



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission



IHREC
Monitoring Mechanism
Independent Monitoring Mechanism
under the United Nations Convention on
the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Mr Keith Leonard
Chair of the National Emergency Coordination Group
National Directorate for Fire and Emergency Management
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage,
Custom House,
Dublin 1,
D01 W6X0

Sent via email: Keith.Leonard@housing.gov.ie

21 March 2025

Dear Mr Leonard,

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission is the Independent Monitoring Mechanism for Ireland under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ('UNCRPD IMM'). Following the ratification of the UNCRPD, in 2018 we established a Disability Advisory Committee ('DAC'), comprised primarily of disabled people, under Section 18 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. The role of the DAC is:

- › to assist and advise the Commission on matters related to its function of keeping under review the adequacy and effectiveness of law and practice in the State relating to the protection of people with disabilities; and
- › to advise the Commission on the fulfilment of its independent monitoring role under the UNCRPD.

The DAC has recently raised serious concerns regarding the impact that recent climate-related emergencies have had on disabled people and have highlighted the critical importance of ensuring disabled people participate at all levels in domestic emergency response.

Following the aftermath of the recent storm Éowyn, our DAC described to us the particular impacts experienced by disabled people including lengthy or intermittent electricity power



cuts affecting charging of power chairs and breathing machines; access to basic items such as food and cooking facilities; and impacts related to isolation, including virtual, telephone and in-person disconnection due to the impacts of the storm, and in particular noting the reduction in in-person check-ins through personal assistance or other HSE-funded services. The DAC expressed concerns regarding the impacts on health, safety and freedom of movement and further expressed concerns regarding increased detrimental impacts on disabled people living in residential and congregated settings, due to weather related staff shortages. The DAC noted that there appeared to be inconsistency in response taken by of service providers between different areas, based on their information and observations. The DAC noted inaccessibility of some of the communication regarding the storm and its possible impacts. In particular, it was observed that Irish Sign Language interpretation was not provided for all news briefings before the storm, and members expressed concern that this risks delays in provision of vital information to deaf people.

The DAC stressed the detrimental impact of under-representation of disabled people in emergency planning, and its linkages to invisibility of disabled people and their particular experiences and requirements in emergency response. It was recommended that disabled people should be represented on the national coordinating structures for emergency planning and response and recognised as knowledge bearers and not just service users.

We have previously highlighted the very limited participation of disabled people and Disabled Persons Organisations in emergency response, for example in relation to oversight of the Covid-19 response. With this in mind, IHREC would invite you to consider the importance of **meaningful and sustainable participation** of disabled people in emergency planning mitigation and response, and to put in place mechanisms to ensure that disabled people are represented in emergency planning and response mechanisms, if they are not already.

The Commission recently provided a submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities regarding the drafting of a General Comment on Article 29 of the Convention, the rights to participate in public and political life. It is anticipated that the General Comment, once finalised, will provide the Committee's interpretation of the



Coimisiún na hÉireann um Chearta
an Duine agus Comhionannas
Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission



IHREC
Monitoring Mechanism
Independent Monitoring Mechanism
under the United Nations Convention on
the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

provisions of Article 29, and provide guidance to States parties regarding their obligations and how to fulfil them. Our submission is informed by our monitoring of the UNCRPD in Ireland, which draws on expertise and on-the-ground insights of a wide range of rights-holders and civil society actors, including our Disability Advisory Committee. I attach the submission for your reference.

Our team would welcome an opportunity to discuss these issues further. Dr. Karen Murphy can be contacted at karen.murphy@ihrec.ie or at 087 955 6014.

In line with our publications policy, this correspondence will be published on our website. This policy only pertains to IHREC-issued communications, and not to correspondence received by us.

Yours sincerely

Deirdre Malone

Director