

EVENT REPORT



1. Event Summary

This event was the fourth in a series of five events organised by The Wheel with support from the European Commission Representation in Ireland. The aim of the series is to engage civil society, and by extension the communities they represent, with the Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE). The topic of this particular event was Disability Inclusion and it was delivered in collaboration with the Disability Federation of Ireland, an organisation that advocates for the full and equal inclusion of people with disabilities and disabling conditions in all aspects of their lives.

The event featured an introduction to the CoFoE with a demonstration of how to engage with the CoFoE online platform and input from John Dolan, CEO of Disability Federation of Ireland, on disability inclusion and the EU. Facilitated breakout rooms allowed participants to discuss their key recommendations for the EU on disability inclusion and accessibility. All ideas were collected by breakout room moderators and shared via the Mentimeter app in a plenary session. John Dolan closed out the event with a summary of the recommendations and The Wheel encouraged participants to continue to engage with the Conference on the Future of Europe by registering on the digital platform and sharing their ideas about other topics of importance to them.

2. Participants

There were 28 participants comprised of people working with the disability community on a professional basis, those people living with a disability themselves, and citizens with a general interest in the topic.

3. Statement from Disability Federation of Ireland

The EU plays a precious and benign role in securing and maintaining fundamental freedoms such as democracy and the rule of law for its citizens. This is vital for its disabled citizens. Participation in initiatives like the Conference on the Future of Europe is so important.

4. Statement from The Wheel

The Conference on the Future of Europe (CoFoE) is a year-long EU-wide project to seek citizens' views about Europe's future challenges and priorities on a variety of topics, including issues facing the disability movement. The Wheel's goal with this event series is to facilitate Irish citizens and civil society playing a more participative role in shaping future developments across Europe and thereby influencing the decisions that directly affect them.

Through participation in EU initiatives like the Conference on the Future of Europe, civil society organisations can make their voices and the voices of their beneficiaries heard at EU level and have a chance to make real change. If it proves to be successful, the Conference's online platform might become a permanent public consultation tool – there's no time like the present to get familiar with it and do our part to make sure the future EU is an inclusive one.

5. Main topics and recommendations discussed during the workshops

The following ideas and recommendations were contributed by the participants in the breakout rooms and via the Mentimeter app.

- **Employment & Livelihood**
 - Employment pathways are limited for higher support needs
 - Flexible working and work from home arrangements should be continued post-pandemic
 - Right to remote work needed as it has equalled the playing field in terms of access to work
 - European Central Bank to set up a job guarantee programme
 - Need better support/recognition for carers – 50% of carers live in consistent poverty – family carers should not be the default position as this compromises personal relationships
 - The data is there to show the connection between poverty and disability
 - People need a basic income to live on – reflects the nature of service provision in the country.
- **Mental Health**
 - Children with disabilities are disproportionately represented as those who have suffered sexual abuse – more funding needs to be allocated to help these children and their families recover from trauma
 - Take a more holistic approach – don't just look at the physical side of disability – there's also mental health.
- **Awareness, Information and Service Provision**
 - Awareness raising about who the disability community advocates are
 - Centralised support and less fragmented treatment – having a protocol of a “one stop shop” in each country outlining supports and services
 - Shared learning between countries about best practice models would be good

- Gaining access to resources and services for people with disabilities is very difficult – it is very inconvenient and there are lots of forms; there is not one place you can go to gain access
 - There's no census of who is living with what and where - this would help with service provision – more info could be collected in the national census
 - Champions of disabled persons from Ireland in the EU need to be in the headlines
 - Develop a blueprint for learning from other countries' best practice models – gather the data to inform best structures
 - Interventions to help people recover from COVID
 - More strategic thinking – be proactive, early intervention is key – this will save money and ensure that funding has the most impact
 - Dedicated person or officer within services to help bring the conversation to the table
 - Divide and conquer ethos in terms of service provision
 - Need to join voices together in the disability community
 - General public unaware of the issues people with disabilities have – not coming forward to their local representatives to advocate for people
 - Joined up thinking between departments – reflect on it from a disabled person's perspective
 - Failure of the sector to lobby and failure of political influence – missing from the discussion
 - Access to information and data is very important (how many people are living with what disabilities, where, etc). This helps to make a case for funding and services
 - We rely on families and civil society groups to provide supports and services, but there's no funding. There needs to be more equality and better collaboration between the state and civil society groups to deliver better services AND make sure people know what's available.
- **Housing**
 - Lack of meaningful and responsible engagement from Local Authorities on housing
 - We need to build lifetime homes and communities where you can live throughout your life regardless of age/disability.
- **Government and Legal Systems**
 - Focus on UNCPRD and passing of the optional protocol to show Ireland as a leader
 - Government should have clear responsibilities, targets for impact, and a timeframe – this is to prevent tokenistic involvement and easy gestures and effect actual investment into services
 - If Government aren't going to finance the values they espouse, they are all talk
 - Hold the Irish government to account to actually deliver on promises and impose penalties like they do with climate goals
 - The commitment to equality is one of four priorities for our President and such a transparent development is long overdue
 - Needs to be a coherent and systematic approach to ensure that no further incoherence or violations take place
 - Total disregard and incoherence on mental wellbeing - to hear that the members of the Judiciary were due to receive training on mental wellbeing recently was very hard to hear

- There needs to be clear and unambiguous direction to the courts and the public legal system in particular to ensure that no human or civil rights violations are perpetrated or facilitated
 - The public system is continuing to undermine this sector through an unprofessional, incoherent, and bullish approach – this is further compounded with a gender bias through the courts
 - There are clear variations between public and private legal practice
 - There is a need for a public apology for a number of failings and violations due to a lack of credible governance and oversights by numerous stakeholders over many years
 - Promote more inter sector cooperation between civil society groups and Irish government, e.g. mandate multiannual funding so CSOs can plan etc.
 - Legislation on the rights and funding to deliver on them
 - Ireland is currently in a strong position to undertake public expenditure relating to the implementation of the UNCRPD due to the suspension of EU fiscal limits till 2023 and the availability of close to zero-interest loans. We should increase our national ambition and seek to make the actions and investments as early and as effectively as possible. We need to ensure that measures to advance implementation of the UNCRPD are reflected in Ireland's plans for strategic use of key EU funds, including the Recovery and Resilience Funding, Just Transition Fund and Brexit Fund. It is important that no projects supported by these funds slow UNCRPD implementation.
- **Accessibility**
 - Standards should be set up to increase accessibility of public space across the EU
 - Conduct access auditing for built environments
 - Increased awareness campaigns and training on public duty for accessibility
 - Movement towards using Plain English
 - How we use language can make things more accessible – we need to be better
 - Greater understanding of what access is and what universal design is
 - Access officer is often a role that's tagged on to someone's job description – they don't have the training required to appropriately assist people
 - Stronger conditions about people being able to complain about accessibility – they only implement what is practical – often loopholes for businesses work around.
- **Social Inclusion**
 - The tendency to “other” people is strong – increased visibility of people who have a different lived experience is essential to “normalise” the human condition
 - A number of stakeholders, including those nominated to represent this sector, need to take a long look at themselves with respect to social inclusion
 - See the person, not the disability
 - Listen to people with disabilities
 - There should be a framework for supported decision making
 - A stronger role for advocates – people's voices need to be heard
 - We need national direction on social inclusion from the government
 - There need to be incentives in the area of health and education to support people with disabilities – direction from government to various agencies is needed
 - People with disabilities need to be represented everywhere from the very beginning (school, workplace, community)
 - Kids should be educated about people with disabilities at a very young age

- More patient participation in policy design, research, innovation, designing supports and programmes
 - Representation of the full scope of people living with disabilities (rural, urban, gender, etc.)
 - You should have equal access no matter where you live
 - Development of personal assistant services which are focused on the care an individual wants as opposed to care being prescribed for the individual – this approach allows people greater autonomy over their lives
 - Be conscious of who is around the table and whose voice is missing and asking ourselves how we add those voices.
- **EU Funding**
 - Compassionate application process for help and increased funding
 - LEADER funding is not working – the odds are stacked against disabled people
 - Filter down the EU funding options to DPOs in accessible formats and/or with supports to apply
 - Personalised/individualised funding – usually given to organisations but given directly to the person would enhance the person’s autonomy
 - Make information and access to grants and funding more accessible.

6. Follow-up

This report was created based on the ideas and recommendations shared by the participants in the breakout rooms and jointly collected during the event. This report will be uploaded and shared on the CoFoE online platform and sent to all participants to encourage them to continue to contribute their ideas to the platform.