



# Poverty AND Disability

**A public-friendly guide to economic inequality and the cost of disability.**



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Employment Affairs and Social Protection



INCLUSION IRELAND

# Poverty AND Disability

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The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) recognises that people with disabilities often live with poverty.

The UNCRPD says that there is a need to look at the impact that poverty has on people with disabilities.

### **The Irish Government defines poverty as when:**

“(a person’s) income and resources (material, cultural and social) are so unfair as to preclude them from having a standard of living that is regarded as acceptable by Irish society generally. As a result of unfair income and resources people may be excluded and marginalised from participating in activities that are considered the norm for other people in society”.

There is a survey called the “Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC)” which measures income and poverty in Ireland. The SILC says that 35% of people with disabilities are at risk of poverty, more than double that of the population as a whole.

People with disabilities are more likely to be in consistent poverty. Consistent poverty is where a person has an income of less than 60% of the middle income in Ireland and is deprived of two or more essential goods or services.

Consistent poverty affects almost one in four people with disabilities compared with one in twelve of the general population.

### **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)**

Article 28 of the UNCRPD says persons with disabilities have a right to an adequate standard of living, including adequate food, clothing and housing.

Article 28 also says that there is a right to continuous improvement of living conditions.

Once Ireland ratifies the Convention, the State will be monitored for its performance including the right to an adequate standard of living. Ireland can learn from other countries on their experience, having ratified the UNCRPD.

## The UNCRPD in other countries

### United Kingdom

In August 2017, the UN Disability Committee reviewed the UK's compliance with the UNCRPD. They highlighted the need for action to eliminate the higher levels of poverty, particularly affecting children, women and members of black and ethnic minority communities with disabilities. The Committee was also concerned that austerity measures had a negative effect on people with disabilities.

### Canada

The Committee examined Canada's compliance with the UNCRPD in May 2017. They reported concerns about poverty, particularly "the intersecting nature of discrimination against women and girls with disabilities, indigenous persons with disabilities and migrant persons with disabilities, who face heightened risk of ... poverty".

The Committee raised concerns that nearly 15% of persons with disabilities live in poverty or extreme poverty in Canada. As we know, the number in Ireland is closer to 25% and likely to cause grave concern for the Committee were it to continue unaddressed.

### New Zealand

New Zealand, which is a country of similar population and national income to Ireland, was examined by the Committee in 2014. They found that children with disabilities were more likely to be poor than other children. The Committee recommended that a review of disability related costs be undertaken to ensure people with disabilities, and children and families in particular, have enough money.

## The economic cost of disability

Economic costs associated with having a disability mean that people with disabilities are more likely to experience poverty and social exclusion than others.

There are two elements to cost of disability. Firstly, people with disabilities are less likely to attend further education or be in employment. If they do have a job, they are likely to have lower earnings. This 'earnings handicap' is the indirect cost of disability.

Secondly, people with disabilities generally have extra costs associated with having a disability; costs such as home adaptations, higher costs for energy and transport, higher medical costs and disability aids. These are the direct costs associated with disability.

Addressing cost of disability is an equality issue - people with disabilities have lower incomes than the population as a whole and have to spend more of their income to achieve the same standard of living as everyone else.

### **What are the extra costs?**

People with disabilities face extra costs including:

Things used by people with disabilities only, e.g. disability aids, home adaptations & therapeutic supports.

Things used by everyone but which cost more for people with disabilities, e.g. insurance or specialised clothing or footwear.

Things used by everyone but which people with disabilities use more of, e.g. energy or taxis (where accessible public transport is not available).

In Ireland, the direct economic cost of disability has been estimated at between €207 - €276 per week for the average household.

### **The indirect costs of disability**

- People with disabilities are less likely to attend further education and less likely to be in paid employment.
- If a person with a disability does have a job, they may be on a lower income. They may also have less opportunity to accumulate wealth.
- 1 in 3 people with disabilities of working age is in employment, compared to 2 in 3 of the general population.
- Only 17% of those with an intellectual disability are—in employment.
- 3% of people with intellectual disability are in open or supported employment.

Having a job helps people participate in their community and helps to combat other reasons for poverty and social exclusion. However, employment itself is not and should not be seen as the route out of poverty for all people with disabilities.

Some people with disabilities may not work or may not work in the future. Steps should be taken to ensure that all people with disabilities, regardless of their participation in the labour force, have an income sufficient to maintain a fair standard of living.

### **Ways of addressing the cost of disability**

An increase in social welfare payments such as Disability Allowance is often mentioned as a way to address the cost of disability. However, social welfare increases would not completely or fairly address the cost of disability.

An understanding of all of the causes of poverty and deprivation among people with disabilities is needed as well as approaches that involve, increasing income, reducing costs or both.

#### **England & Wales Example: Extra Costs Commission**

The Extra Costs Commission was an independent inquiry which explored the extra costs faced by disabled people and their families.

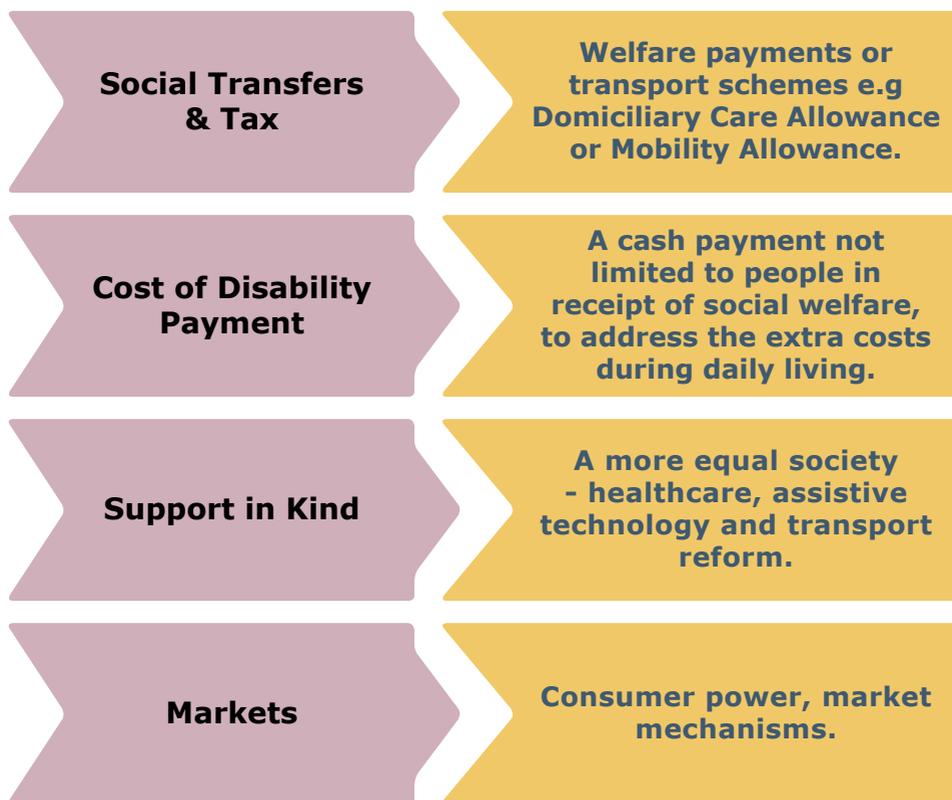
The Commission identified recommendations for disabled people and their families, disability organisations, businesses, regulators and government to drive down the additional costs of disability.

The report recommended that:

- Disabled people themselves should be 'bold and loud' and build consumer power.
- Disability organisations improve information and services to disabled people and businesses to allow them to drive down the extra costs of disability.
- Businesses should improve the customer experience of disabled people.
- Regulators and government should intervene where features of markets result in unfair extra costs for disabled people.

**Read more at <https://www.scope.org.uk/>**

## Ways to address the cost of disability



For more information see  
[www.inclusionireland.ie/costofdisability](http://www.inclusionireland.ie/costofdisability)

### Key references

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