



POST ELECTORAL EVENT REVIEW

Family and Care Referendums | 8 March 2024

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1. Foreword



The two referendums in March 2024 were the first electoral events since the establishment of An Coimisiún Toghcháin in February 2023. We made a decision to exercise our statutory power to prepare and publish a report on the administration of the referendums, and so advised the Department of Housing, Local Government & Heritage and the returning officers appointed in connection with these referendums.

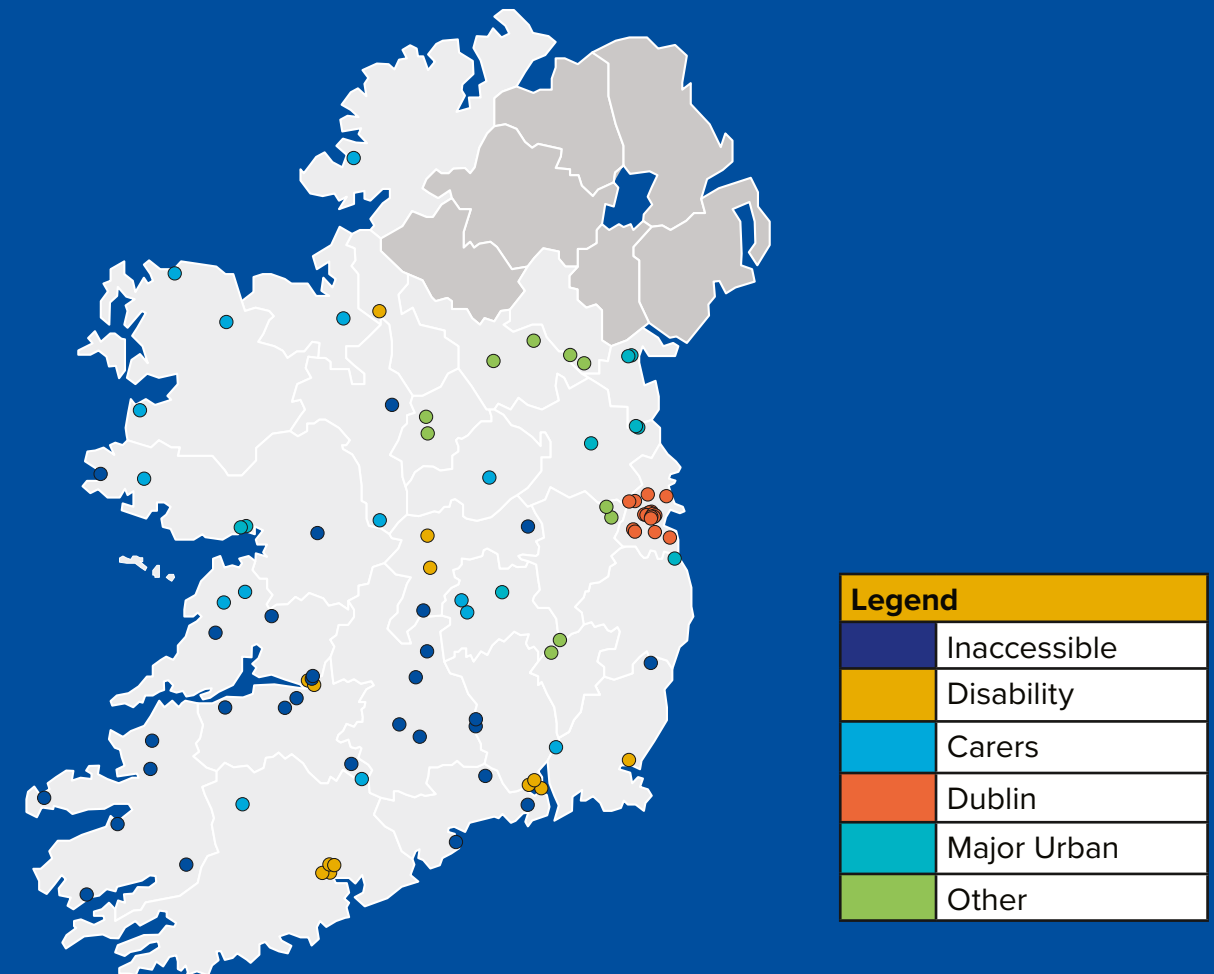
This report is the result of our observations and is prepared from an analysis of data collected by members of An Coimisiún and our staff at polling stations across the country.

The report is the first such report and a number of themes emerged. In particular, we express some concerns regarding the accessibility of some polling stations and explain why we consider that improvements are required if persons with disabilities are to fully exercise their constitutional right to vote, and to do so without hindrance or obstacle. We stress here that we did not conduct the type of observation that might be done by an engineer or other person with similar expertise, but did so as laypersons, all the while keeping in mind that voting should be facilitated in every way possible if true democratic engagement is to be achieved.

The report is detailed and is the first such report ever conducted in Ireland. The reader will see that in general the observations and comments are positive and encouraging, albeit we did not hesitate to point to shortcomings, many of which seem to be capable of easy remediation.

The experience of our observation teams was that the polling stations were in general well run, but more worthy of remark is the fact that the atmosphere generated was one of positive encouragement and enthusiasm by the election staff. It is not an exaggeration to say that in many stations the sense that something important was occurring was palpable.

The assistance afforded to every voter by the presiding officers and their staff was a matter of comment by every one of us. We observed that the exercise of the franchise was conducted as a community occasion. We met one presiding officer with 50 years' experience working with a young student who had worked in a polling station only once before.



The passing on of knowledge, experience and community spirit and enthusiasm is important and fosters support and confidence in the electoral system. We observed some officers giving assistance to those who showed evident challenges to vote, and doing so with grace. This service to democracy given by the election staff is greatly appreciated by the electorate, and An Coimisiún takes this opportunity to reflect this view, and to say that this service is of great importance to the fostering of the democratic process in Ireland.

I wish to express my personal thanks to each of the teams involved in this project, who travelled in some cases to far flung places and spent time observing and later analysing the data.

We hope this report will be the first of many such reports, and I commend it to the reader.

Ms. Justice Marie Baker
Chairperson, An Coimisiún Toghcháin

2. Introduction

An Coimisiún Toghcháin (An Coimisiún) is a statutory, independent body, established on 9 February 2023, with responsibility for a broad range of electoral functions as set out in the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*.

In January 2024, An Coimisiún made a decision to exercise its statutory power to prepare and publish a report on the administration of the March 2024 referendums, and so advised the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and the returning officers appointed in connection with these referendums.

An Coimisiún informed the Department that its staff and members had received election

observation training, and that it was understood that observers could not give directions to election officials or voters, handle ballots, or interfere in any way with the voting process.

This report is the result of that first such review. For the purpose of the review, 32 An Coimisiún staff and members, comprising 16 teams of two persons, visited 98 polling stations in all 26 counties on polling day. In addition, eight An Coimisiún members and staff attended five count centres on 9 March 2024 in counties Dublin, Cork and Laois to observe the opening of the ballot boxes and to witness the adjudication and declaration procedures in relation to spoilt ballots and count results.

3. Our Role

“An important lesson to be learned about post-election assessment is that it should be set out as a priority from the very beginning of the electoral process.”

ACE- The Electoral Knowledge Network

Although it has no direct role in the organisation or administration of electoral events themselves, one of An Coimisiún’s electoral reporting functions, is the preparation and publication of **Post Electoral Event Reviews**.

A Post Electoral Event Review (“PEER”) is a review of the administration of an electoral event once that event has taken place.

The *Electoral Reform Act 2022 (Part 2, Chapter 9, s.68(1))* permits An Coimisiún to prepare and publish after each electoral event, and in such a manner as An Coimisiún may itself determine, a report on the administration of that electoral event.



In accordance with s. 68(2) of the 2022 Act, if An Coimisiún does prepare such a report, it is to be published and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas, no more than six months after the electoral event in question, and a copy provided to the relevant Minister.

Section 68(3) of the 2022 Act stipulates that a PEER should specifically include a description of the assistance given by presiding officers and returning officers to electors, particularly electors with disabilities at electoral events, selecting buildings for polling stations which are accessible to wheelchair users and issuing a public notice of any inaccessible polling stations in advance of an electoral event. The imperative of making voting accessible to all electors is a matter of high importance addressed in this report.

The *Electoral Reform Act 2022* amended the *Electoral Act 1992* to replace the term “physical disability” with “disability” for all relevant sections of the 1992 Act. Amendments were also made to the legislative provisions on postal voting and

the special voters list to accommodate this broader definition of disability, which had the practical effect of widening the elector base for whom specific requirements and services must be provided at election time. The legislative reforms introduced reflect the Census 2022 disability statistics which showed that over half of the total 1,109,557 persons declaring at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty, reported non-physical conditions such as an intellectual disability, psychological condition or mental health issue.

An Coimisiún recognises that returning officers, who have the responsibility of selecting polling stations, do not have dedicated funds to support any refurbishment works. An Coimisiún has been advised by returning officers that they continue to work with the local registration authorities to improve accessibility. It is noted that persons likely to be impacted by difficulty in accessing their nominated polling station may apply to transfer their vote to a more accessible station, although this is not a preferred solution and must be seen as temporary and short term at best.

4. Election Observation

Election observation is a widely used practice involving the attendance for the purpose of observation at polling stations by international or domestic observers who assess the conditions prevailing on the ground in a region or country where an election is taking place. The objective of the observation is to foster genuine and democratic electoral events, enhance their transparency and credibility and to contribute to the overall promotion and protection of civil and political rights. The goal of election observation is to enhance the integrity of the electoral process.

Standard election monitoring templates have been developed by organisations such as the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), an institution situated within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) as well as the European Union Election Observation and Democracy Support (EODS) project.



The OSCE proposes that observation be a process-oriented activity that includes four main elements:¹

1. Gathering of Information.
2. Analysis of Information.
3. Drawing of Conclusions.
4. Formulation of Recommendations.

Although a PEER of the referendums held on 8 March 2024 (PEER March 2024) does not have the scale or complexity of an international election observation mission, PEER March 2024 embodied similar election observation principles. As both ODIHR and EODS' election monitoring assessment models are aligned with the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation², PEER observer teams adopted the approach of international election observation missions and engaged a number of principles and practices as follows:

- Avoid interfering in the normal course of the electoral process – work unobtrusively.
- Observe how irregularities and disputes are dealt with.
- Not to give instructions or issue guidance. If asked for assistance, explain carefully that the attendance of members of An Coimisiún was for the purpose of observation only.
- Not to touch any election materials such as the ballot box, Register of Electors, ballot paper, ballot paper account form.



The OSCE's Election Monitoring Handbook³ suggests that a report of an election observation can identify areas for improvements and formulate concrete recommendations on how an election process can be improved. This approach is reflected in the objectives of PEERs set out in An Coimisiún's draft Research Programme⁴:



“Post Electoral Event Reviews will allow An Coimisiún to identify any areas for improvement in the conducting of polling events, particularly with regard to accessibility and enhancing participation.”



5. Administration of Elections

Before explaining the process engaged by An Coimisiún for this review, it is useful to explain briefly how the electoral process is administered in Ireland.

The responsibility for the administration of electoral events rests with statutorily appointed returning officers and their election staff. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has responsibility for electoral law and policy, operational tasks relating to the running of elections and referendums, provision of information and advice to returning officers, registration authorities and members of the public and ensuring preparedness for the holding of elections and referendums⁵.

The key tasks and responsibilities in the administration of electoral events range well beyond the taking of the polls on the day of an electoral event, and include administrative duties carried out by returning officers and election staff in the various constituencies before, during and after an electoral event such as:

- publishing notices of the locations of polling stations;
- publishing notices of those polling stations considered to be inaccessible for electors with disabilities;
- issuing authorisations to staff or electors with physical disabilities to vote at alternative polling stations;
- issuing of postal votes;
- opening of postal votes;
- conducting special voting;
- segregation of ballot papers;
- verification of ballot papers;
- counting of ballot papers;
- adjudication of spoilt ballot papers;
- ensuring safe custody of ballot papers;
- ensuring secure transport arrangements for ballot papers;
- selection and fitting up of all polling stations;
- appointment of election officials: returning officers, supervisory presiding officers, presiding officers and poll clerks.

The review that we carried out respected these functions and we observed at first hand the dedicated and uncomplaining work carried out by presiding officers and their staff during the long day of polling on 8 March 2024. The people of Ireland are grateful for such dedication and excellence in support of democracy.



6. PEER Checklist

It was considered appropriate that the observation by An Coimisiún involve visits to observe the voting process, and that a template document be used to record observations and remarks. This template drew on standard election observation

assessment templates and accessibility-focused appraisals. The members and staff of An Coimisiún used what we called the PEER Checklist on their visits to polling stations on 8 March 2024.

SECTION A: Observer Team	
A1. Team Number	<input type="text"/>
A2. Time of Arrival	<input type="text"/>
A3. Time of Departure	<input type="text"/>
SECTION B: Polling Place Identification	
B1. Polling Place Name	<input type="text"/>
B2. Polling Station Number	<input type="text"/>
B3. Number of Polling Stations	<input type="text"/>
B4. Polling Place Presiding Officer	<input type="text"/>
B6. Polling Place Selection Criteria	<input type="checkbox"/> Disability <input type="checkbox"/> Caring <input type="checkbox"/> Inaccessibility <input type="checkbox"/> Low Turnout <input type="checkbox"/> Urban <input type="checkbox"/> Other

SECTION C: Opening Checklist Complete Only if Present at Opening	
C1. Timing Was the polling place open for voting at the appointed time of 07:00?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>	
C2.1 Ballot Box Was the ballot box demonstrated to be empty to those that were present at the time of opening?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
C2.2 Ballot Box Was the ballot box demonstrated to be securely sealed to those that were present at the time of opening?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>	

SECTION D: Exterior Checklist	
D1. Signage Is there directional signage to the polling place on the approach route and an official notice displayed at the entrance?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>	
D2.1 Canvassing Are there any election posters in evidence within 50 meters of the curtilage of the polling place?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
D2.2 Canvassing Are there any alternative forms of canvassing e.g. leafleting in evidence within 50 meters of the curtilage of the polling place?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>	

D3.1 Car Parking Are car parking facilities for electors conveniently located in the general vicinity of the polling place?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
D3.2 Car Parking Is there designated accessible car parking for people with disabilities near the main pedestrian entrance to the polling place and is this signposted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		

SECTION E: Interior Checklist		
E1.1 Layout Is the layout in the polling place adequate for the conducting of the poll e.g. sufficient space, sufficient lighting etc.?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
E1.2 Layout Is the layout in the polling place intuitive and conducive to the flow of the polling process e.g. entrance, identification, voting, exit etc.?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
E1.3 Layout Is the layout in the polling place conducive to the security of the ballot box (public space) and the secrecy of the voting process (private space)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
E2. Staffing Are staff in the polling place identifiable and positioned in areas where they are visible to electors?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
E3.1 Emergency Are emergency exits signposted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
E3.2 Emergency Are emergency exits suitable for use by disabled electors and electors with reduced mobility?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
E4. Posters Were the <i>Statements for the Information of Voters</i> posters available in bilingual format in English and Irish?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
E5. Materials Are any of the essential election materials missing from the polling place?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ If yes, please specify:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Ballot Boxes <input type="checkbox"/> Ballot Papers <input type="checkbox"/> Ballot Paper Templates <input type="checkbox"/> Register of Electors <input type="checkbox"/> Balancing List <input type="checkbox"/> Marking Instrument <input type="checkbox"/> Reference Material <input type="checkbox"/> Pencils/ Pens		
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		

SECTION F: Voting Procedures Checklist		
F1. Identification Were any electors asked to provide ID on being issued with a ballot paper during the time of the review? [Non-Mandatory]	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		

SECTION F Voting Procedures Checklist (Continued)		
F3.1 Voting Did the voting compartments enable electors to vote in secret?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
F3.2 Voting Was there only one elector in a voting compartment at a time, unless accompanied by a voting companion?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
F3.4 Voting Were any electors observed engaging in 'selfies' or other forms of prohibited photography?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		

SECTION G: Electors with Disabilities Checklist		
G1.1 Hazards Were there any steps or steep changes in level outside the polling place?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
G1.2 Hazards Are there any observable hazards or obstacles on the pedestrian approach to the polling place?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
G2. Layout Is the layout suitable for electors with physical disabilities e.g. entryways, corridors, voting compartments etc.?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
G3.1 Wheelchair Use Are the primary access points e.g. entrance, exit etc. generally of accessible dimensions for wheelchair users?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
G3.2 Wheelchair Use Is the interior accessible to wheelchair users in terms of layout e.g. turning space and an absence of obstacles?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
G3.3 Wheelchair Use Is the interior accessible to wheelchair users in terms of voting e.g. low-level voting compartments and ballot box accessibility?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
G4.1 Vision Impairment Are Ballot Paper Templates (BPTs) available for electors with a vision impairment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
G4.2 Vision Impairment Are ballot papers and signs available in a large-print format for electors, especially those with a vision impairment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
G5. Deaf/Hard of Hearing Are there any provisions to aid those who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing with a hearing impairment e.g. a Loop System (sound system) for hearing aids?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ If yes, please provide further detail: <input type="text"/>		
G6. Non-Physical Disabilities Did you observe any issues in relation to the assistance given to electors with intellectual, learning, sensory or developmental disabilities?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
G7. Voting Companion Was voting with the assistance of a voting companion in evidence during the review; if yes, was the oath issued by the Presiding Officer?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ If yes, please provide further detail: <input type="text"/>		

SECTION H: Persons Present

H1. Polling Place Staff | Please indicate the staff present in the polling place at the time of review:

Staff	Present	Staff Numbers Present
Presiding Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Supervisory Presiding Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
Poll Clerks	<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

→ Comments:

H2.1 Authorised Persons | Were there personation agents present in the polling place at the time of the review?

Yes ☐ No ☐

→ If yes, please provide further detail:

H2.2 Authorised Persons | Were there any issues with regard to unauthorised persons present in the polling place at the time of this review?

Yes ☐ No ☐

→ Comments:

PEER March 2024 entailed primary data collection at source through the creation of the PEER Checklist, devised to capture all areas which PEER March 2024 sought to examine, such as the accessibility of a polling station to the availability of key materials and assistance in relation to voting. The PEER Checklist intended that the data collected would provide observations and identify any issues or shortcomings in regard to polling stations, voting procedures and conditions. PEER March 2024 also entailed the use of secondary data derived from Central Statistics Office (CSO) census statistics for 2022.

On 8 March 2024:

- The finalised PEER Checklist was issued to all 16 PEER observer teams, each comprised of two persons who were then assigned a designated set of polling stations to visit.
- Observation took approximately 30 minutes at each polling station.
- One PEER checklist form was completed at each polling station by the PEER observer team in attendance.
- Completed PEER checklists returned to An Coimisiún for collation and analysis.

All information collected by An Coimisiún on the PEER checklists during the visits to polling stations on polling day, was aggregated centrally and the data analysed. The conclusions and recommendations from that analysis are presented in this PEER report.

The dependence of the research on the observations made at polling stations by 16 different PEER observer teams may have lent a degree of subjectivity to the data gathered. However, having two team members in each PEER observer team helped to ensure a degree of objectivity and improved accuracy.



7. Polling Stations - Selection Criteria

For the purpose of choosing the polling stations⁶ to visit, a number of criteria were engaged.

2022 Census figures released on disability⁷, show that 22% of the population (1,109,557 people) declared at least one long-lasting condition or difficulty⁸. Further breakdown of the 2022 figures show that 407,342 (8% of the population) reported experiencing at least one long-lasting condition “to a great extent” with a further 702,215 (14% of the population) reported a long-lasting condition or difficulty to “some extent”.



provide the same levels of precision, whilst statistics from smaller geographic units could be excessively skewed due to their low populations and local anomalies.

However, not all Census 2022 datasets were published for individual Electoral Divisions. Furthermore, the population of Electoral Divisions can vary significantly, posing a risk of smaller Electoral Divisions being overrepresented in the polling stations selected for the survey.

Reflecting the legislative provisions regarding PEERs, An Coimisiún considered that the observation and analysis should place an emphasis on accessibility as well as some other criteria related to turnout. Accordingly the selection of polling stations for visits took account of the following criteria:

1. polling stations previously identified as inaccessible for people with disabilities (data supplied by Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage);
2. Electoral Divisions with the highest percentage of people with disabilities identified in Census 2022;
3. Electoral Divisions with the highest percentage of carers identified in Census 2022;
4. polling stations in low turnout Electoral Divisions in Dublin;
5. polling stations in other major urban areas;
6. polling stations in other geographic areas extent.

[See Appendix 3: PEER Polling Stations]

2022	
Persons	Type of Disability
259,050	A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating
109,288	Intellectual disability
269,789	Psychological or emotional condition or a mental health issue
233,420	Deafness or hearing impairment
296,601	Blindness or vision impairment
440,090	A difficulty with pain, breathing or any other chronic illness or condition
349,155	Difficulties with basic physical activities

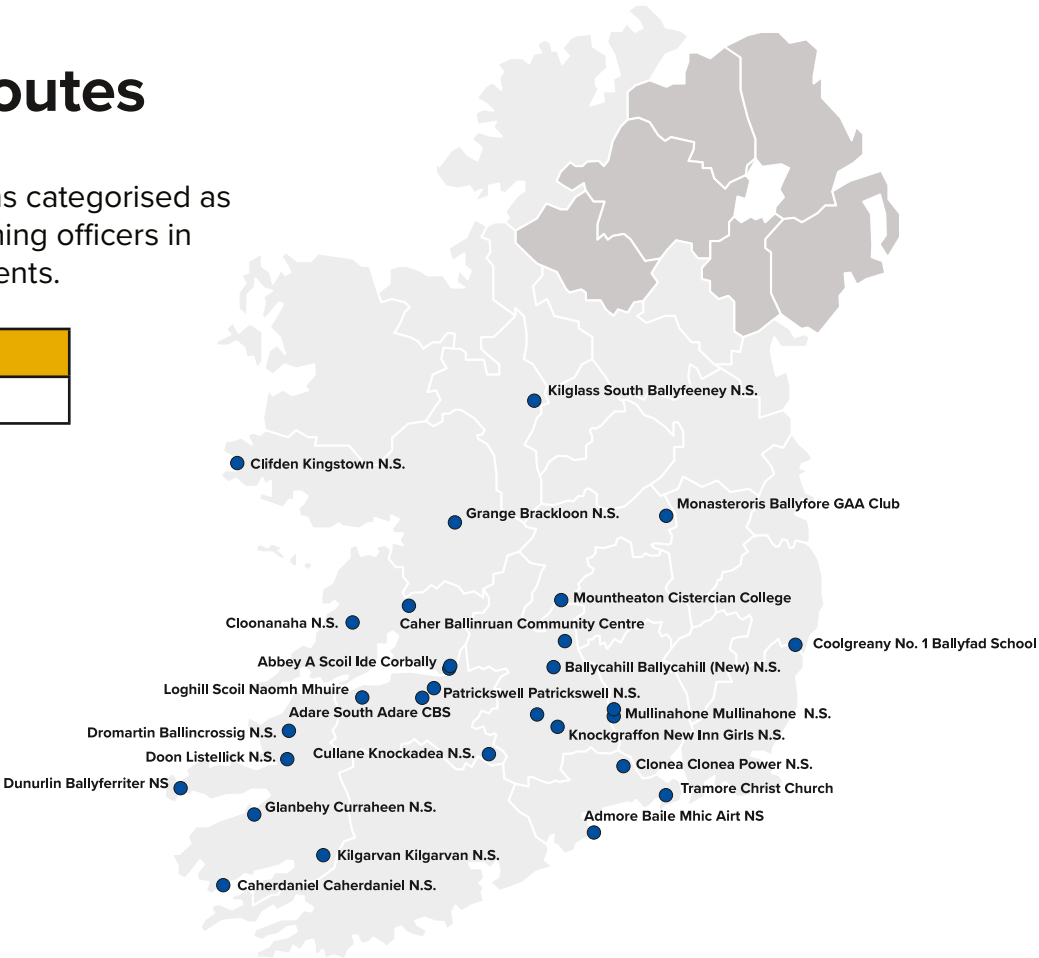
An Coimisiún noted the Census 2022 statistics signal a need to ensure such a large voting cohort is facilitated and assisted with participation in the political process, and that improvements in accessibility are required.

With the benefit of the Census 2022 datasets⁹ regarding disability, An Coimisiún identified the 15 Electoral Divisions across all 26 counties which had the highest proportionate population of people declaring a disability or health condition, as well as the 15 Electoral Divisions with the highest proportionate population of people stating they were unpaid carers of persons with disabilities.

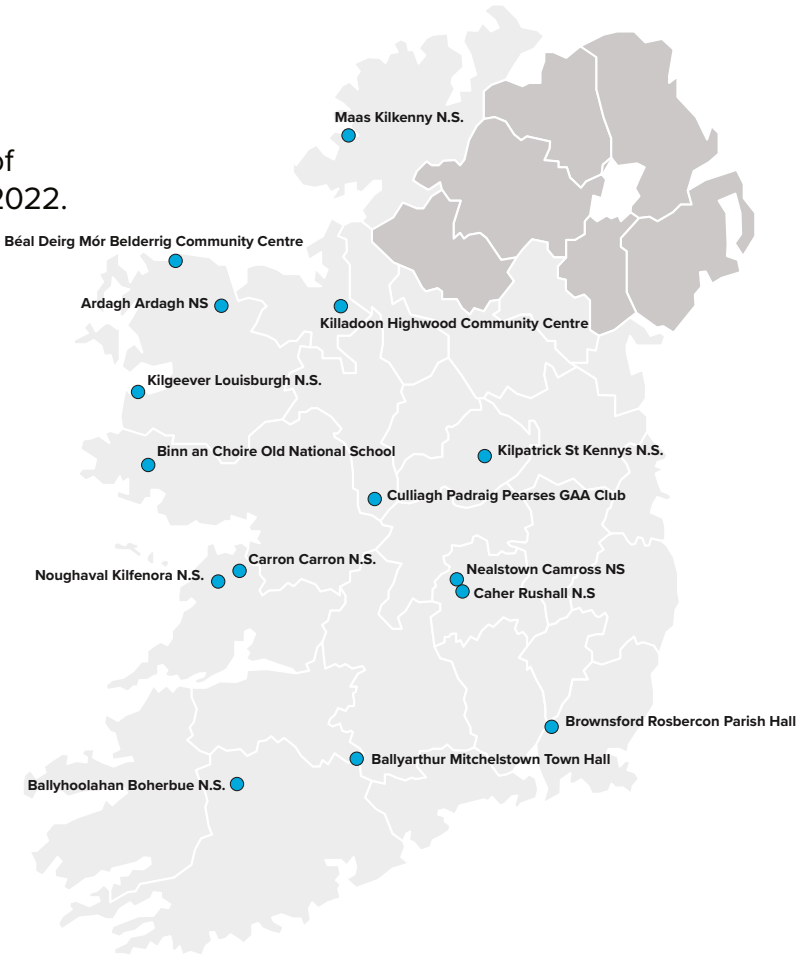
Electoral Divisions were chosen as the most suitable geographic unit for the purpose of data mining in order to maximise the precision of the selection process. Larger geographic units would not

8. PEER Routes

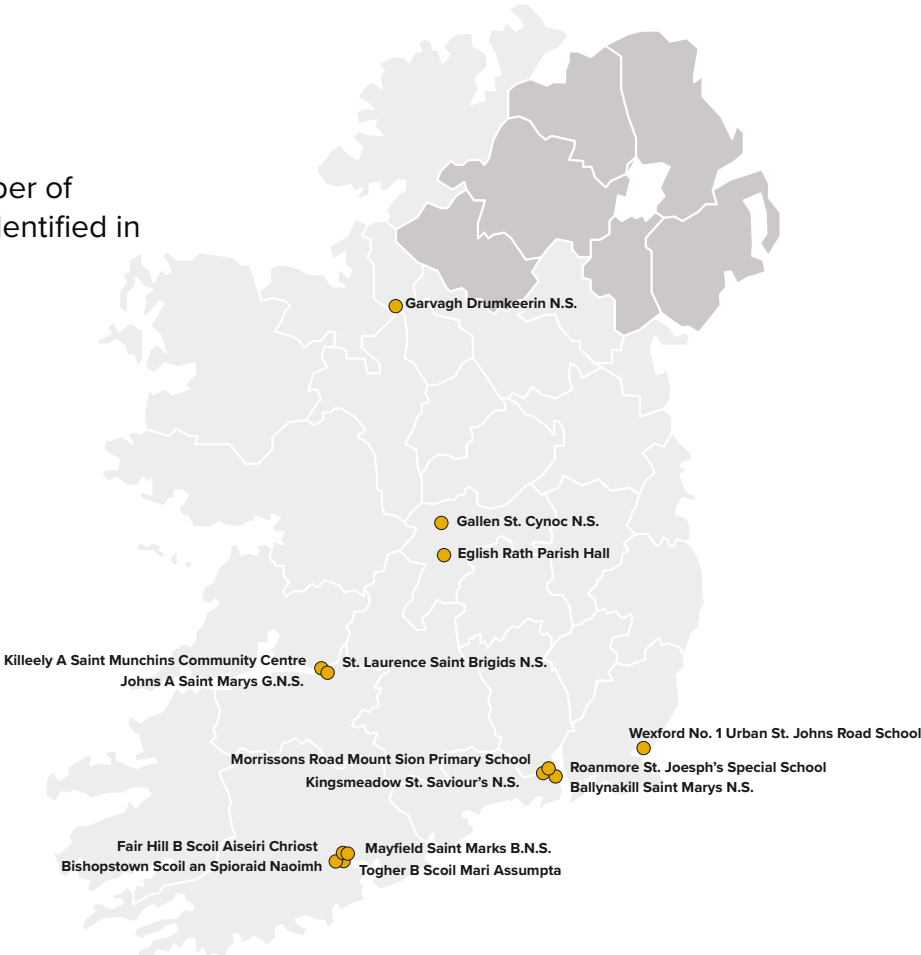
Map of polling stations categorised as inaccessible by returning officers in previous electoral events.



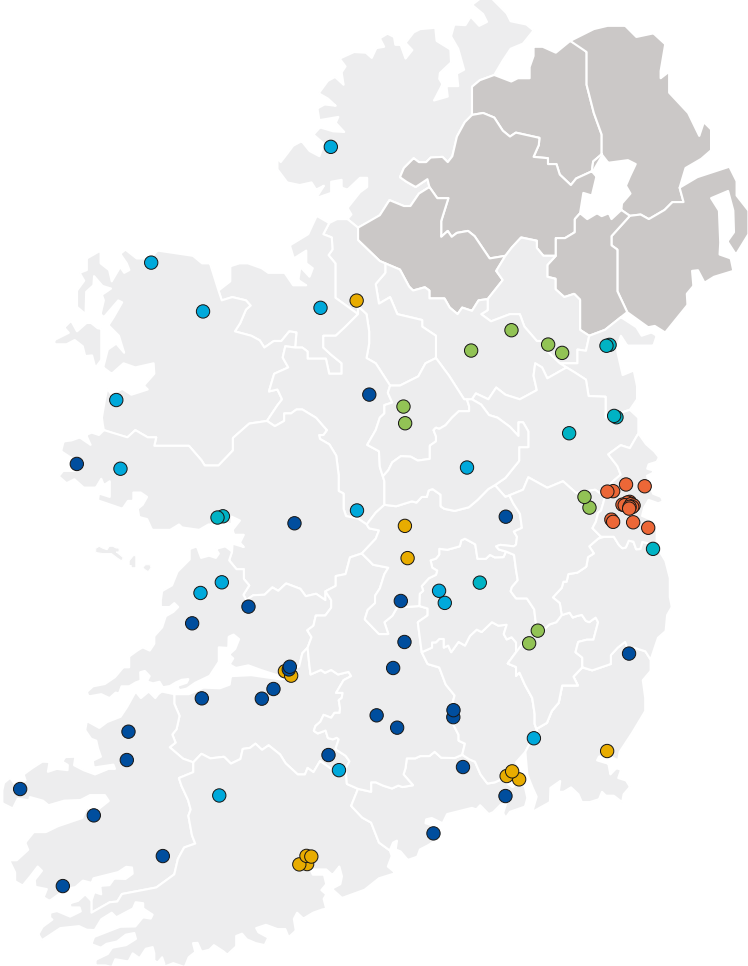
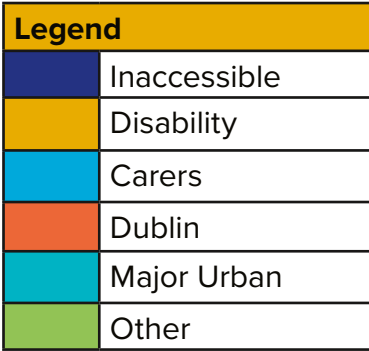
Map of areas with highest number of unpaid carers identified in Census 2022.



Map of areas with highest number of persons declaring a disability identified in Census 2022.



Map of final overall PEER routes.



9. The Central Issue of Accessibility

Effective and easy access to polling stations is a key element of universal suffrage, and for that reason our review of polling stations was formulated so as to assess, inter alia, the accessibility of the selected polling stations for this PEER. The review of polling stations in March 2024 aimed to embody election observation best practice combined with a focus on assessment of accessibility. We were also aware of s. 68(3) of the Act of 2022,

which requires that a report should include details of the assistance given by presiding officers and returning officers to electors, particularly electors with disabilities.

Addressing the Joint Committee on Disability Matters on Wednesday, 25 October 2023¹⁰, Art O’Leary, Chief Executive, An Coimisiún Toghcháin, noted the importance of removing obstacles to participation in electoral events.



“We have become acutely aware that the universality of people’s access to voting and democratic participation is riddled with obstacles – some of them physical, related to bricks and mortar access; others related to our electoral registration processes; and more still related to the act of voting. Disabled people, while having an explicit guarantee of equal participation in political and public life under Article 29 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, UNCPRD, often face a very different reality when seeking to vindicate that right.”



Article 29 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* states that people with a disability must be guaranteed the opportunity and right to vote on an equal basis with others, “ensuring that voting procedures, facilities and materials are appropriate, accessible, and easy to understand and use”, protecting the right of persons with disabilities to vote by secret ballot.

To understand the needs of electors on polling day, An Coimisiún consulted the Accessibility Checklist (see Appendix 1) issued in 2018 by the Working Group on Disability Voting (chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage and of which the National Disability Authority is a member and original author of the checklist). The Accessibility Checklist was included for the first time in the *Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers General Election 2020* and was also issued as an appendix to the *Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers* for the March referendums 2024.

The Accessibility Checklist covers the accessibility of voting at polling stations including directional signage to polling stations, car parking facilities and removal of hazards outside and inside polling stations entrances.

Accessibility Checklist - Sample Assessment Areas

- Is there directional signage to the polling station along all approach routes and at the entrance?
- Is there designated accessible car parking for people with disabilities near the main pedestrian entrance to the polling station and is it clearly marked?
- Is there enough internal circulation space to allow a wheelchair user to move freely from the entrance area to the polling room and get their ballot paper, complete their vote and put the vote into the ballot box?

Many of the questions on the PEER Checklist were derived from the OSCE’s Voting Observation Report Form¹¹ with reference also made to the UK Electoral Commission’s Instructions and checklist for polling station inspectors¹². In addition, a former returning officer in Irish elections was consulted as part of the PEER Checklist development process in order to reflect the perspective of returning officers.

We also looked at some international materials to assist in the preparation of our PEER checklist, and briefly describe these here.

UK

The UK Electoral Commission has produced a *Checklist for Polling Station Inspectors*¹³ as well as a *Polling Place Review Project Plan Checklist* and a *Guide to Assessing Polling Place Suitability*.¹⁴

Of note, the review procedure for local authorities entails a requirement to consult the UK Parliamentary (Acting) returning officer for each constituency in its area, to give public notice of any reviews being conducted by local authorities, to seek the views of all residents, particularly disabled residents and for “any person or body with expertise in access for persons with any type of disability to make a representation or to comment on the authority’s proposals.”

Estonia

The European Commission report *Guide of good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in the electoral process*¹⁵ refers to the following Accessibility Checklist used in Estonia.

Criteria assessed	Yes	No
Public transport and parking		
The building where the polling station is located can be accessed by public transport		
The building has parking spaces for vehicles of persons with disabilities		
Obstacle-free access from the parking area to the main entrance of the building		
Access route and entry to the building		
The routes to the building and the main entrance are signposted		
The entry to the building is accessible by a ramp		
The ramp has handrails and a level anti-slip surface		
The ramp has sufficient width (minimum 1.1 m)		
Wheelchair users can cross the door threshold of the building independently		
The outer door of the building opens automatically or can be opened easily		
The outer door of the building opens automatically or can be opened easily		
Access route to the polling place in the building		
The polling place is on the same floor as the main entrance of the building		
The polling place (if it is not on the same floor as the main entrance) is accessible by a lift or ramp		
The route from the main entrance to the polling place has sufficient width (minimum 1.5 m)		
The access route to the polling place is free of obstacles, including door thresholds, that impede wheelchair access		
The inner doors of the building open automatically or can be opened easily		
The route to the polling place is signpost		
The interior premises of the building have sufficient lighting		
Movement in the polling station		
There is sufficient space to move wheelchairs and other mobility aids in the polling station		
The polling station has seats for voters who need to rest		
The polling station has sufficient lighting		

In Estonia, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) monitoring body which periodically assesses the accessibility of polling stations and highlights any shortcomings

to the authorities. A 2023 ODIHR report¹⁶ cites representatives of the Office of the Chancellor of Justice reporting that 80% of polling stations were accessible in Estonia's 2019 parliamentary elections.

Australia

The Australian Electoral Commission utilises an Accessibility Checklist¹⁷ which provides that where possible, polling premises should have:

- a level, firm and obstacle-free path of travel to the polling place;
- circulation space in the voting area for use by those using mobility devices
- clear directional signage;
- access to accessible parking spaces;
- easy access to public transport (ideally within 400 metres of a bus/train stop, or 800 metres to other forms of public transport);
- an alternate voting room with adjustable lighting, if possible, to make voting more accessible for people with sensory sensitivities;
- a rest area between the site boundary and the polling place to support cognitive, sensory and anxiety self-regulation.

Internal set-up:

- accessible voting screens placed in line with other voting screens;
- two-person tables with accessible voting screens to facilitate assisted voting;
- other tables and chairs for seated voting.

In Australia, there are no prescribed polling stations, so electors can vote wherever they choose, and every polling station is assigned an accessibility rating by the Australian Electoral Commission (AEC). The accessibility ratings are: wheelchair accessible; assisted wheelchair access; not wheelchair accessible, and these are published on the AEC's website¹⁸, alongside general information regarding venue accessibility.

Accessible Voting - Postal Vote

Before leaving the question of accessibility, An Coimisiún wishes to briefly address the issue of postal voting. That issue will be addressed more fully by An Coimisiún in the course of a proposed research project, but some comment is warranted here with regard to the difficulty presented to voters with disabilities who wish to vote by post.

In an overview of Article 29 published by the National Disability Authority (NDA)¹⁹ in 2023, concern was expressed that electors with disabilities are required to obtain medical certification to register for a postal vote. An Coimisiún considers that the current procedures may involve additional cost for many applicants and amount to an unjustifiable barrier to participation, inconsistent with Article 29 of the UNCRPD. It advocates the simplification of registration for postal voting, and that it does not impose any financial cost on an applicant. An Coimisiún notes a positive improvement effected by the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*, so that notice must now be given before a right to a postal vote is removed, and that there is no longer a requirement for yearly registration. The onus is on the individual to notify the local authority if there is a change in their circumstances and the special/postal vote is no longer needed.

An Coimisiún's *Research Programme 2024-2026*²⁰ commits to researching the issue of postal voting, including for electors with disabilities. An Coimisiún will also address the procedures governing the administration of the postal vote in future PEERs, particularly for electors with disabilities.

10. Analysis

Section 30 of the *Electoral Reform Act 2022* sets out the functions of An Coimisiún, including s. 30(2), which provides that

“The Commission shall have all such powers as are necessary or expedient for, or incidental to, the performance of its functions.”

An Coimisiún did not on this occasion encounter any reluctance on the part of presiding officers or their staff to our presence in polling stations, but considers that election observation by An Coimisiún would be facilitated by an express statutory provision for the attendance of An Coimisiún staff and members at polling stations and count centres to electoral events to complement the existing legislative provisions in the Act of 2022.

Overall, the layout in the majority of polling stations visited facilitated the flow of the polling process (entrance, identification, voting, exit) and had sufficient space and lighting. Generally speaking, polling station staff were identifiable and positioned in areas where they were visible to electors. No electors were seen engaging in ‘selfies’ or other forms of prohibited photography. In the majority of polling stations visited, the voting compartments allowed electors to vote in secret.

PEER observer teams, however, did find several problems, including poor directional signage on approach routes to polling stations, lack of parking facilities in urban areas, insufficient or no designated parking spaces for electors with disabilities, and hazards at building entrance points. These will be described in more detail now.

Legislation regarding the accessibility of voting is primarily contained in the *Electoral (Amendment) Act 1996*, which amended the *Electoral Act of 1992*. Section 3(1)(a) of the Act of 1996, requires the returning officers to provide where practicable polling stations which are accessible to wheelchair users. In this respect, our observations were hugely disappointing as approximately a quarter of polling stations visited were considered to have entrances not easily accessible for wheelchair users, although it should be noted that of the 98 polling stations visited, 29 of them had already been categorised as inaccessible by returning officers in previous electoral events.

Of the 69 polling stations selected based on criteria other than “inaccessibility”, 16% were not viewed to be easily accessible at the entrance to the polling place. An Coimisiún observers cited various reasons for considering an entrance not to be easily accessible, including the presence of obstacles and obstructions, for example, steps; the absence of accessibility infrastructure, for example a wheelchair ramp or platform lift; and the limited dimensions of the entrance space. These issues could have prevented electors, particularly wheelchair users, from accessing these polling stations. Furthermore, at 23% of the same 69 polling stations, arrangements for wheelchair users to facilitate the marking and placing

in the ballot box of ballot papers were considered not to be in accordance with the provision outlined in s. 3(2)(b)(i) of the *Electoral Act 1996*. In this regard, the absence of low-level voting compartments and low-level ballot boxes was noted. Issues with the internal layout of those polling stations were less common, with only 3% of polling stations reported as having an internal layout inaccessible to wheelchair users, exemplified by insufficient turning space and the presence of obstacles inside the polling station.

Accessibility issues can affect a variety of electors, not just those who use a wheelchair. Issues getting in and out of polling stations can arise for electors with a walking aid or with a pram. External conditions, such as steps or steep changes in level, as well as internal conditions, such as obstacles posed by items or furniture, can represent a hazard to electors. 33% of polling stations visited had external conditions that represented a hazard to electors, while at several polling stations, approximately 18% of those visited, obstacles represented a hazard to electors.

A common impediment to accessibility externally was steps at the entrance to the polling station. 15% of all polling stations visited were noted as having a step or several steps at the entrance. On multiple occasions, steps were considered to be hazardous, particularly where the steps were steep or unmarked. In one instance an irregular half-step was regarded as a hazard. In order to improve accessibility, presiding officers often provide wheelchair ramps, however PEER observer teams reported that the quality of wheelchair ramps was variable. In one instance, staff at the polling station were unable to erect the wheelchair ramp.

The entrance doors to polling stations raised additional accessibility issues.

In the majority of cases, these issues were temporary and correctable, for example, where internal doors were closed or partially closed, limiting access for wheelchair users. Other door-related issues were less readily remediable, for instance, where the weight and dimensions of the doors, particularly external doors, prevented their use by wheelchair users. PEER observer teams identified issues with doors at over one in ten polling stations. A related issue was obtrusive thresholds. 5% of polling stations were noted as having a prominent threshold lip which posed a hazard to electors, and made the threshold difficult or impossible to use by a wheelchair user without help.

Obstacles were observed in a number of instances. At one polling station, gym equipment was present, posing a hazard to electors, particularly those with a visual impairment. At a different polling station, a chair was used to prop the door open, partially blocking the entrance. In another polling station, a flowerpot blocked the entrance. Obstacles were also observed at emergency exits. At one polling station, an emergency exit was obstructed by a voting compartment. At another, an external shutter blocked the emergency exit. Other issues with emergency exits included an absence of appropriate signage, an absence of ramps and issues with the dimensions and general accessibility of the exits. In one instance, the only emergency exit was an elevated window. In two instances, there was no emergency exit. Overall, approximately 15% of polling stations were considered to have unsatisfactory emergency exits.

A ballot paper template (BPT) is a transparent plastic device intended to be placed over a ballot paper to facilitate voting by visually impaired electors. Statutory instrument S.I. No. 196 of 2019 – Elections (Ballot Paper Template)

Regulations 2019, pursuant to S.I. No. 196(3) provides that these templates are to be made available at polling stations by returning officers if required. PEER observer teams reported that BPTs were present in the vast majority of polling stations, with BPTs not locatable in four polling stations out of the 98 polling stations visited. Limited feedback was available from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage regarding the usage levels of BPTs used in the March referendums, although 60 templates were recorded as having been used in the 2020 General Election. It is the intention of An Coimisiún to examine the matter of BPT usage and facilities available to blind and visually impaired electors in future PEERs, with the Disabled Persons Organisation, Voice of Vision Impairment's report on *Voting in the Referendums*²¹ to be further examined in this regard.

Legislation regarding voting procedures is primarily contained in the Electoral Act 1992, which is applied to the Referendum Act 1994 in accordance with s. 32(1) of the Act of 1994. Section 101(2)(c) of the Electoral Act 1992 requires that a mark shall be placed on the register against the number of the elector to denote that a ballot paper has been issued to that elector. The PEER teams observed substantial compliance with this requirement. The overwhelming majority of ballot papers were observed being marked with the official mark or "stamped" in accordance with s.101(2)(b) of the Electoral Act 1992. One instance was observed where a ballot paper was not stamped. An Coimisiún is aware that data produced by returning officers, indicated that 742 votes were spoilt at the Family referendum in March 2024 because of the absence of the official mark on the ballot paper. Adequate training should be provided to all polling station staff, with a special focus on ensuring ballot papers are stamped.

An Coimisiún is also addressing the issue of unintentional spoilt votes as a matter of utmost priority in its voter education, outreach and awareness raising initiatives.

PEER observer teams considered that voting compartments in all polling stations visited preserved the secrecy of the vote, as provided for in s.94(5)(a) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, although at two polling stations the layout was less than satisfactory to ensure privacy in the voting process. The requirement to ensure there is one elector in a voting compartment at a time, as required by s. 101(3) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, was satisfied, with only two instances of apparent breach observed when a family member attempted to provide assistance to an elector. While companion voting is provided for under s. 103 of the Electoral Act, 1992, it was unclear whether the circumstances met the statutory test and the statutory safeguards were complied with.

With regard to any possible elector interference at polling stations, PEER Observer Teams identified four instances in which s. 33 of the Electoral (Amendment) Act 2001, – an amendment to s. 147(2) (c) of the Principal Act - which prohibits the display of any poster relating to the election within 50 metres of the curtilage of a polling station, appeared to be breached.

PEER observer teams commented on issues with the layout in 10% of the polling stations visited. A common concern related to the absence of interior signage inside the polling station. Privacy was reported as potentially being compromised by the layout at two polling stations. At one polling station the security of the ballot box was questionable, as the ballot box was located beside the entrance where electors entered the polling station.

11. PEER Checklist Statistical Analysis

PEER Checklist Question	YES	NO	% YES	% NO	N/A
D1. Signage	36	56	39%	61%	8
D2.1 Canvassing (Posters)	4	93	4%	96%	3
D2.2 Canvassing (Other)	1	95	1%	99%	4
D3.1 Car Parking (Available)	88	9	91%	9%	3
D3.2 Car Parking (Disabled Available)	47	46	51%	49%	7
E1.1 Layout (Adequate)	96	1	99%	1%	3
E1.2 Layout (Conducive)	93	3	97%	3%	4
E1.3 Layout (Security)	94	2	98%	2%	4
E2. Staff (Identifiable)	95	1	99%	1%	4
E3.1 Emergency Exit (Sign)	84	12	88%	12%	4
E3.2 Emergency Exit (Disabled Use)	66	26	72%	28%	8
E4. Posters	90	6	94%	6%	4
E5. Materials	10	77	12%	88%	13
F1. Identification	52	37	58%	42%	11
F2.1 Ballot Paper (Stamped)	89	1	99%	1%	10
F2.2 Ballot Paper (Register Marked)	88	1	99%	1%	11
F3.1 Voting (Compartment Secrecy)	95	0	100%	0%	5
F3.2 Voting (Compartment One Elector)	87	2	98%	2%	11
F3.3 Voting (Selfies)	90	0	100%	0%	10
G1.1 Hazards (Steps)	31	64	33%	67%	5
G1.2 Hazards (Obstacles)	17	75	18%	82%	8
G2. Layout (Disabled Use)	81	14	85%	15%	5
G3.1 Wheelchair Use (Accessible Dimensions)	74	23	76%	24%	3
G3.2 Wheelchair Use (Accessible Space)	87	8	92%	8%	5
G3.3 Wheelchair Use (Accessible Voting)	68	24	74%	26%	8
G4.1 Vision Impairment (BPT Available)	91	4	96%	4%	5
G4.2 Vision Impairment (Large Print)	31	58	35%	65%	11
G5. Deaf/ Hard of Hearing (Loop)	1	93	1%	99%	6
G6. Non-Physical Disabilities (Assistance)	2	73	3%	97%	25
G7. Voting Companion (Assistance/ Oath)	6	68	8%	92%	26
H2.1 Authorised Persons (Personation)	0	90	0%	100%	10
H2.2 Authorised Persons (Issues)	1	89	1%	99%	10

12. Guidance Manuals for Election Management Officials

For the most part electoral guidelines and procedures as set out in *Guidance Manuals* issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to returning and presiding officers, were followed satisfactorily. These *Guidance Manuals* reflect key electoral law in Ireland. An Coimisiún recommends that these useful manuals be made publically available, omitting any confidential operational data.

An Coimisiún also considers that current guidance manuals should be expanded to cater for wider cohorts of electors, such

as persons with non-physical disabilities and voters who are neuro-divergent, in light of the recent legislative widening of the definition of disability to include electors with non-physical disabilities. The guidance should reflect Census 2022 data on persons who declare a range of non-physical disabilities, as well as areas such as neurodiversity. The most recent guidance issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in November 2022, Information for Voters with Disabilities²² should be updated and expanded.

13. Electoral Poll Data: Voter Experiences



National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) for Ireland

As part of An Coimisiún's development of a National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) for Ireland²³, a face-to-face Voters' Survey of a representative sample of 3,557 voters was conducted on 8 March 2024 by Ipsos B&A. The survey was split with approximately half the sample (1874) asked a set of questions (below) about their voting experience.

Q.8a Thinking of when you got here today to cast your vote. Was it easy or not easy to access the polling station?

1. Easy	2. Not Easy	3. Don't know
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Q.8b Was it easy or not easy to find where in the building you needed to go to vote?

1. Easy	2. Not Easy	3. Don't know
---------	-------------	---------------

Q.8c Did you feel you had sufficient privacy or not when casting your vote?

1. Yes	2. No	3. Don't know
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Q.8d Did you require any additional assistance from any of the staff working here?

1. Yes	2. No	3. Don't know
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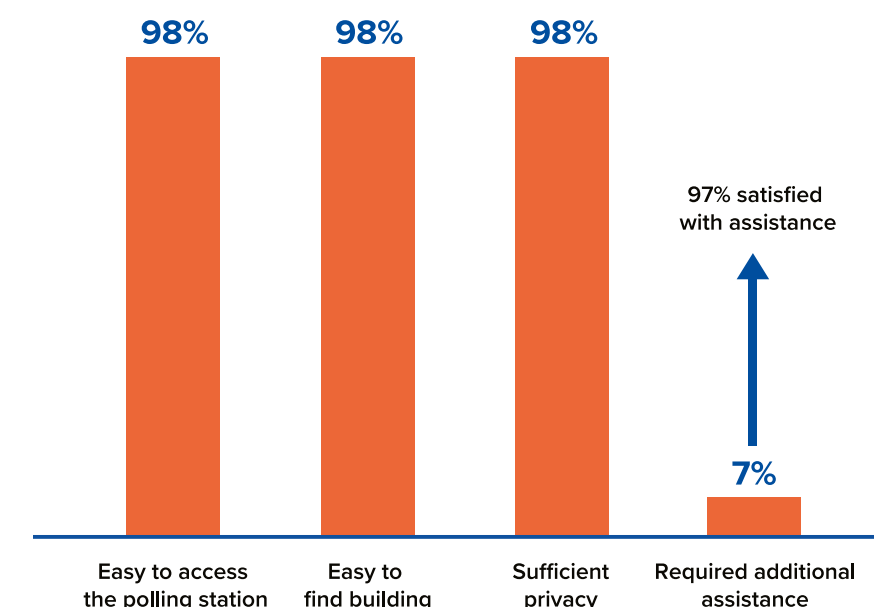
IF YES AT Q.8d, ASK Q8e

Q.8e Were you satisfied or dissatisfied with the assistance you received?

1. Satisfied	2. Dissatisfied	3. Don't know
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Percentage of Voters with Positive Response to 'Voter Experience' Survey Questions



	Easy to Access Q8.a	Easy to Find Q8.b	Sufficient Privacy Q8.c	Req. Assistance Q8.d
Family & Care Voters	98%	98%	98%	7%



Whilst these figures are encouraging and paint a generally positive picture, it should be noted that 2% of voters is around 30,000 of those who voted in March 2024. This is not an insignificant number.

Further analysis of the voting experience of persons with disabilities is planned as part of An Coimisiún's June NEDS, in addition to the focus to be placed in the June PEER.

14. Recommendations

	Amend electoral legislation to expressly provide for the attendance of An Coimisiún staff and members at polling stations and count centres for all electoral events.
	Revise and expand the accessibility standards for polling stations in an updated Accessibility Checklist .
	Assign an Accessibility Rating to all polling stations which is easy for electors to check in advance of voting.
	Review all voting materials with a view to providing a wider range of accessible formats.
	Make available to the public guidance manuals issued to returning and presiding officers, omitting any confidential operational data.
	Provide standardised training to all polling station staff, with a special focus on ensuring ballot papers are properly marked.
	Ensure staff in polling stations are appropriately trained to assist electors with a range of disabilities, including non-physical disabilities.
	Publish a guidance manual for electors which should explain the facilities and voting aids available at polling stations.



15. Conclusion

It is envisaged that the observation and attendance at electoral events by members and staff of An Coimisiún will form part of all future PEERs. This first March 2024 PEER will inform the conduct of the PEER for the European Parliament, local and Limerick Mayoral elections on Friday 7 June 2024. For that June 2024 PEER, An Coimisiún will revisit some matters addressed here. The occurrence of several different electoral events in such a short timeframe provides us with an opportunity to refine and progress our research.

In line with An Coimisiún’s mandate to encourage voter participation and inclusion in the democratic process, PEERs will frequently focus on voters’ experiences and access to an electoral event. In addition, taking into account the definition of a PEER as “a report on the administration of the electoral event concerned” and in reference to legal provisions singled out in s.68(3) of the Act such as Article 74 of the Local Elections Regulations, 1995²⁴, it is envisaged that future PEERs may also place a focus on additional aspects of the administration of an electoral event, such as the “safe custody of the ballot papers and other documents relating to an electoral event”. The scope of PEERs may also be expanded in the future to review the information, facilities and services provided for voters with disabilities throughout the electoral process, not just on the day of the electoral event.

An Coimisiún has taken a number of steps since March 2024 in light of the conclusions and observations made in this report:

- Letters (April 2024) were issued to each returning officer for the March referendums, thanking them for their assistance and co-operation and outlining issues encountered in polling stations visited, as in some cases it was apparent that some relatively easily achieved changes and improvements could be made before the 7 June elections.
- Stakeholder engagement and follow-up meetings have been held with returning officers and the Working Group on Disability Voting, chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. An Coimisiún also met and engaged with organisations from a wide variety of sectors including the formal education/ adult/community education sectors and groups representing electors experiencing barriers to electoral participation, including electors with disabilities, and with members of the general public.

PEER - European Parliament, local and Limerick Mayoral elections, Friday 7 June 2024:

- Thematic selection and focus of new PEER criteria based on Census 2022 data deployed to select polling stations for future visits, and to polling stations categorised as inaccessible.
- 100 polling stations across all 26 counties were selected for the June electoral events, some of which had been categorised as inaccessible by returning officers in public notices issued in March 2024.
- The surveys of voters as part of the June National Democracy and Election Study placed an increased focus on the experience of voters with disabilities.

16. Endnotes

- 1 OSCE Election Observation e-learning
- 2 <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/dop-eng.pdf>
- 3 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/e/68439.pdf>, p.14.
- 4 ec-cdn-live.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/app/uploads/2023/11/10161907/Draft-Annual-Research-Programme-English-web.pdf
- 5 <https://assets.gov.ie/292999/53dbf9b6-b86d-492e-b42d-48dbdb287925.pdf>, p.85.
- 6 Electoral legislation distinguishes between a “polling place”, an area or premises in which the poll is conducted, for example, a national school, and a “polling station” a space within the polling place provided for electors to cast their ballot, for example a classroom. In this report, the term “polling station” is used to refer to general premises as well as the particular space provided for electors to cast their ballot.
- 7 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp4/census2022profile4-disabilityhealthandcarers/disability/>
- 8 Of note, since the 2016 census, changes were made to the 2022 census questions relating to disability (see Appendix 2).
- 9 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpp4/census2022profile4-disabilityhealthandcarers/>
- 10 https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/joint_committee_on_disability_matters/2023-10-25/2/
- 11 Annex B - Sample Observation Forms for Voting- <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/e/68439.pdf>, pp 109-111
- 12 <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2022-01/Checklist%20for%20polling%20station%20inspectors%20generic.doc>
- 13 <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/2024-02/Checklist%20for%20polling%20station%20inspectors%20PCC%20EA22.docx>
- 14 Reviews of polling districts, polling places and polling stations | Electoral Commission
- 15 https://commission.europa.eu/document/66b9212e-e9b0-409d-88a3-c0e505a5e670_en, Annex 2, p.35
- 16 <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/6/5/537589.pdf>, p.5
- 17 Australian Electoral Commission Submission No. 330, p.3 to Conduct of the 2022 federal election and other matters- REPORT - November 2023
- 18 <https://www.aec.gov.au/assistance/>
- 19 Overview of UNCRPD Article 29 in Ireland. Participation in political and public life. June 2023.<https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/UNCRPD-Article-29-Paper-FINAL-230607.docx>
- 20 www.electoralcommission.ie/research-programme
- 21 <https://vvi.ie/voice-of-vision-impairment-accessibility-report-on-referendums-of-march-8th-2024/>
- 22 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1b3dc-information-for-voters-with-disabilities/>
- 23 National Election and Democracy Study (neds.ie)
- 24 Article 74, Local Elections Regulations, 1995 - Time and place for the counting of the votes. (2) The returning officer shall appoint a place within the area of the local authority or convenient to the said area as the place at which the officer will count the votes and shall, at the place so appointed, provide suitable accommodation and all furniture and equipment necessary for counting the votes in accordance with Part XIII and shall make adequate arrangements for the safe custody of the ballot papers and other documents relating to the election.

17. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Accessibility Checklist

An Coimisiún consulted an Accessibility Checklist issued by the Working Group on Disability Voting in 2018, this checklist is available on the National Disability Authority’s (NDA) website listed as the “Accessibiltiy Checklist for Polling Stations”.
<https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/Accessibility-Checklist-for-Polling-Stations-April-2024-FINAL.docx>

Appendix 2 – Census Questions on Disability 2022 & 2016

Do you have any of the following long-lasting conditions or difficulties?			
(a) Blindness or a vision impairment	Yes to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	No
(b) Deafness or a hearing impairment	Yes to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	No
(c) A difficulty with basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying	Yes to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	No
(d) An intellectual disability	Yes to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	No
(e) A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating	Yes to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	No
(f) A psychological or emotional condition or a mental health issue	Yes to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	No
(g) A difficulty with pain, breathing or any other chronic illness or condition	Yes to a great extent	Yes, to some extent	No

2016

Do you have any of the following long-lasting conditions?		
(a) Blindness or a serious vision impairment	Yes	No
(b) Deafness or a serious hearing impairment	Yes	No
(c) A difficulty with basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, reaching, lifting or carrying	Yes	No
(d) An intellectual disability	Yes	No
(e) A difficulty with learning, remembering or concentrating	Yes	No
(f) A psychological or emotional condition	Yes	No
(g) A difficulty with pain, breathing, or any other chronic illness or condition	Yes	No

Appendix 3 – PEER Polling Stations Visited by Selection Criterion

Table 1: Inaccessible Polling Stations (DHLGH)

	Electoral Division & Polling Station	Constituency & County	Recorded Inaccessible	% Declared Disability [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
1	Caher Ballinruan Community Centre	Clare Clare	2020 DHLGH	21.8%	V95 A348	52.93629430627313, -8.892795957439008
2	Cloonanaha Cloonanaha NS	Clare Clare	2020/ 2024 DHLGH & LRO	16.7%	V95 HN76	52.867732693597354, -9.273428116907425
3	Ballyglass Scout Hall	Clare Clare	2020 DHLGH & LRO	28.5%	V94 K720	52.68692551384004, -8.61230643596915
4	Clifden Kingstown NS	Galway West Galway	2020 DHLGH	24.1%	H71 KF38	53.51037470897069, -10.09169694030088
5	Grange Brackloon NS	Galway East Galway	2020 DHLGH	24.2%	H65 C670	53.28308108417541, -8.586165991718401
6	Caherdaniel Caherdaniel NS	Kerry Kerry	2020/ 2024 DHLGH & LRO	21.8%	V93 FK88	51.77058185338391, -10.10179261965231
7	Dunurlin Ballyferrier NS	Kerry Kerry	2020 DHLGH & LRO	21.8%	V92 X795	52.165596434164286, -10.408028909816553
8	Glanbehy Curraheen NS	Kerry Kerry	2020/2024 DHLGH & LRO	19.3%	V93 XD43	52.06525720452734, -9.910522098027633
9	Doon Listellick NS	Kerry Kerry	2020 DHLGH & LRO	18.6%	V92 WTR8	52.29835838356138, -9.694777139864103
10	Dromartin Ballincrossig NS	Kerry Kerry	2020/2024 DHLGH & LRO	19.2%	V92 AP80	52.41518403611091, -9.687700314992872
11	Kilgarvan Kilgarvan NS	Kerry Kerry	2020/2024 DHLGH & LRO	18.0%	V93 HP79	51.90619538148865, -9.441747443964484
12	Adare South Adare CBS	Limerick County Limerick	2020 DHLGH & LRO	20.6%	V94 FK30	52.561038426235854, -8.794026224352423,
13	Loghill Ballyhahill NS	Limerick County Limerick	2020 DHLGH	24.1%	V94 VK23	52.558290044503366, -9.198913355039672,

	Electoral Division & Polling Station	Constituency & County	Recorded Inaccessible	% Declared Disability [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
14	Cullane Knockadea NS	Limerick County Limerick	2020 DHLGH & LRO	20.8%	V35 DW73	2.32872685748991, -8.342518969139771
15	Patrickswell Patrickswell NS	Limerick County Limerick	2020 DHLGH	24.8%	V94 YF44	52.6005951557356, -8.713857098589497
16	Abbey A Scoil Íde	Limerick County Limerick	2020 DHLGH	23.3%	V94 X659	52.6780780148816, -8.61474375199046
17	Mountheaton Cistercian College	Laois-Offaly Offaly	2020 DHLGH	15.5%	E53 DX37	52.96305721153817, -7.854989548273085
18	Monasteroris Ballyfore GAA Club	Laois-Offaly Offaly	2020 DHLGH & LRO	20.7%	R45 R283	53.30709509700372, -7.134750346404081
19	Kilglass South Ballyfeeney NS	Galway-Roscommon Roscommon	2020 DHLGH & LRO	22.6%	F42 WV63	53.78477011123259, -8.040516900348544
20	Knockgraffon New Inn Girls NS	Tipperary Tipperary	2020 DHLGH & LRO	17.7%	E25 VP64	52.44275716431914, -7.881650153194337
21	Kilvemnon Kilvemnon National School	Tipperary Tipperary	2020/2024 DHLGH & LRO	23.0%	E41 NR76	52.486114438832445, -7.503997593072962
22	Mullinahone Mullinahone National School	Tipperary Tipperary	2020 DHLGH & LRO	28.4%	E41 ED30	52.5138499197375, -7.5006056314504015,
23	Thomastown Thomastown National School	Tipperary Tipperary	2020 DHLGH & LRO	24.7%	E25 F840	52.493582477146646, -8.019112228654615,
24	Templemore St. Colmcille's Boys NS	Tipperary Tipperary	2020 DHLGH & LRO	26.5%	E41 CR60	52.794706995167346, -7.832719544578874
25	Ballycahill Ballycahill (New) NS	Tipperary Tipperary	2020 DHLGH & LRO	18.6%	E41 RR68	52.68829383422049, -7.9070661985534105,
26	Tramore Christ Church	Waterford Waterford	2020 DHLGH	24.1%	X91 WC92	52.158459271402535, -7.155653532342615,
27	Clonea Clonea - Power NS	Waterford Waterford	2020 DHLGH	19.5%	E32 NNP40	52.279620146174, -7.439200068482805,

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	Recorded Inaccessible	% Declared Disability [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
28	Admore Baile Mhic Airt NS	Waterford Waterford	2020 DHLGH	24.8%	X35 CR20	52.006463941210484, -7.640131625998028,
29	Coolgreany No. 1 Ballyfad School	Waterford Waterford	2020 DHLGH	22.2%	Y25 E376	52.76705908533976, -6.269604510849667,

Table 2: Polling Stations in Electoral Divisions with the Highest Reported Rates of Disability

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	% Declared Disability [CSO]	ED Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
1	John's A St Mary's Girl's School	Limerick City Limerick	38.7%	747	V94 T6Y0	52.66977641789793, -8.623239339373507
2	Killeely A Saint Munchin's Community Centre	Limerick City Limerick	38.4%	1455	V94 F58P	52.66977641789793, -8.623239339373507 -8.636468920307799
3	Gallen St Cynoc's National School	Laois-Offaly Offaly	37.6%	588	R42 A527	53.273886962408, -7.827572360919667,
4	Wexford No. 1 Urban St. John's Road School	Wexford Wexford	37.4%	1702	Y35 XO84	52.33784866425299, -6.4711762874463705
5	Ballinakill Saint Mary's NS	Waterford Waterford	36.8%	432	X91 HF65	52.22580577111883, -7.065960607179964
6	Togher B Maria Assumpta Convent	Cork South Central Cork	36.8%	683	T12 HY44	51.8832785071177, -8.480291503190076
7	St. Laurence Saint Brigid's NS	Limerick City Limerick	36.7%	988	V94 FN12	52.65640451444483, -8.598404586566131
8	Bishopstown B Scoil an Spioraid Naoimh	Cork South Central Cork	36.6%	421	T12 X030	51.878658032658414, -8.52865233074282
9	Fair Hill B Scoil Aiseirí Chríost	Cork North Central Cork	36.3%	753	T23 E634	51.912028438562245, -8.48407889209046

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	% Declared Disability [CSO]	ED Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
10	Mayfield Saint Mark's BNS	Cork North Central Cork	35.9%	2846	T23 P5FY	51.91166452776854, -8.45770813627059
11	Garvagh Drumkeerin NS	Sligo-Leitrim Leitrim	35.8%	123	N41 DK12	54.16535937253812, -8.140187956149251
12	Morrisson's Road Mount Sion Primary School	Waterford Waterford	35.5%	518	X91 KH90	52.25674855345074, -7.116800373424116,
13	Eglish Rath Community Hall	Laois-Offaly Offaly	35.3%	153	R42 X471	53.13878558317453, -7.807683535266469
14	Kingsmeadow Saint Saviour's NS	Waterford Waterford	34.9%	1305	X91 Y472	52.24726456601189, -7.1134326550447895
15	Roanmore Saint Joseph's Special School	Waterford Waterford	34.4%	790	X91 E030	52.25433545186891, -7.126471202261946

Table 3: Polling Stations in Electoral Divisions with the Highest Reported Rates of Carers

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	% Carers [CSO]	ED Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
1	Carron Carron NS	Clare Clare	17.1%	146	V95 YA22	53.037817858577505, -9.075235972786382
2	Brownsford Rosbercon Parish Hall	Carlow-Kilkenny Kilkenny	14.9%	148	Y34 TK33	52.393909440668665, -6.962794714384631
3	Béal Deirg Mór Belderrig Community Centre	Mayo Mayo	14.7%	150	F26 KXV6	54.30619977149281, -9.5580945588407,
4	Cullagh Padraig Pearse's GAA Centre	Roscommon-Galway Roscommon	14.4%	208	H53 E398	53.336946558151475, -8.154500579286546
5	Nealstown Camross NS	Laois-Offaly Laois	14.3%	91	R32 YEF6	53.004996210805785, -7.592052631084584
6	Noughaval Kilfenora NS	Clare Clare	13.5%	111	V95 EY90	52.989580141532954, -9.221214006556536,

Electoral Division & Polling Station	Constituency & County	% Carers [CSO]	ED Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
7 Binn an Choire Old National School Srath Salach	Galway Galway	13.2%	219	H91 AE65	53.46445042655767, -9.717092594525067,
8 Ballyhoolahan Boherbue NS	Cork North West Cork	13.2%	295	P51 RY99	52.158363482627244, -9.07174011705574
9 Caher Rushall NS	Laois-Offaly Laois	13.0%	108	R32 CK15	52.95521503041821, -7.554390024359899,
10 Ardagh Ardagh NS	Mayo Mayo	12.9%	365	F26 DK19	54.124711944274566, -9.23293200932157
11 Kilgeever Louisburgh NS	Mayo Mayo	12.8%	102	F28 T189	53.76337372155201, -9.800068139976263,
12 Maas Kilkenny NS	Donegal Donegal	12.5%	272	F94 CX21	54.830959059046485, -8.346165992148036
13 Kilpatrick St Kenny's NS	Meath West Westmeath	12.4%	243	N91 H003	53.51184753600313, -7.397157063782786
14 Killadoon Highwood Community Centre	Sligo-Leitrim Sligo	12.3%	276	F52 K663	54.07247644511274, -8.282422952202749
15 Ballyarthur Town Hall Mitchelstown	Cork East Cork	12.3%	325	P67 CC95	52.26789451945669, -8.271857445771058

Table 4: Polling Stations in Low-Turnout Electoral Divisions in Dublin

Electoral Division & Polling Station	Constituency & County	General Election 2020 Turnout %	ED Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
1 Inns Quay B Saint Mary's Primary School	Dublin Central Dublin	50.5%	4,537	D07 HF10	53.35476632348695, -6.2674629154333115
2 North City Scoil Caoimhín	Dublin Central Dublin	27.5%	6749	D01 YT29	53.35128328011371, -6.257968210043339
3 Mountjoy B St. Brigid's Nursery	Dublin Central Dublin	34.1%	4537	D01 RY94	53.3572082086959, -6.257616478673871

Electoral Division & Polling Station	Constituency & County	General Election 2020 Turnout %	ED Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
4 Arran Quay B Stanhope St NS	Dublin Central Dublin	36.4%	1784	D07 DY60	53.35264899383881, -6.2828903022514915
5 Rotunda B St Pauls CBS	Dublin Central Dublin	26.5%	3,589	D07 P529	53.35057290240467, -6.276749435707641
6 Rotunda A Scoil Caoimhín <i>Same station as N°. 2</i>	Dublin Central Dublin	37.1%	6528	D01 YT29	53.35128328011371, -6.257968210043339
7 Dubber St. Margaret's NS	Dublin Fingal West Dublin	39.6% (Dublin North West) 48.5% (Dublin Fingal)	8931	K67 PE80	53.43041654555986, -6.3007841370200275
8 Kinsealy St. Nicholas of Myra Hall	Dublin Fingal East Dublin	49.5%	11470	D17 FP52	53.42082756429663, -6.176035270986604
9 Priorswood C* Darndale SNS	Dublin Bay North Dublin	50.5%	4883	D17 CK81	53.401715602368256, -6.193086769976132
10 Ballymun B* Holy Spirit NS	Dublin North West Dublin	48.9%	4273	D11 N207	53.395767123869156, -6.270208042463925
11 Phoenix Park 2 St. Mary's Hospital	Dublin West Dublin	30.4%	1465	D20 TY72	53.34994943999179, -6.336261845515446
12 Blanchardstown-Mulhuddart Ladyswell NS	Dublin West Dublin	37.6%	4219	D15 DD40	53.405653614762365, -6.392144523409186
13 Blanchardstown-Tyrrellstown Mary Mother of Hope SNS	Dublin West Dublin	37.6%	3343	D15 PH93	53.40432344088769, -6.424745893946317
14 Tallaght-Fettercairn St Aidan's NS	Dublin South West Dublin	46.1%	11335	D24 XN24	53.2867495199334, -6.404462669550795
15 Tibbradden Our Lady's NS	Dublin Rathdown Dublin	48.8%	945	D16 CX60	53.27535359361609, -6.256968055865242

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	General Election 2020 Turnout %	ED Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
16	Dún Laoghaire-West Central Dominican NS	Dún Laoghaire Dublin	49.0%	2726	A96 V2P2	53.292270987872634, -6.137904743709612
17	Mansion House B Scoil Cairtriona	Dublin Bay South Dublin	33.3%	1021	D02 H365	53.336236626872896, -6.246286593879802
18	St. Kevin's CBS Primary School Synge Street	Dublin Bay South Dublin	35.0%	5732	D08 R283	53.33363446001539, -6.268276908734838
19	Wood Quay B Youthreach Training Centre	Dublin Bay South Dublin	43.7%	1989	D08 XF76	53.3354411128342, -6.2671477719296975
20	Phoenix Park 1 Municipal Rowing	Dublin South Central Dublin	33.0%	1465	D08 EF83	53.346252001148216, -6.321088575921979
21	Merchants Quay B Francis St CBS	Dublin South Central Dublin	36.5%	4343	D08 FE83	53.341434258703714, -6.273399928953108
22	Merchants Quay F St. Catherine's NS	Dublin South Central Dublin	37.5%	2328	D08 YR66	53.33310566770014, -6.283234246766526
23	Tallaght-Jobstown Jobstown Community Centre	Dublin South West Dublin	45.8%	18125	D24 NV06	53.28272418696748, -6.401548818616015

Priorswood C*
Our Lady Immaculate NS not visited.

Ballymun B*
Holy Spirit BNS not visited.

Table 5: Polling Stations in Other Major Urban Centres

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	Urban Centre (No.)	Urban Centre Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
1	St. Nicholas Scoil An Linbh Íosa	Galway West Galway	Galway (4th)	85,910	H91 RX32	53.275764683878755, -9.053809305097793
2	Eyre Square Scoil Chroí Íosa	Galway West Galway	Galway (4th)	85,910	H91 FV48	53.27422229944869, -9.062655161563047
3	West Gate Ballsgrove National School	Louth Louth	Drogheda (6th)	44,135	A92 FD60	53.71115540872472, -6.359892119454248
4	St. Mary's St. John's NS	Louth Louth	Drogheda (6th)	44,135	A92 DD39	53.71096148350811, -6.3748013998754685
5	Dundalk No.1 Urban Town Hall	Louth Louth	Dundalk (7th)	43,112	A91 W20C	54.00456238444265, -6.400527800162336
6	Dundalk No.3 Urban Friary National School	Louth Louth	Dundalk (7th)	43,112	A91 N286	54.001330494660365, -6.407921263393187
7	Navan Urban Flowerfield NS	Meath West Meath	Navan (9th)	33,886	C15 XV20	53.64593589653201, -6.686069937926905
8	Bray No. 1 St. Peter's NS	Wicklow Wicklow	Bray (10th)	33,512	A98 YH93	53.20705428793694, -6.117594757303721
9	Portlaoise Rural Knockmay NS	Laois Laois	Portlaoise (18th)	23,494	R32 EV18	53.03791628020945, -7.314513050696914

Table 6: Polling Stations in Other Geographic Areas

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	County Centre (No.)	County Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
1	Cavan Urban St. Clare's Convent School	Cavan-Monaghan Cavan	Cavan	78,633	H12 DR74	53.99247766227388, -7.356594114259284
2	Cootehill Urban St. Michael's NS	Cavan-Monaghan Cavan	Cavan	78,633	H16 P304	54.07379562162731, -7.074917628410056
3	Corduff Scoil Phadraig Corduff	Cavan-Monaghan Monaghan	Monaghan	65,288	A81 PP78	54.0111381160967, -6.820998193444684

Electoral Division & Polling Station		Constituency & County	County Centre (No.)	County Population [CSO]	Eircode	Map Coordinates
4	Carrickmacross Rural Carrickmacross Workhouse	Cavan-Monaghan Monaghan	Monaghan	65,288	A81 E372	53.97854114571511, -6.725097009379569
5	Carlow Urban St Joseph's NS	Carlow-Kilkenny Carlow	Carlow	61,968	R93 HP99	52.839224400574125, -6.923182801125843
6	Clogrenan Ballinabranagh NS	Carlow-Kilkenny Carlow	Carlow	61,968	R93 T9N4	52.78578341313234, -6.982448764927956
7	Celbridge Scoil na Mainistreach	Kildare Kildare	Kildare	246,977	W23 VR98	53.34033559789964, -6.55452581448244
8	Maynooth Presentation GNS	Kildare Kildare	Kildare	246,977	W23 X0C6	53.3835772118809, -6.587457574290244
9	Caldragh Scoil Mhuire	Longford-Westmeath Longford	Longford	46,751	N39 K263	53.76294352969754, -7.833396489979866
10	Longford Rural Stonepark NS	Longford-Westmeath Longford	Longford	46,751	N39 T925	53.694304741566214, -7.820077109614682

Appendix 4 – Correspondence with Minister Darragh O'Brien

Mr. Darragh O'Brien,
Minister for Housing, Local Government & Heritage,
Custom House,
Dublin 1.

12 April 2024

Dear Minister,

As you are aware, the *Electoral Reform Act 2022* assigns a function to An Coimisiún Toghcháin to prepare and publish Post Electoral Event Reviews - reports on the administration of the electoral events which include a description of the assistance given by presiding officers and returning officers to electors, particularly electors with disabilities, at electoral events.

Members and staff of An Coimisiún Toghcháin visited almost 100 polling stations in 26 counties across Ireland on 8th March 2024 to observe voting procedures and conditions in the two referendums.

A report on the polling stations visited is currently being compiled by An Coimisiún Toghcháin and the finalised report will be published and laid before the Houses of the Oireachtas in compliance with the requirements of the legislation i.e. no later than six months after 8th March 2024.

However, at its meeting this week, members of An Coimisiún discussed the review and agreed that I should write to you about some issues of particular concern which should be addressed in advance of the June elections.

It was quickly apparent to all of the observer teams that the reality regarding the accessibility of polling stations, particularly for electors with disabilities, was considerably worse than initially anticipated when set against accessibility-related statistics and data gathered by my staff in advance of the visits from local Returning Officers and the Working Group on Accessible Voting, chaired by your Department.

Poor directional signage on approach routes to polling stations, lack of parking facilities in urban areas, insufficient parking spaces for electors with disabilities, hazards at building entrance points, issues in regard to emergency exits and polling booths for wheelchair users were encountered by An Coimisiún Toghcháin observer teams on multiple occasions.

Of chief concern, the accessibility of polling stations and polling booths for voters with physical mobility issues, extending to voters with more severe levels of physical disability such as wheelchair users requires immediate attention and remedy. Initial conclusions point to an urgent need for a re-assessment of the polling stations selected for future electoral events, and/or an upgrade of the existing facilities in polling stations and their surrounds.

To assist An Coimisiún Toghcháin in its compilation of the Post Electoral Event Review and to aid planning for a repeat exercise for the forthcoming June 2024 electoral events, An

Coimisiún Toghcháin will separately continue its engagement with Franchise Section and all Returning Officers about a number of more technical issues associated with the elections. I would particularly like to acknowledge their active co-operation and assistance to date.

An Coimisiún Toghcháin will also shortly contact the Working Group on Accessible Voting to seek its feedback on any aspects of the March 2024 referendums which it considers necessary to highlight, in addition to any plans or focus which the Working Group may have in relation to the electoral events in June.

Yours sincerely,



Art O'Leary
Chief Executive, An Coimisiún Toghcháin

**An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage**

11 June 2024

Mr. Art O'Leary,
Chief Executive,
An Coimisiún Toghcháin,
Dublin Castle,
Dublin 2.



**An Coimisiún Toghcháin
The Electoral Commission**

19 JUN 2024



Dear Art,

Thank you for your letter of 12 April regarding the forthcoming Post Electoral Event Review of the referendums on Family and Care.

The observations of An Coimisiún Toghcháin of polling stations' features relating to accessibility are timely and welcome and will inform our ongoing work in this area. The full participation of disabled voters in our democratic processes is essential. Good progress has been made in this regard in recent years and it is important that this is maintained.

As you are aware, Returning Officers are independent in the discharge of their functions, including the selection of polling stations. However, recognising that disabled people have particular needs, my Department endeavours to ensure that the voting process is as accessible and inclusive as possible. The Department produces a Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers and a manual for Presiding Officers in advance of all electoral events.

In advance of the local and European elections on June 7th, members of the Working Group on Disability Voting provided suggestions on accessibility guidance in the memoranda provided to Returning Officers and the manual for Presiding Officers. These memoranda advise that the selection of polling stations should have regard to the needs of disabled voters. They also advise that if a polling station traditionally used is not accessible, consideration should be given to using an alternative accessible venue, or consideration given to practical ways in which the current venue could be made accessible. In short, the documents assist Returning Officers and Presiding Officers in their endeavours to enable full participation by disabled voters. I very much welcome your planned engagement with Returning Officers in relation to these matters, which will undoubtedly help ensure greater accessibility outside and within polling stations in the future.



You will be pleased to note that in April, my officials facilitated a session between the National Disability Authority and the Returning Officers. At the meeting, the representative of the Authority outlined ways in which accessibility for disabled voters could be enhanced at the forthcoming polls. I understand it was a very engaging meeting.

Please rest assured that officials in my Department who are on the working group remain available to engage with An Coimisiún on these issues. I understand that there has been positive engagement between my officials and your staff to date. If there is any additional information An Coimisiún requires for its Post Electoral Event Review, my officials are available to assist.

I look forward to receiving a copy of An Coimisiún's Post Electoral Event Reviews of the March referendums and the June 7th polls when they have been completed. The aim making provision for such a review in the Electoral Reform Act 2022, was to identify what practices could be improved in the administration of electoral events. The first such review will no doubt benefit our democratic processes.

Thank you once again for bringing these matters to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

**Darragh O'Brien, TD,
Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage**

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