# National Fiche – Ireland

## COVID-19 cases

On 31st August 2020, Ireland registered 1,519 COVID-19 confirmed deaths[[1]](#footnote-1) out of 1,777 deaths[[2]](#footnote-2) in a population of around 4.9 million people[[3]](#footnote-3).

Data on deaths and cases of COVID-19 was disaggregated by underlying health conditions[[4]](#footnote-4). Regarding persons with disabilities, the COVID-19 confirmed incident rate is 548 per 100,000 for persons with disabilities compared to 516 per 100,000 for persons with disabilities[[5]](#footnote-5).

The Irish Department of Health published a Mortality Census of Long-Term Residential Care Facilities based on data from 1 January – 19 April 2020. It indicated that out of 73 deaths in residential facilities for persons with disabilities, 16 were COVID-19 related. In nursing homes out of 3,243 deaths, 585 were COVID-19 related. In residential facilities for persons with mental health issues, 14 deaths out of 51 were related to COVID-19[[6]](#footnote-6).

## Emergency, lockdown, and confinement

Ireland did not declare a state of emergency but the authorities adopted the Health Bill 2020 (Preservation and Protection and other Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) on 19 March 2020[[7]](#footnote-7) to handle the COVID-19 pandemic.

From March 2020 to August 2020, Day centre for adults with disabilities were closed and disability-services were reduced. The Health Service Executive (HSE) developed a Framework for the Resumption of Adult Disability Day services which provided guidance for the re-opening of services[[8]](#footnote-8).

Inclusion Ireland reported the negative impact of the closure or suspension of services on the wellbeing, mental health and life of persons with disabilities and their families. The organisation called on the resumption of existing services and stressed that the COVID-19 situation was “an opportune time to progress on moving people out of institutions and congregated day services into community based, person focused services that support their individual needs”[[9]](#footnote-9).

In terms of exceptions for persons with disabilities during the lockdown, as of 20 September 2020 information could not be found.

## Involvement of organisations of persons with disabilities

During the COVID-19 crisis, the Disability Federation of Ireland (DFI) acted as representative of the disability interest and ensured that the needs of people with disabilities and disability services were included in COVID-19 responses. As such, the DFI is part of the National Public Health Emergency Team Vulnerable People (NPHET) Subgroup and the COVID-19 Advisory Group on Community Response in the Department of Rural and Community Development. The Federation also collaborated with the Health Service Executive Disability Services and engaged with Department of An Taoiseach (Government) and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform[[10]](#footnote-10). Inclusion Ireland also met with Ministers and Committees to raise awareness about the issues faced by persons with disabilities during the pandemic and submitted recommendations[[11]](#footnote-11).

Even with this involvement of the DFI, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission expressed concerns about the lack of participation of persons with disabilities and DPOs in the development of COVID-19 Response in its report on the impact of COVID-19 on people with disabilities and the response of the State[[12]](#footnote-12).

While acknowledging efforts of the State in mitigating some of these concerns in response to concerns raised by persons with disabilities and their representative organisations, the Commission regretted that the State did not take action for persons with disabilities from the beginning of the crisis. The Chief commissioner also deplored the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities due to “significant gaps and vulnerabilities in existing policy and services”[[13]](#footnote-13).

## Communications and announcement

Initially, neither the public health information on television nor the Health Service Executive’s website were available in Irish Sign language. It was only after awareness-raising efforts from the Deaf community to the Department of Health that sign language interpreters have been provided for briefings on COVID-19[[14]](#footnote-14).

The Health Services Executive’s website provided resources and information to support persons with disabilities and their families during the pandemic. Resources were available in easy-to-read and also through comic strip explaining the coronavirus situation and the process for testing. Easy-to-read resources for persons with intellectual disabilities developed by Inclusion Ireland were also available on HSE’s website. The website included diverse information including contact details of local HSE Disability service and helplines for family carers and persons with intellectual disability[[15]](#footnote-15).

## Institutions and closed settings

The COVID-19 management in care homes highlighted gaps in the governance of private nursing homes as acknowledged by the Chief of HSE[[16]](#footnote-16). If fact, 125 of the 167 institutions affected by COVID-19 deaths in Ireland were privately run or operated by voluntary groups[[17]](#footnote-17).

Regarding mental health facilities, the Mental Health Commission stressed the need for more clarity on public health guidance, staff isolation capacities and the testing of staff[[18]](#footnote-18).

Among several issues identified as reasons for the spread of the COVID-19 in nursing homes and residential care settings there was lack of personal protective equipment and understaffing which led to staff working after testing positive to the virus or staff working in more than one care facilitty or in care facilities and at the hospital[[19]](#footnote-19). The State Health service watchdog received 280 complaints about nursing homes in the first two months of the pandemic[[20]](#footnote-20).

## Health care

From March 2020 to May 2020, the Department of Health released three guidance documents on prioritisation in access to critical care. Following concerns raised by the representatives of persons with disabilities[[21]](#footnote-21) about the absence of disability in the two first documents, the third guidance document finally mentioned persons with disabilities. The guidance included that “people with physical and intellectual disability have equal rights to the highest attainable standards of health and to a high standard of healthcare”.

It appears on the Ethical considerations document that a combination of factors including frailty, the presence of co-morbidities and the type and severity of the patient’s illness are taken into account in triage decisions[[22]](#footnote-22).

## Social Protection

In July 2020, Inclusion Ireland made a submission to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social protection requesting support in the employment sector for persons with disabilities. The organisation also requested a cost for disability payment to support persons with disabilities expenses and extra costs due to disability. Inclusion Ireland called on the improvement in the accessibility of social protection payment procedures[[23]](#footnote-23).

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4. HPSC, Reports on underlying conditions in confirmed cases of COVID-19, 31 August 2020. As of 29 August 2020, out of 28,758 confirmed cases of COVID-19, 22,132 cases (77%) had data available on underlying medical conditions. There were 10,735 COVID-19 confirmed cases with an underlying medical condition. available at: <https://www.hpsc.ie/a-z/respiratory/coronavirus/novelcoronavirus/surveillance/underlyingconditionsreports/Underlying%20conditions%20summary_31082020.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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9. Inclusion Ireland, The impact of Covid-19 on people with intellectual disabilities and the disability sector, June 2020. Available at: <http://www.inclusionireland.ie/sites/default/files/attach/basic-page/1651/submission-oireachtas-committee-covid-19-response-final.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. DFI’s website, available at : <https://www.disability-federation.ie/covid-19/dfi-response/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See “Emergency, lockdown and confinement” and “Social Protection” sections [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. The Impact of COVID-19 on People with Disabilities, Submission by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission to the Oireachtas Special Committee on COVID-19 Response, June 2020. Available at: <https://www.ihrec.ie/app/uploads/2020/07/IHREC-Submission-The-Impact-of-COVID-19-on-People-with-Disabilites.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
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