countries, access to healthcare for people with intellectual disabilities and their families is a major problem, especially for families in poverty and new parents.

Ireland should lead in Europe by:

- implementing a family-centred model for child disability services can be implemented to support families after an Assessment of Need.
- creating guidelines for training staff in mainstream healthcare about intellectual disabilities. This would ensure everyone can access healthcare information autonomously, especially regarding reproductive health.

Representation

As in other European Countries, there is a national advocacy service. But these services must be properly supported so people with intellectual disabilities can voice their concerns and input into decision-making.

Ireland should lead in Europe by:

- continue to support advocacy and self-advocacy and help them cope with new advocacy demands.
- make participation in decision-making more accessible by making public consultations and political information understandable. Participation is the pillar of democracy⁴³.

⁴³ NHRS Pillar 5 commitments on participation and co-production (Commitment 22)

Abbreviations List

ADMCA – Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Act 2015

AON – Assessment of Need

CAMHS-ID – Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services for Intellectual Disabilities

CDNT – Children’s Disability Network Teams

CSO – Central Statistics Office

DCDE - Department of Children, Disability and Equality

DHLGH - Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage

DPO – Disabled Persons’ Organisation

DSP – Department of Social Protection

EPSEN – Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs

HIQA – Health and Information Quality Authority

HSE – Health Service Executive

SSHA – Summary of Social Housing Assessments

UNCRPD – United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

How Ireland can lead on inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities and their families

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