

Joint Committee on Disability Matters: ‘UNCRPD at a local level – Community Development’

Opening statement by
Anna Shakespeare, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Pobal

Wednesday 10 April 2024

1. Introduction

Good evening, thank you Cathaoirleach for the opportunity to present to you here today.

My name is Anna Shakespeare, I am the Chief Executive of Pobal, joined by my colleagues Delia Goodman, National Manager of Better Start and Paul Skinnader, Director of Social Inclusion and Employment Operations

Pobal works on behalf of Government to support communities and local organisations toward achieving social inclusion and community development. We provide grant management and support services to 41 programmes in the areas of Social Inclusion and Employment, and Early Years and Young People. We administer these programmes on behalf of seven Government Departments¹ and a number of EU bodies.

Pobal's vision is to create an equal and inclusive society in partnership with Government and communities. As an agency working with disadvantaged communities nationwide, including individuals and families with a disability², we are grateful for this opportunity to consider the role local structures can play in ensuring participation and inclusion of persons with disabilities.

As time is limited, I will focus on a few key areas of opportunity grounded in our programmatic data.

2. Articles 24 & 7 on education and children

Regarding **Articles 24 & 7 on education and children**, Pobal recognises that ensuring full participation of people with disabilities in their communities necessitates person-centred and inclusive services from childhood onwards. The right to education is a prerequisite for the exercise of many other rights in the UNCRPD.

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)³ has, since its inception in 2016, sought to provide an inclusive environment and ensure that all children with disabilities can benefit from quality early learning and care in the community alongside their peers.

One factor which has been critical to the success of AIM is that it takes a child-centred, needs-based approach without requirement for medical diagnosis. This has

¹ Department of Rural and Community Development; Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth; Department of Social Protection; Department of Health/HSE, Department of Justice, Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications and Department of Transport.

² We use the terms persons with disabilities to reflect the language of the UNCRPD, however, we recognise that many people in disability rights movement in Ireland prefer 'disabled people' as it aligns with the social and human rights model of disability.

³ AIM is a programme of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) which Pobal administers.

supported the inclusion and meaningful participation of children with disabilities in mainstream pre-school, enabling timely targeted supports to almost 30,000 children to date.

An independent evaluation has demonstrated its effectiveness, notwithstanding areas for improvement,⁴ and the programme will be extended in September 2024.

Programme insight: Shifting away from diagnosis to child-centred and needs-based support has been critical for widening access and creating inclusive-spaces for children at local level.

3. Articles 19 & 30 related to independent living, community inclusion and participation in cultural life

Moving to **Articles 19 & 30 related to independent living, community inclusion and participation in cultural life**, community development work is vital for ensuring that our communities are liveable and accessible spaces for everyone, including people with disabilities.⁵ Programmes like the Social Inclusion and Community Activation Programme (SICAP) and Community Services Programme (CSP) are important levers for inclusion at a local level, and can provide a solid foundation for more targeted work in a given locality or sector.

SICAP is designed to ensure partnership between local communities, relevant stakeholders and state agencies. 421 community groups supported by SICAP worked with people with disabilities in the programme period of 2018-2023. Alongside this, approximately 11,000 SICAP beneficiaries were people with disabilities. The supports provided are needs-based and include items such as day-to-day money management skills, creativity workshops and employment and training. For new communities, SICAP also has played an important signposting role as they navigate local disability services.

Programme insight: Community-based social inclusion programmes provide a solid foundation for more targeted work, and in themselves, play a valuable role in supporting the independence of persons with disabilities, enabling opportunity to develop knowledge and skills and

⁴ Robinson, D., Gowers, S.J., Codina, G., Artess, J., Antonio Delgado Fuentes, M., Mycock, K., Qureshi, S., Shepherd, R., and Ni Luanaigh, I., (2022). End of Year Three Evaluation of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

⁵ NDA (2022) A review of approaches used to create liveable communities to attain full participation and inclusion for disabled people

4. Article 27 on work and employment

Finally, regarding **Article 27 on work and employment**, Ireland has one of the lowest rates of employment for people with disabilities in the EU and the EU's largest disability employment gap.⁶

Targeted employability support programmes such as Ability and forthcoming Workability⁷ are critical for creating opportunities for disabled people to progress into education and training, while also enhancing communication skills and confidence. Crucially, they are also effective for enhancing employers' understanding of the benefits associated with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, and embedding good practice.⁸

Programme insight: Targeted community-based employability support programmes designed in partnership with people with disabilities, can redress labour market inequalities, support personal skills development, and foster more inclusive workplace cultures.

5. Conclusion

In sum, there are specific approaches which can support the implementation of the UNCRPD at a local level. We know that broader social inclusion programmes play a role in building capacity and inclusion at a local level, however, alongside these, there is a need for targeted and tailored supports.

Partnership is central to developing community-based inclusion – the approaches outlined above are underpinned by local collaboration between all stakeholders, community, voluntary and statutory, and with consultation and implementation with people with disabilities as key. This collaboration enables significant synergies between programmes at the local level and can be an important lever for UNCRPD implementation.⁹

Finally, it is critical to consider the disproportionate levels of disabilities across communities in Ireland. Using the Pobal HP Deprivation Index and CSO data, we have examined disability rates nationwide, and those living in very disadvantaged areas are twice as likely to have a disability as compared to their peers in very

⁶ European Disability Forum (2023) The Right to Work: The employment situation of persons with disabilities in Europe, European Human Rights Report Issue 7

⁷ The Ability Programme, a nationwide programme ran from 2018-2021 supporting 2,195 young people with disabilities. It was co-funded under the European Social Fund (ESF) Programme for Employability, Inclusion and Learning (PEIL) Operational Programme and the Department of Social Protection and Pobal was the programme administrator. Workability is a successor programme led by the DSP and administered by Pobal.

⁸ See the independent evaluation of Ability by Quality Matters.

⁹ For example, a third of the successful applicants for Workability are Local Development Company's implementing SICAP.

affluent areas.¹⁰ While this finding is stark, it provides an opportunity for place based, targeted interventions and resources to be directed to where they will be most effective.

Pobal is committed to working with Government, state agencies and communities nationwide to ensure full equality and inclusion for people with disabilities. I am happy to take any questions from the Committee in relation to the information presented today.

¹⁰ Pobal is developing a research briefing on this which we will be able to share with the Committee in due course.



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