

Universal Design in the Built Environment

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Overview

- **Census definition:** a long-standing condition/difficulty, or if as a result of a long-standing condition or difficulty, they experience difficulty with any of a range of common activities.
 - Physical, sensory, intellectual, mental health and neurodivergence
- Number of people with disability in Ireland is 1,109,557 **1 in 5 people**

Transport plays a crucial role in enabling people with disabilities to obtain and retain employment and to participate in everyday life and the activities of their communities



Census 2022

National Disability Authority

The independent statutory body that provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities. Advise the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability in the co-ordination of disability policy.

- **Centre for Excellence in Universal Design:** Promotes the universal design of the built environment, products, services and information and communication technologies so that they can be easily accessed and used by everyone, regardless of age, size, ability or disability.

The Disability Act: Law that places legal obligations on public bodies to ensure accessibility for people with disabilities, promoting equality and social inclusion.

- **NDA monitoring and reporting**

- Codes of Practice
- Web Accessibility
- Employment
- Irish Sign Language Act

- **National advisors**

- Policy and research
- Universal Design
- European Accessibility Act

Relevant strategies

➤ The National Human Rights Strategy for Disabled People 2025-2030

- Goal is to ensure to ensure full participation in Irish society on an equal basis with others, disabled people have a right to a life without barriers.

➤ United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities, an international human rights treaty ratified by the State in 2018 to protect, promote, and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights by people with disabilities.

- Article 9: Accessibility: identification and elimination of obstacles and barriers to accessibility, shall apply to Buildings, roads, transportation and other indoor and outdoor facilities

➤ United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

➤ National Planning Framework for Strategy Ireland 2040

➤ European Commission's Disability Strategy

Pillar 1: Inclusive Learning and Education

Pillar 2: Employment

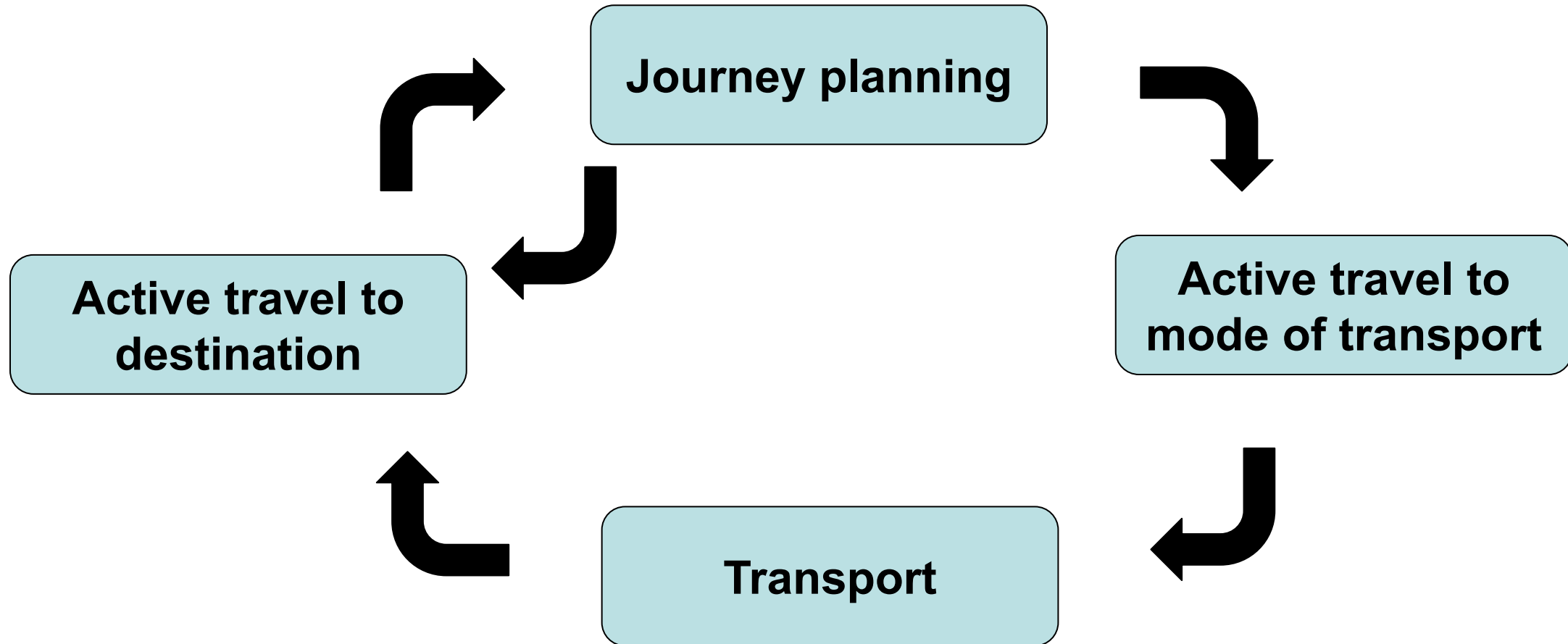
Pillar 3: Independent Living and Active Participation in Society

Pillar 4: Wellbeing and Health

Pillar 5: Transport and Mobility

Mobility within the built environment

The Journey – Whole journey approach



Facilitating the Journey - Universal Design

Universal Design is the design and composition of a building, an environment, product or service so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their **age, size, ability or disability**

1. **Built environment**
2. **Products & Services**
3. **ICT**



Universal Design places **human diversity at the heart** of the design process so that buildings and environments can be designed to meet the **needs of all users**.

Universal Design assumes

Every person experiences barriers, reduced functioning, some form of disability – temporary or permanent – at some stage in life



The foundation of UD is engagement and codesign with disabled people and older people.



Definition of Accessibility

- “the extent to which products, systems, services, environments and facilities can be used by people from range of characteristics and capabilities to achieve a population with the widest a specified goal in a specified context of use” (ISO Guide 71: 2014)



Road User Priorities

- “To encourage more sustainable travel patterns and safer streets, designers must place pedestrians at the top of the user hierarchy (see Figure 2.21)” - Design Manual for Urban Roads and Streets, Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport

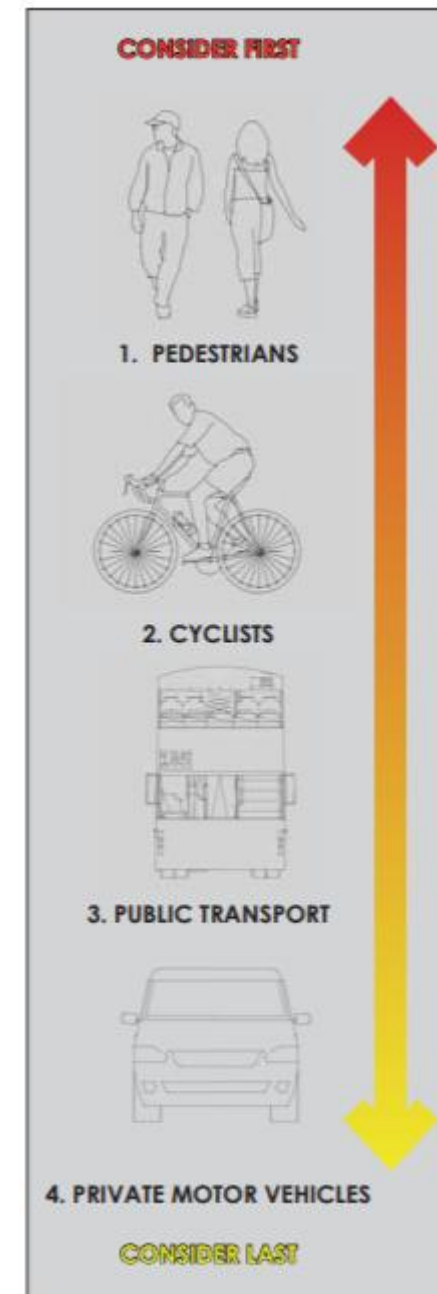
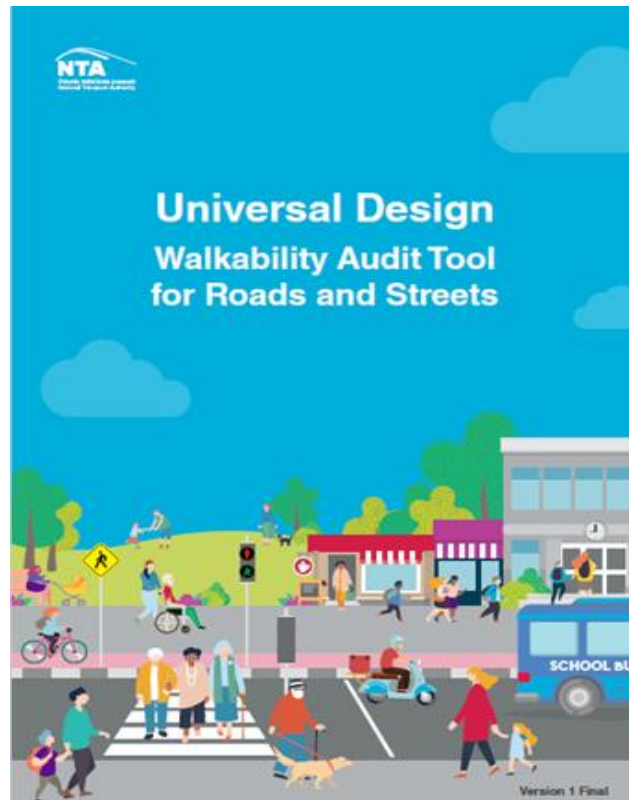


Table 2.21: User hierarchy that promotes and prioritises sustainable forms of transportation

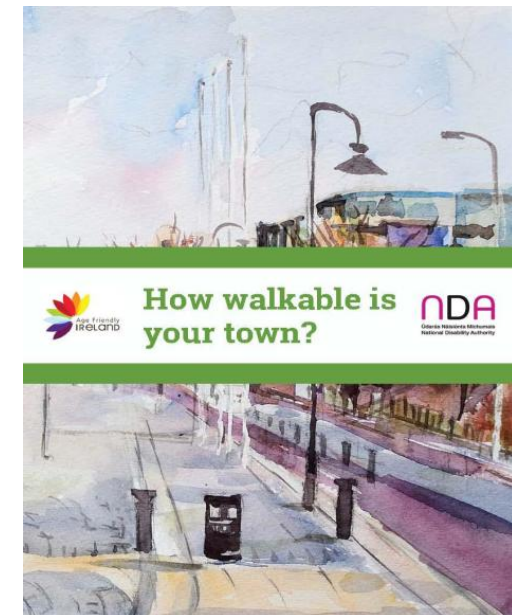
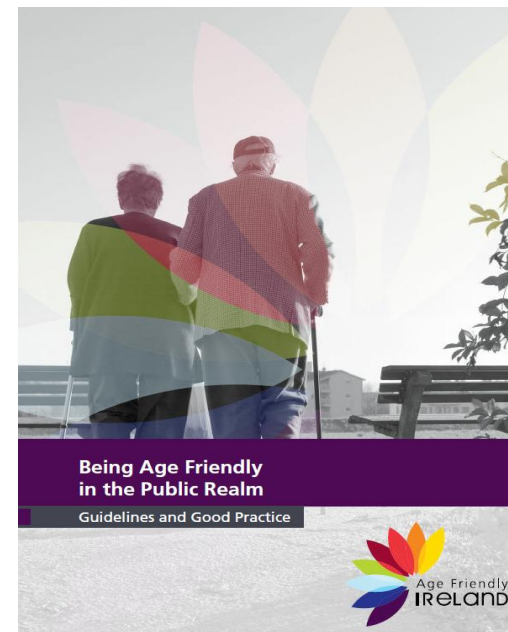
Facilitating the Journey – Walkability in the public realm

Universal Design Walkability Audit Tool



Age Friendly Ireland

- Being Age Friendly in the Public Realm
- How walkable is your town?



How walkable is your town?

Footpaths were rated between **OK** and **Poor**. Barriers to 'walkability' included:

- footpaths that are **too narrow**,
- **absent** footpaths or footpaths that suddenly end,
- **poor surface conditions** (e.g., cracks, tilted, uneven, slippery, lodged water from drainpipes, and missing dropped kerbs),
- older poorly designed footpaths with **sporadic and inconsistent maintenance**,
- hazardous footpath **obstructions** including raised cobble blocks, overgrown shrubbery, dog fouling, leaf litter and moss, manholes with no covers, utility boxes and poles, rubbish bins, parked vehicles, signage at inappropriate locations, and clutter from businesses,
- **markings to delineate the edge of footpaths are either missing, faded, or confusing** because of contrasting materials used.



Crossings and Junctions were rated **Poor** overall. Challenges raised involved:

- a **lack of pedestrian crossings** in key locations (e.g., town centres, schools, train stations) or for key functions such as to get to the public toilet,
- **dangerous surface conditions** around crossings such as missing or damaged dropped kerbs,
- **inappropriately positioned crossings** such as in busy areas,
- difficulty crossing at certain junctions due to **insufficient traffic light signal time** for people of all mobility levels to cross safely,
- **traffic lights with no sound**, needed to alert those with visual impairments when it is safe to cross.



Road User Behaviors were between **OK and Poor**. Problematic road user behaviours were also reported as a significant issue, including:

- **driving and cycling** at excessive speeds or not looking out for pedestrians,
- inconsiderate or illegal **parking practices** such parking on pavements or parking in accessible parking spaces without a blue badge,
- behaviours related to **noisy traffic, littering and dog fouling**.



Car parked with no blue Badge

Public Spaces and Facilities were **OK** overall. Inaccessible aspects of public spaces and buildings were raised as significant barriers to walkability across reports, such as;

- certain prominent **areas** of towns perceived as **completely inaccessible** (e.g. market squares/centres, access to bay/beach areas),
- **entrances to businesses and buildings** missing ramps or have unsafe to use ramps, or when access is only possible at the rear of buildings,
- lack of **accessible public toilets** facilities or none at all,
- **bus stops** with no shelters or seating.



Safety and Comfort rated between **OK** and **Good**.

- **Public seating:** Reports highlighted a lack of adequate public seating, benches, rest spots, or [age friendly seating](#) as a common major challenge for people with mobility issues.
- **Public lighting:** Feeling unsafe due to poor lighting, out of order lighting or no public lighting at nighttime in particular areas was also raised as a significant problem across audit reports.
- **Cycling infrastructure:** Shared spaces considered unsafe, unsafe crossing cycle paths, **Island bus stops** unsafe



Other issues:

- **Parking:** a lack of dedicated and appropriately placed [Age-Friendly Car Parking](#) spaces or accessible parking spaces. For example, when disabled parking spaces are not well connected to local amenities.
- **Signage:** a lack of appropriate signage such as when wayfinding signs were either in poor condition, inappropriate, or entirely unhelpful.
- **Cycling infrastructure:** a lack of segregated bike lanes and cycle paths and bicycle parking facilities added to walkability barriers.



Actions to improve walkability

➤ NDA [Walkability Audit Summary Report](#)

Sample of Actions for **Crossings and junctions**

- review pedestrian traffic light signal timings and audio alerting,
- engage and collaborate with stakeholders to determine the potential for an improved pedestrian crossing,
- make existing partially completed crossing points more visually obvious,
- install traffic calming measures and provision of safe pedestrian crossings especially at schools, in collaboration with schools,
- improve and maintain the road surfaces so that it is smooth and gives priority to pedestrians over motorists,
- improve the provision of safe, accessible pedestrian crossing points,
- invest resources (people, time, finance) to improve, provide new and maintain the road crossings.

Facilitating the Journey – statutory obligations

Accessible websites and apps

Under the [EU Web Accessibility Directive](#) (WAD), public sector bodies in Ireland must ensure their websites and mobile applications are accessible to everybody, including people with disabilities.

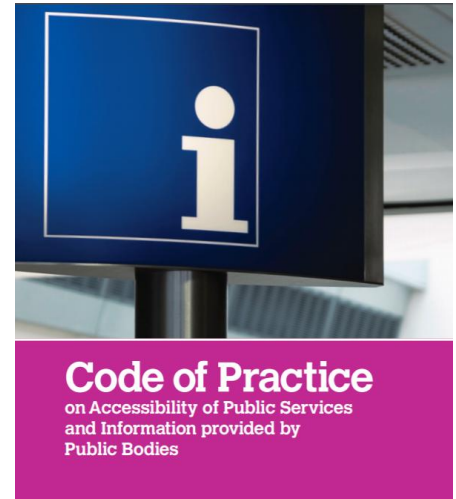
Local Authority	Accessibility Score%
Cavan County Council ☺	100.00
Meath County Council	99.74
Cork City Council	99.60
Mayo County Council	99.49
Leitrim County Council	98.35
Wicklow County Council	96.25
Waterford City & County Council	95.49
Kildare County Council	95.39
Sligo County Council	94.72
Donegal County Council	94.46
Limerick City & County Council	94.40

The Code of Practice on Accessibility of Public Services and Information

Part 3 of the Disability Act

Sample of indicators:

- **Consult with and seek out the expertise of people with disabilities (UNCRPD)**
- Access Officer
- Provide information on the accessibility of their service including any assistance they provide
- Procurement process
- Website WAD compliant
- Complaints procedure under the Disability Act 2005
- Training to staff



Employment of persons with disabilities

Under [Part 5 of the Disability Act](#), public bodies are obliged to:

- Promote and support the employment of persons with disabilities in the public sector
- Ensure that public bodies meet the minimum statutory employment target of **6%** for the employment of disabled people.
- NDA advice and guidance
 - Website “How do you Create an Equal, Diverse and Inclusive Work Culture using a Universal Design Approach?”
 - Recently launched the NDA’s free [Introductory e-Learning module on disability equality](#) showcases this advice and models of good practice.

Irish Sign Language Act



- Law that officially recognises ISL as a native language of Ireland.
- It mandates that public bodies provide free, accredited ISL interpretation for deaf users accessing public services.
- NDA responsible for reporting on its operation.
 - First report 2021
 - Second report 2026 (pending publication)

European Accessibility Act (EAA)

- The European Accessibility Act (EAA) is a European Directive that contains accessibility requirements for a range of products and services.
 - Payment self-service terminals
 - Information self service terminals
 - Ticketing machines
 - Check-in machines....
- The NDA is responsible for advising the compliance authorities on the EAA accessibility requirements.
- Compliance authorities: Commission for Communications Regulation (ComReg), Coimisiún na Meán, Irish Aviation Authority, National Transport Authority, Central Bank of Ireland



Homework





1. Do the [NDA e-learning module on disability equality](#)
2. Look at the NDA and AFI resources on walkability - [thematic review of Walkability Audits](#) – Actions
3. Think “is this design accessible for people with disabilities?”
4. Engage with people with disabilities and older people
5. See how your local authority is doing in complying with accessibility legislation by looking at our monitoring reports on www.nda.ie/monitoring
6. Look through the NDA’s CEUD guidance and resources on www.universaldesign.ie
7. Contact us at info@nda.ie or info@ceud.ie
8. Check out the [European Commission’s AccessibleEU Centre: Accessible Transport online course](#)
9. Attend our conferences on universal design




AccessibleEU European Event

Advancing Accessibility in Transport

 Tuesday 9 June 2026

 9.30 to 16.30 (IST)

 Aviva Stadium, Havelock Area, Lansdowne Road,
Dublin 4, Ireland

 Hybrid Event

[Join us!](#)

Accessible
centre **EU**



We move with you!



Centre for Excellence
in Universal Design

Ülkerle Nispetiye Michumale
National Disability Authority

NDA

Save the Date

8th International Universal Design Conference (UD26)



When? 4–6 November 2026

Where? Galway City, Ireland

Contact: UD26@nda.ie



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National Disability Authority



OILSCOIL NA
GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY
OF GALWAY

nda



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais
National Disability Authority

Save the date

NDA Annual Conference 2026

Disability inclusive responses to
emergencies – Article 11
UNCRPD

Thursday 15 October, 2026
Aviva Stadium Dublin and Online

Thank you

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