



Stáisiún Vótála
Polling Station

POST ELECTORAL EVENT REVIEW

General Election | 29 November 2024

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Table of Contents

1. Foreword	2
2. Executive Summary	4
3. Scope of PEERs	12
4. Attendance and Observation of Electoral Events	13
5. PEER Checklist	14
6. Polling Stations – Selection Criteria	23
7. PEER Routes	24
8. Analysis	28
9. Best Practices Observed	35
10. Electoral Poll Data: National Election and Democracy Study	37
11. PEER Observer Experiences	38
12. Voter Experiences	40
13. Case Studies	44
14. Next Steps	65
15. Endnotes	67
16. Appendices	69
Appendix 1 - Information Campaign for 29 November general election	69
Appendix 2 - Index of Polling Stations Visited	72
Appendix 3 - PEER Checklist Statistical Analysis	79
Appendix 4 - Correspondence with Minister James Browne	81
Appendix 5 - Sample Election Report Dáil Election 29 November 2024	82

1. Foreword



The people of Ireland voted in a general election to Dáil Éireann on 29 November 2024, electing a total of 174 TDs across 43 constituencies: the largest Dáil in the history of the State.

In exercise of the statutory powers vested in it by s.68 of the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*, An Coimisiún Toghcháin (An Coimisiún) prepared and now publishes this report on the administration of the general election, and has so advised the Department of Housing, Local

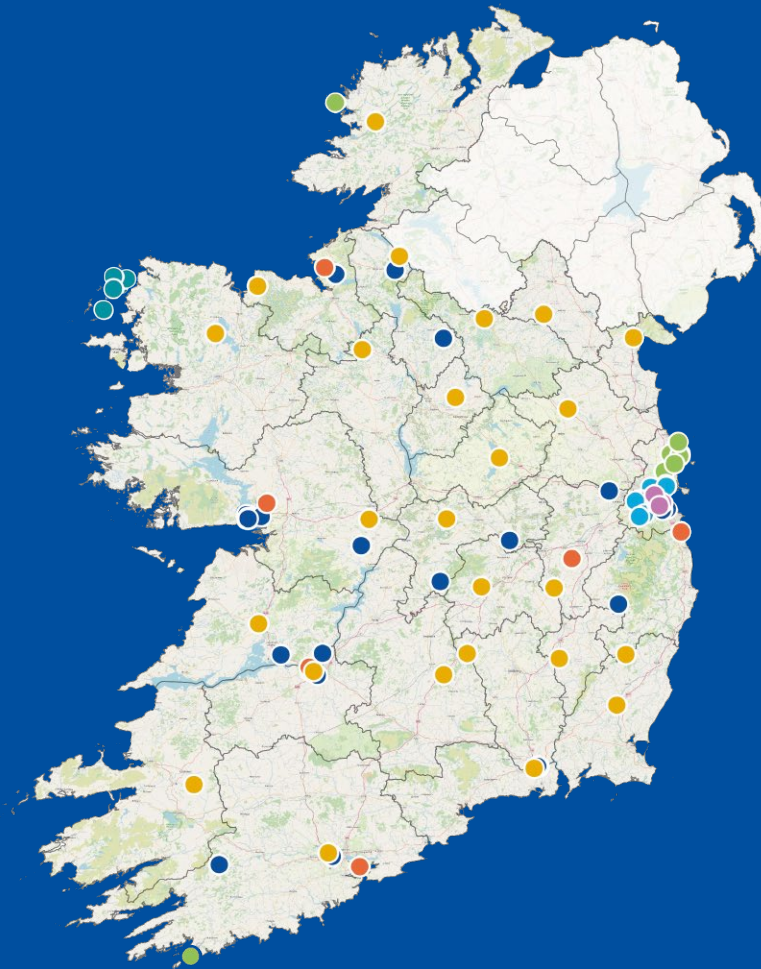
Government and Heritage and the returning officers appointed in connection with this election.

This is the third Post Electoral Event Review (PEER) report published by An Coimisiún since our establishment on 9 February 2023. In line with the legislative provisions governing PEERs, this report places a focus on the assistance provided to electors while voting, in particular electors with disabilities. Inclusivity and fairness are guiding principles of our work, and accessibility is of the utmost importance to the health and integrity of our electoral system.

As was the case with our previous PEERs in March and June 2024, members and staff of An Coimisiún observed voting at polling stations for the purposes of this report. Key principles of international election observation were followed as part of these visits. Polling stations were selected based on a range of criteria: feedback from voters, geographic representation, and our concern as an organisation to encourage and increase participation among underrepresented and marginalised groups. In total, we visited 87 polling stations across every county.

From Árainn Mhór off the shores of Donegal, to Sherkin Island to the south of Cork, An Coimisiún's representatives were heartened by the professionalism and dedication of election staff. The organisation and conducting of a general election in the space of only a few weeks is, on any analysis, a mammoth task, but one on which Ireland's representative democracy depends. The diligence and expertise of returning officers and their officials ensured that the election could take place on that wet winter's day, and we commend them for their skill and professionalism.

We were particularly inspired by observing efforts of election staff to facilitate voters who found it difficult to cast their ballot, including the elderly and infirm and those residing in nursing homes. For the first time, we accompanied electors with varying disabilities as they went to vote in polling stations across the Belmullet Peninsula in North Mayo. There we witnessed the difficulties encountered in some polling stations by wheelchair users, albeit we were aware that inclement weather conditions posed particular challenges on the morning of polling day. Across our three PEER reports, we have learned a great deal about these obstacles. While we were pleased to observe progress in physical accessibility at several locations on 29 November, there is still considerable work to be done.



Legend	
■	Geographic Distribution
■	Dublin Pobal Index
■	Rest of Ireland Pobal Index
■	Dublin City Low Turnout
■	Public Engagement
■	Electors Aged 18-24
■	IWA Case Study

We noted difficulties, previously not analysed, experienced by some voters in applying for a postal vote given the short time frame for this election.

We here take the opportunity to recommend some legislative and administrative reforms, aimed at improving the accessibility of the electoral system in the broad sense. We also note that many of the recommendations made by An Coimisiún in previous PEERs have yet to be fully implemented, and we therefore restate them here.

I hope that the analysis in this report will contribute to the improvement of the electoral system. Many of the recommendations we propose are not unduly onerous but could be expected to make a real and positive contribution to the voting experience and to increased participation in future electoral events. I commend it to the reader.

The Honourable Ms Justice Marie Baker
Chairperson, An Coimisiún Toghcháin

2. Executive Summary

2024 was one of the busiest years of electoral events in the history of the State. Two referendums took place in March, followed by European Parliament, local and Limerick mayoral elections in June and the general election at the end of November.

S.68 of the *Electoral Reform Act 2022* provides that An Coimisiún Toghcháin, the Electoral Commission, may prepare and publish after each electoral event a report on the administration of an electoral event – a ‘Post Electoral Event Review’ (PEER) and that these PEER reports shall be published within six months of the electoral event. To date, An Coimisiún has conducted and published two PEER reports in line with these provisions: for the March referendums and June elections.

This is the third PEER report and relates to the general election held on 29 November 2024. The methodology of, and approach taken to, each PEER reflects and builds on experience and observations from the previous one. Specifically, the approach taken in this PEER represents an evolution in extending the scope of analysis from accessibility of polling stations primarily observed through visits on polling day to a broader ‘seeing is understanding’ approach. On this occasion, An Coimisiún attended the issuing of postal votes; observed special voting taking place in nursing homes; and witnessed first-hand the experience of electors with disabilities being supported in travelling to polling stations and casting their ballot.

As with previous PEERs, the methodology used was in-person fieldwork, survey data from the National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) and feedback from voters by email or phone call to An Coimisiún’s offices. For the assessment of

polling stations, members and staff of An Coimisiún visited 87 polling stations in 26 counties across the State. Similar to our experiences in March and June, we found election staff very helpful and courteous to our teams and their hard work and commitment was evident throughout our visits.

Of the 87 polling stations visited:

- 56 polling stations were in Central Statistics Office (CSO) designated urban areas:¹ 37 of these were in cities, 20 of which were in Dublin city;
- nine polling stations were in Gaeltacht areas;
- five polling stations in Co. Mayo were chosen as part of a joint case study conducted with Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) service-users;
- six polling stations had been highlighted to An Coimisiún by members of the public as having accessibility or privacy issues;
- two polling stations were situated on offshore islands.

This was our first time conducting a PEER for a general election. In conjunction with the short turnaround time between the announcement and holding of the general election, statutory provisions for a general election (see Table 1 below) such as the deadline to register for a postal vote (two days after the date of dissolution of the Dáil) and the deadlines for the nomination of candidates/withdrawal of candidates, created challenging timeframes. These timelines can create difficulties for certain aspects of election administration such as for people who qualify for a postal vote but do not know they require it until the election date is announced (for example people who are absent on the date for work reasons).

It also creates problems by restricting the time available for sending and returning ballots to our overseas embassies.

Table 1: Timelines for the general election, 29 November 2024.

Key dates 2024	
8 November	Proclamation dissolving Dáil Éireann
8 November	Writ of Election issued
8 November	Polling Day Order issued
10 November	Deadline for postal vote applications
11-13 November	Notices of Election published
12 November	Deadline to register to vote
14 November	Opening of Nominations
16 November	Close of Nominations
18 November	Withdrawal of Nominations
19 November	Proofing and approval of ballot papers
20-21 November	Initial supply of ballot papers
29 November	Polling Day

These timelines also have knock-on effects for the printing of the ballot papers and printing and delivery of polling information cards. We understand that polling information cards were not issued in some local areas as a result. At one polling station in Limerick city, visited by a PEER observer team, polling staff estimated that



80% of electors (and possibly even more) were presenting without polling information cards as they were reportedly undelivered.

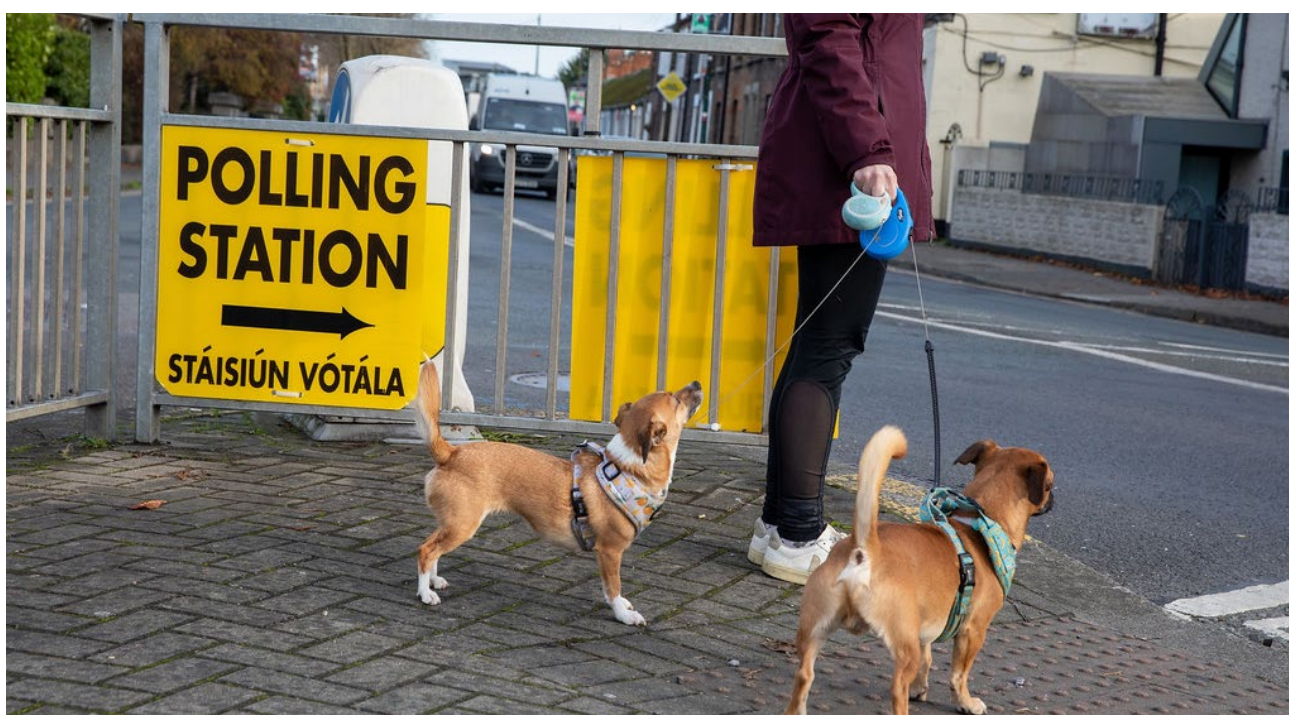
Another issue arising in the constituency of Limerick City, was an administrative error meaning some general election candidates' names did not appear in alphabetical order on the ballot paper as is required under s.88(1)(a) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*. On this occasion, the outcome of the election results in this constituency were not subject to challenge arising from this error.

Following the *Constituency Review Report 2023*² conducted by An Coimisiún, the number of Dáil constituencies increased by four from 39 to 43. For the November 2024 general election, around 800,000 people lived in a constituency which was new or different compared with the last general election in 2020. In some isolated cases, errors in polling schemes combined with the new Dáil constituency boundary changes, resulted in small pockets of electors voting in the wrong Dublin Dáil constituency. Arising from this, we believe

polling schemes should be reviewed following any changes made to electoral boundaries following a constituency review and additional guidance provided to presiding officers on how to address this situation should it occur in the future, although of course the priority must be to take whatever action is required to avoid such errors.

Administrative arrangements were also altered on foot of boundary changes; in one polling station visited by a PEER observer team, the polling stations for the two constituencies of Galway East and Roscommon-Galway were set up in the same school room with polling booths separated by two desks, resulting in electors being unsure of their assigned polling booth.

We observed the issuing of postal votes for the general election for two Dáil constituencies and watched the dispatch of postal votes overseas via the “diplomatic bag” as administered by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. As a result of our postal voting observation exercises,



we have identified procedural changes which could be implemented in advance of the research on postal voting which An Coimisiún will commence later in 2025 as part of our *Research Programme 2024-2026*.

We attended special voting in nursing homes in the Dáil constituency of Tipperary North and examined the data available on those registered for the special and postal vote nationwide. We consider that the separation of election data on special voting from data on postal voting (for example on election data reporting forms) is essential for all future electoral events, including the presidential election in Autumn 2025. Currently, these categories are aggregated, recording the number of votes rejected at opening as a total of postal and special votes, and the number of votes placed and found in the ballot box as a total of postal and special votes. Not having the segregation of data for postal and special votes impedes our oversight capacity as it affects our ability to examine postal and special voting patterns overall.

It was encouraging that our visits to polling stations in November demonstrated progress since previous PEERs. There was evidence that returning officers had taken note of areas identified as problematic in our previous reports concerning the March referendums and June elections. A genuine effort to improve the accessibility of certain polling stations was in evidence.

In comparison with our observations of previous electoral events in 2024, we observed an increase in disabled or elderly electors being assisted with the voting process at polling stations – both by polling staff and by voting companions. Another positive, and we think new, practice which was noted was the use of signs reminding electors to ensure that their ballot paper was stamped on being issued to them. This

was observed in multiple constituencies and is to be commended. There was also an improvement in the accessibility of voting compartments; in general, there appears to be an increase in the use of modern voting compartments – with a low-level compartment for wheelchair users – at polling stations.

On privacy, PEER observer teams reported fewer privacy-related issues in polling stations than were observed during the June elections. For visually impaired electors, ballot paper templates (BPTs)³ were present at 97% of polling stations visited, although their usage was only in evidence on two occasions.

As with our March and June PEER observations, accessibility issues were observed such as steps, steep changes in level, threshold lips and the lack of wheelchair ramps and the level of directional signage provided outside polling stations remained relatively low. With a presidential election imminent in Autumn 2025, building on the PEER reports to date, An Coimisiún believes there is time and opportunity to address accessibility issues and the need for more and improved signage.

75% of polling stations visited in November had a primary entrance that was accessible for disabled voters which is consistent with our observations from previous PEERs: 74% during the June local and European elections, and an identical 75% during the Family and Care referendums in March. Although accessibility issues were identified with the primary entrances of 25% of polling stations, when alternative access arrangements were considered, approximately 89% of polling stations visited by An Coimisiún were accessible to voters with a disability. This was the first time alternative access points for wheelchair users were recorded as part of

the PEER, though we consider that there is no substitute for universal access for all electors via one main entrance.

Unfortunately, regarding our case study carried out in conjunction with the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA), we observed wheelchair users who could not enter their polling station without assistance in two of the five polling stations visited in the Belmullet Local Electoral Area. On polling day, across the vicinity of Belmullet, we met with IWA service-users who had a range of disabilities and provided mixed opinions on voting. A power wheelchair user expressed complete satisfaction with her voting experience; a visually impaired elector said he found the ballot paper template (BPT) difficult to use and voted instead with the assistance of a presiding officer; another visually impaired voter brought their own magnifying glass to view the ballot paper; and an elector with an intellectual disability advised that the polling staff were particularly helpful.

A key lesson for An Coimisiún from this case study was the importance of taking a broad approach to accessibility. By accompanying the IWA and its service users in Co. Mayo, we gained a much better appreciation that polling station accessibility is not just about the presence of individual pieces of infrastructure such as ramps. It is ultimately about the overall design and flow of the whole voting experience and the interaction between different aspects of the voting infrastructure and journey.

While electoral observation is a key tool used by us to deliver the PEERs, An Coimisiún has decided to supplement this with larger scale quantitative data regarding voter experience through the inclusion of questions on voter experience in the National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS). Some such data was

collected in March, and this was further expanded on and developed in June. Following the general election, 2,200 respondents said that they had voted. Of these, similar to March and June, an encouraging 99% said that their voting experience was easy or quite easy.

13% of voters said that they did not get the assistance they needed from polling station staff when voting in November compared with 12% of respondents in June. Finally, a fifth of voters (21%) said that the layout of the ballot paper was difficult to follow, suggesting that more work may need to be done in voter education. This also reinforces the need for An Coimisiún's planned research on ballot paper design.

We are conscious that there are many aspects to the administration of an electoral event that merit observation and evaluation. Therefore, this PEER also highlights additional procedural and policy-oriented reforms or changes that should be considered, as well as some specific recommendations related to accessibility of voting for persons with disabilities.

We also identified additional barriers facing electors in the 'illness/disability' category and recommend that these be remedied with the utmost priority, as currently these electors may face additional costs (see 'Case study: Barriers to postal voting – cost', p.53). In addition, electors who are entitled to a postal vote under the 'occupation/students' category encounter additional 'Declaration of Identity' requirements not faced by others who are entitled to postal votes (see 'Case study: Occupation/student postal vote', p.54). Communication regarding these requirements should be improved.

Based on our observations in polling stations, we also make a recommendation for instruction to be given to polling staff



on another recurring issue – polling information cards left by voters on the presiding officer’s table. This has data protection and privacy implications where these are not securely disposed of.

Finally, in a repeat of the exercise conducted for the June elections, we test-called freephone numbers listing candidates in the order they appear on the ballot paper, these are primarily designed to support voters with visual impairments. We have concluded that audio files would be a useful supplementary option if made available to voters on returning officer websites, as well as on www.gov.ie in advance of an electoral event.

An Coimisiún reaffirms the need for further progress regarding the physical accessibility of polling stations for electors with disabilities, acknowledging the work done to date since the beginning of 2024. Continued action needs to be taken by all involved in the selection of polling stations or the setting of the criteria used to select them, to further increase polling station accessibility. Certain buildings continue to be selected to act as polling stations despite their unsuitability. Specifically, our November observations indicate that a review of accessibility standards and an accessibility rating for polling stations continue to be required, as recommended in our first PEER report on the March referendums⁴.

PEER March recommendations



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.

As per previous PEER recommendations, progress will be monitored as set out in An Coimisiún commitments below.

Our recommendations arising from this PEER are as follows:

PEER November recommendations

	Waive all charges in connection with medical certification imposed on persons applying for the postal vote because of an illness or disability. An Coimisiún strongly recommends that this should be done in advance of the 2025 presidential election.
	Review the statutory timelines following the dissolution of the Dáil to ensure that voters are given every opportunity to arrange for postal voting, and those wishing to register to vote for the first time or at a new address are able to do so.
	Amend <i>Form PV4 - Application for postal vote due to work or study reasons</i> , so that attendance at a Garda station and the 'Declaration of Identity' requirements regarding voting are clearly specified on the application form.
	Issue guidance to presiding officers regarding the safe and secure disposal of polling information cards left in polling stations by electors.
	Review polling schemes following any changes made to electoral boundaries arising from a constituency review.
	Issue guidance to presiding officers on how to respond to incidences where electors are issued with ballot papers for the wrong constituency.
	Amend reporting forms completed by returning officers after each electoral event so that postal voting statistics and returns are separate from special voting data.
	Display freephone numbers which list candidates' in the order they appear on the ballot paper prominently on the homepage of the returning officer and www.gov.ie websites. As a supplementary option on these websites, provide audio files which call out a list of the candidates in the order in which they appear on the ballot paper.

An Coimisiún commitments

An Coimisiún will also take certain actions arising from this and previous PEERs as follows:

- An Coimisiún will assess progress in delivering the recommendations in the March PEER – ‘Revise and expand the accessibility standards for polling stations in an updated accessibility checklist’ and ‘Assign an accessibility rating to all polling stations which is easy for electors to check in advance of voting’.
- An Coimisiún will review progress in implementing all remaining recommendations⁵ in the three PEER reports to date, after the presidential election. This will include engagement with relevant stakeholders.
- The presidential election PEER approach and plan will be devised in consultation with the groups established by An Coimisiún to assist in the development of its *Education and Public Engagement Strategy*.

This report also includes details of the information campaign run by An Coimisiún for the November general election (see Appendix 1).



3. Scope of PEERs

Reflecting its PEER function, An Coimisiún's Strategy Statement 2024-2026⁶ sets out its first strategic priority as follows:



“Rigorous and transparent oversight of all elections and referendums to be conducted assuring the highest levels of integrity, transparency, and fairness to maintain and enhance trust in the electoral process.”



There are many stages and elements to the electoral process which could potentially be explored through the PEER. Our PEER model has been practical in scope from the outset, conducted through on-the-ground visits by An Coimisiún staff and members to polling stations in every county in the State. It also reflects data collected on voter experience through the National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS). (see section Electoral Poll Data: NEDS, p.37).

Given that the legislation providing for PEERs to be conducted places an emphasis on the experiences of voters with disabilities, as with previous PEERs, this focus remains central: but our approach has evolved. For this PEER, after engagement with a number of Disabled Persons' Organisations (DPOs), we organised for a PEER observer team to directly observe the situation on the ground for electors with disabilities, by accompanying the Irish Wheelchair

Association (IWA) — a Disability Service Provider (DSP) — on polling day in the Belmullet Local Electoral Area (see p.44).

For November 2024's general election PEER, we chose to broaden our observation to gain a wider knowledge of the different aspects of election administration. We expanded our attendance beyond polling station visits on election day to other election administration tasks and operations which are part of the running of a general election. We looked at how the postal vote is issued to electors registered for the postal vote, noting the different delivery or administrative arrangements in place depending on the category of postal voter. We observed the conduct of special voting in nursing homes and saw first-hand the importance of this franchise to the long-term residential care community. We also examined election data reporting forms which returning officers complete after each electoral event. We attended count centres in Dublin, Cork, Laois, Kildare, Wicklow, Mayo and Roscommon to witness the counting of votes and the adjudication process for challenged ballot papers.

Like the March and June PEER exercises, our key objective was to gain an overview of voting procedures and conditions and to highlight areas for improvement, particularly regarding accessibility and enhancing participation. For this PEER, we also strove to identify best practices in terms of voting experiences.

On this occasion, 16 teams visited 87 polling stations. Again, for this PEER we visited all 26 counties, combining election observation practices with specific checks regarding the assistance given by presiding officers and returning officers to electors, particularly electors with disabilities.



The scope of the issues examined in this PEER is based on legislative provisions regarding accessibility for electors: s.68(3) of the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*, the *Electoral Act, 1992* and the *Electoral (Amendment) Act, 1996*. The *Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers*

*General Election 2024*⁷ and the *Manual for Presiding Officers at a Dáil Election 29th November*⁸ inform our work and the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage's decision to publish these in line with the recommendation in the March PEER is most welcome.

4. Attendance and Observation of Electoral Events

To complement our legislative power to conduct PEERs and to have all such powers as are necessary for the performance of our functions, An Coimisiún recommended in its **March PEER** report that there be an express statutory provision for the attendance of our staff and members at polling stations and count centres. An Coimisiún restates the need for this provision in advance of the presidential election. For that purpose, the legislation should expressly make provision for our attendance at the administration and observation of all manner of voting, such as places of special voting or of postal voting. The legislation should cover post-election administration tasks, such as oversight of the secure storage of ballot papers or access to electoral data reports submitted by returning officers to the Clerk of the Dáil.

Meanwhile, An Coimisiún welcomes the inclusion in the *Manual for Presiding Officers 29 November 2024* of the reference to An Coimisiún members and

staff attending polling stations on polling day.⁹

The experience of the visiting teams is that An Coimisiún's presence at polling stations is well received by electors. In addition, there is evidence that An Coimisiún's voter education material is having an impact; electors advised PEER observer teams that they had viewed An Coimisiún's online material such as how to vote¹⁰ or how to find out what constituency they were in.¹¹

An Coimisiún members and staff attended, in an observer capacity, the issuing of postal votes, special voting and/or counting of votes in Dublin, Cork, Laois, Wicklow, Kildare, Mayo, Roscommon and Tipperary. In all these cases, written permission was sought from the respective returning officers in advance by An Coimisiún. The co-operation of returning officers and their staff in facilitating our attendance at election administration activities, special voting and count centres is greatly appreciated.

5. PEER Checklist

The **PEER Checklist** is a template document used by PEER observer teams to record their data and observations when they visit a polling station. It was developed by An Coimisiún for its inaugural visits to polling stations in March 2024, further refined for the June 2024 elections and reviewed again in advance of the November 2024 general election.

The **PEER Checklist** combines accessibility-focused appraisals of polling stations with international election observation standards. Our assessments of polling stations include the review of important practical arrangements at polling stations for example signs, ramps, car parking, polling station layout and so on. In addition, practices core to fairness, trust and security of the electoral process such as ballot paper stamping, location of posters and security of the ballot box were also reviewed as part of the **PEER Checklist**.

Regarding the accessibility of polling stations, we examined assessments used by the UK, Estonia and Australia as well as the **Accessibility Checklist**¹² developed in Ireland by the *Working Group on Disability Voting* chaired by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage. The work of Lithuania's Central Electoral Commission also came to our attention and specifically the improvements achieved as a result of their work with disability representatives to assess polling station accessibility.

Spotlight on Lithuania

A 2023 paper published by the European Commission - *Guide of good electoral practices in Member States addressing the participation of citizens with disabilities in*

*the electoral process*¹³ specifically refers to inspections of polling stations in Lithuania which seem to have had a very significant positive impact on accessibility.

In the 2012 national elections in Lithuania, a joint initiative took place between Lithuania's Central Electoral Commission, the Lithuanian Disability Forum and the Lithuanian Association of Persons with Disabilities to assess the accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities.

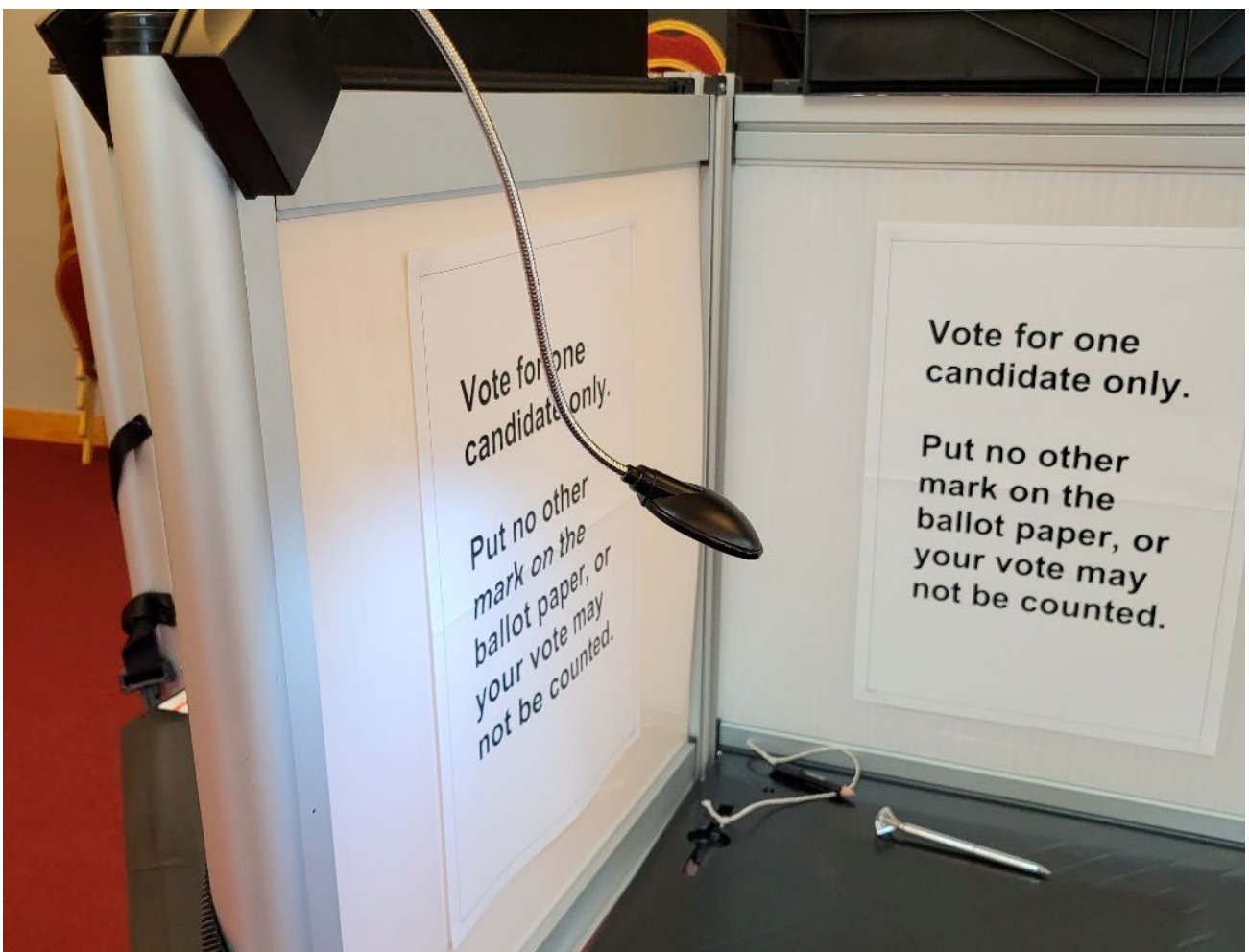
The exercise found there were 554 polling stations accessible to persons with disabilities from the total number of 2,017 polling stations throughout the territory of Lithuania (27.47%).¹⁴ In 2020, an Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) report on the Republic of Lithuania Parliamentary Elections held on 11 and 25 October 2020 found that "Legal amendments in 2018 required municipal budgets to provide for the accessibility of polling stations for persons with disabilities. Owing to measures taken, the accessibility rate at these elections was reported at 93 per cent".¹⁵ As mentioned in previous PEERs, returning officers, who have the responsibility of selecting polling stations, do not have dedicated funds to support any refurbishment works.

Voting in Northern Ireland

In addition, in preparing for the PEER, An Coimisiún benefitted from a visit by some of its staff to observe voting in Northern Ireland on 4 July 2024. At the invitation of the Electoral Commission, Northern Ireland, three An Coimisiún observers attended polling stations and a count centre for the general election held in Northern Ireland on 4 July 2024.



The informational materials in the form of posters and public notices were of particular interest to An Coimisiún observers.



There were also posters containing guidance for election officials.

SCENARIOS

- 1 Registered elector not found on poll register**
If you have checked all registers in the premises and rang PSI, there might be a clerical error, ring 02890446616 and press 1
- 2 Elector doesn't know if they are registered**
Advise them to ring Helpline 02890446680
- 3 Problem with using mobile device**
Telephone 02890446616 and press 2
- 4 Elector does not know their polling station**
Check the look-up 'Where to Vote' facility on the EONI website homepage and input the postcode
- 5 Problem with CNL list, ballot papers or polling agents**
Telephone your PSI on the number provided in your mobile device
- 6 Problem with staff**
Telephone the Business Support Team to speak to a member of the HR Team 02890446616 and Press 4

In the count centre, the guidance on 'doubtful' votes was noteworthy.

Doubtful ballot papers – rejected votes
Suggested examples of rejected votes are provided here. All of these examples are based on previous case law or taken from the specific rules for this election. Ultimately the decision on any particular ballot paper rests with the (Acting) Returning Officer and it is for them to determine their own view of the application of case law. Case references can be found in Supporting a UK Parliamentary election – Dealing with doubtful ballot papers. Other references are to the UK Parliamentary Election Rules (Schedule 1 of the Representation of the People Act 1983).

The Electoral Commission

Reject – voting for more than one candidate. Rule 47(1)(b).

Reject – voter's intention uncertain. Buckrose case and Rule 47(1)(d).

Reject – voter can be identified. Woodward v. Sarsons. South Newington case and Rule 47(1)(c).

Reject – voting for more than one candidate. Rule 47(1)(b).

Reject – voter's intention uncertain. Rowe v. Cox and Rule 47(1)(d).

Reject – voter's intention uncertain. Rule 47(1)(b).

Reject – voter can be identified. Woodward v. Sarsons and Rule 47(1)(c).

Reject – voter's intention uncertain. Rule 47(1)(d).

As well as these useful practices, when formulating the PEER Checklist, we drew on international election observation assessment templates such as the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) ODIHR election-day observation forms¹⁶ and training materials.¹⁷

The revised November PEER Checklist is set out below.

Of particular note, the questions regarding wheelchair users were divided on the November PEER Checklist so that external and internal areas of the polling station could be assessed separately (sections G3/G4). In addition, 'Not Applicable' (N/A) options were added to questions G3.2, G3.3.1-3 and G3.4, and the question on whether wheelchair ramps were available was amended to record N/A in situations

where a ramp was not required because the entrance was accessible. A further question on wheelchair ramps, in cases where they were deployed, was added to record whether the wheelchair ramp was temporary (that is, portable/removable). The question on whether there was an alternative entrance accessible to wheelchair users was qualified, so that it clarified that the question related to situations where the primary entrance was inaccessible.

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 Station Identification	
B1. Polling Station Name	<input type="text"/>
B2. Polling Booth Number	<input type="text"/>
B3. Number of Polling Booths in Polling Station	<input type="text"/>
B4. Polling Station Presiding Officer	<input type="text"/>
B5. Polling Station Selection Criteria	<input type="checkbox"/> Electors 18-24 <input type="checkbox"/> Pobal Index <input type="checkbox"/> Turnout <input type="checkbox"/> Geographic Distribution

SECTION C: Opening Complete Only if Present at Opening	
C1. Timing Was the polling station 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	
D1.1 Signage Is there directional signage present on the approach route to the polling station?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
D1.2 Signage Is an official notice indicating "polling station", displayed at the entrance to the polling station?	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 station?	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 station?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
D3.1 Car Parking Are there adequate car parking facilities?	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 station?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		

SECTION E: Interior		
E1.1 Layout Is the layout in the polling station 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 station 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 station conducive to the security of the ballot box (publicly visible and in a secure area)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
E1.4 Layout Is the layout in the polling station conducive to 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 station 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 there emergency exits in the polling station?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
E3.2 Emergency If yes, are the emergency exits signposted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
E4.1 Posters Are the <i>Electoral Offences</i> and <i>Evidence of Identity</i> posters on display?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
E4.2 Posters Is a <i>Large-Print Notice of Ballot Paper</i> displayed?	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 station?	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"/> Register of Electors <input type="checkbox"/> Balancing List/ Supplement to the Register <input type="checkbox"/> Stamping Instrument <input type="checkbox"/> Guidance to Presiding Officers <input type="checkbox"/> Pens/Pencils		
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		

SECTION F: Voting Procedures		
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"/>		
F2.1 Ballot Paper Were ballot papers 'stamped' with the official mark <i>on being issued</i> to electors?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
F2.2 Ballot Paper Were the names of electors marked off the Register of Electors on being issued a ballot paper?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
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		
G1.1 Hazards Are there any steps or steep changes in level outside the polling station?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
G1.2 Hazards Are there any other observable hazards or obstacles on the approach to the polling station?	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 (External) Is the primary entrance to the polling station generally accessible for wheelchair users?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
G3.2 Wheelchair Use (External) Is there a sign indicating that the entrance is accessible?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
G3.3.1 Wheelchair Use (External) Is there a wheelchair ramp available?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
G3.3.2 Wheelchair Use (External) If there is a wheelchair ramp is it permanent (i.e. built-in to the entrance)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
G3.3.3 Wheelchair Use (External) If there is a wheelchair ramp is it temporary (i.e. portable/ removable)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
G3.4 Wheelchair Use (External) If the primary entrance is inaccessible is there an alternative accessible wheelchair entrance (e.g. side entrance)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>		
G4.1 Wheelchair Use (Internal) 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"/>
G4.2.1 Wheelchair Use (Internal) Is there a low-level voting space?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

G4.2.2 Wheelchair Use (Internal) Is this a low-level voting compartment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
G4.2.3 Wheelchair Use (Internal) Is this a low-level table with a screen?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
G4.3 Wheelchair Use (Internal) Is the ballot box accessible to wheelchair users (e.g. placed at an accessible height ≈ 1 metre from ground)?	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 any issues with the use of the BPTs observable e.g. difficult to use?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
G4.3 Vision Impairment Are any visually impaired electors observable using the 'Freephone' facility to aid in voting?	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 electors with intellectual, learning, sensory or developmental disabilities receiving assistance from poll staff (e.g. assistance with voting or general assistance)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>	
G7.1 Voting Companion Was voting with the assistance of a voting companion in evidence?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
G7.2 Voting Companion If yes, was the oath or affirmation issued to the voting companion by the Presiding Officer? [*Non-Mandatory]	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
→ If yes, please provide further detail: <input type="text"/>	

SECTION H: Persons Present

H1. **Polling Station 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"/>	<input type="text"/>
Supervisory Presiding Officer	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>
Poll Clerk	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="text"/>

→ Comments:

H2.1 Authorised Persons Were there personation agents present in the polling station at the time of the review?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
--	--

→ If yes, please provide further detail:

H2.2 Authorised Persons Were there any issues with regard to unauthorised persons present in the polling station at the time of review?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
--	--

→ Comments: <input type="text"/>	
H3. Communication Did you discuss any issues with the Presiding Officer e.g. the absence of materials or the lack of a low-level voting compartment?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
→ Comments: <input type="text"/>	

SECTION I: Additional Comments
<p>If you have any additional comments regarding the accessibility of the polling station or the administration of the poll in general, please outline them below:</p> <div><div></div></div>

Views from PEER routes



6. Polling Stations – Selection Criteria

6,755 polling stations in 2,701 polling places¹⁸ were deployed across the 43 Dáil constituencies for the November 2024 election. This is an increase on the 5,821 polling stations utilised for the June local and European elections.

In selecting the polling stations to be visited for PEER March 2024 and PEER June 2024 we used secondary data derived from Central Statistics Office (CSO) census statistics for 2022. As well as using Census 2022 data available directly from www.cso.ie, this PEER also used a new source: the Pobal HP Deprivation Index¹⁹ (Haase and Pratschke, 2017), a social gradient tool which shows the level of overall affluence and deprivation of areas in Ireland, covering the small areas (SA) of the 2006, 2011, 2016 and 2022 censuses. This tool was incorporated in our methodology as socio-economic factors are considered to potentially influence levels of voter turnout.

87 polling stations were selected for visits based on the following criteria:

1. **Dublin City: Turnout** – polling stations in five low turnout Polling Districts (PDs) from the 7 June elections were selected, based on official turnout data for the June elections as published by the Dublin City returning officer²⁰.
2. **Dublin City: Pobal Index** – polling stations in five electoral divisions (EDs) categorised as disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged according to the Pobal Index (2022) were selected.
3. **Dublin County: Pobal Index** – polling stations in five EDs categorised as

disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged by the Pobal Index.

4. **Rest of Ireland Pobal Index** – polling stations in 25 EDs, one from each county other than Dublin, categorised as ‘disadvantaged’, ‘very disadvantaged’, and ‘extremely disadvantaged’ by the Pobal Index.
5. **Electors Aged 18-24** – polling stations selected in 29 EDs identified in Census 2022 as having among the highest concentrations of 18-24-year-olds.
6. **Case Study: Disabled Electors** – five polling stations visited in the Belmullet Local Electoral Area accompanied by the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) and a selection of electors with disabilities.
7. **Public Engagement** – six polling stations were visited by An Coimisiún due to issues raised by members of the public/media reports.
8. **Geographic Distribution** – seven polling stations were selected to be visited to ensure adequate representation of urban areas and offshore islands.

In the event that a polling station had already been visited by An Coimisiún, or that for logistical purposes it was not feasible to visit a particular polling station on 29 November, an alternative polling station was sought.

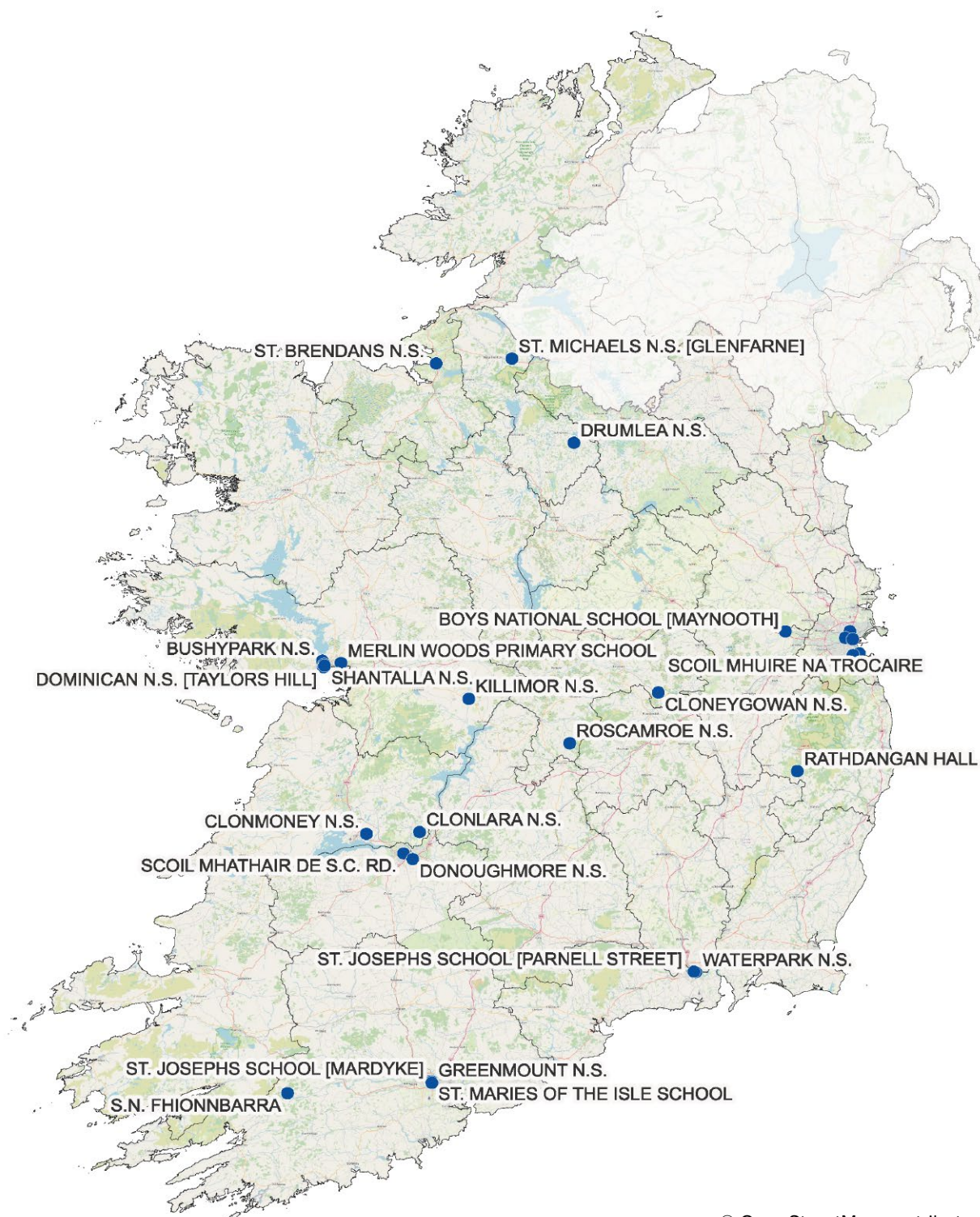
(To view the full list of polling stations visited see Appendix 2 – Index of Polling Stations Visited).

7. PEER Routes

Map 1. Map of polling stations selected based on high numbers of electors aged 18-24 as identified in Census 2022.

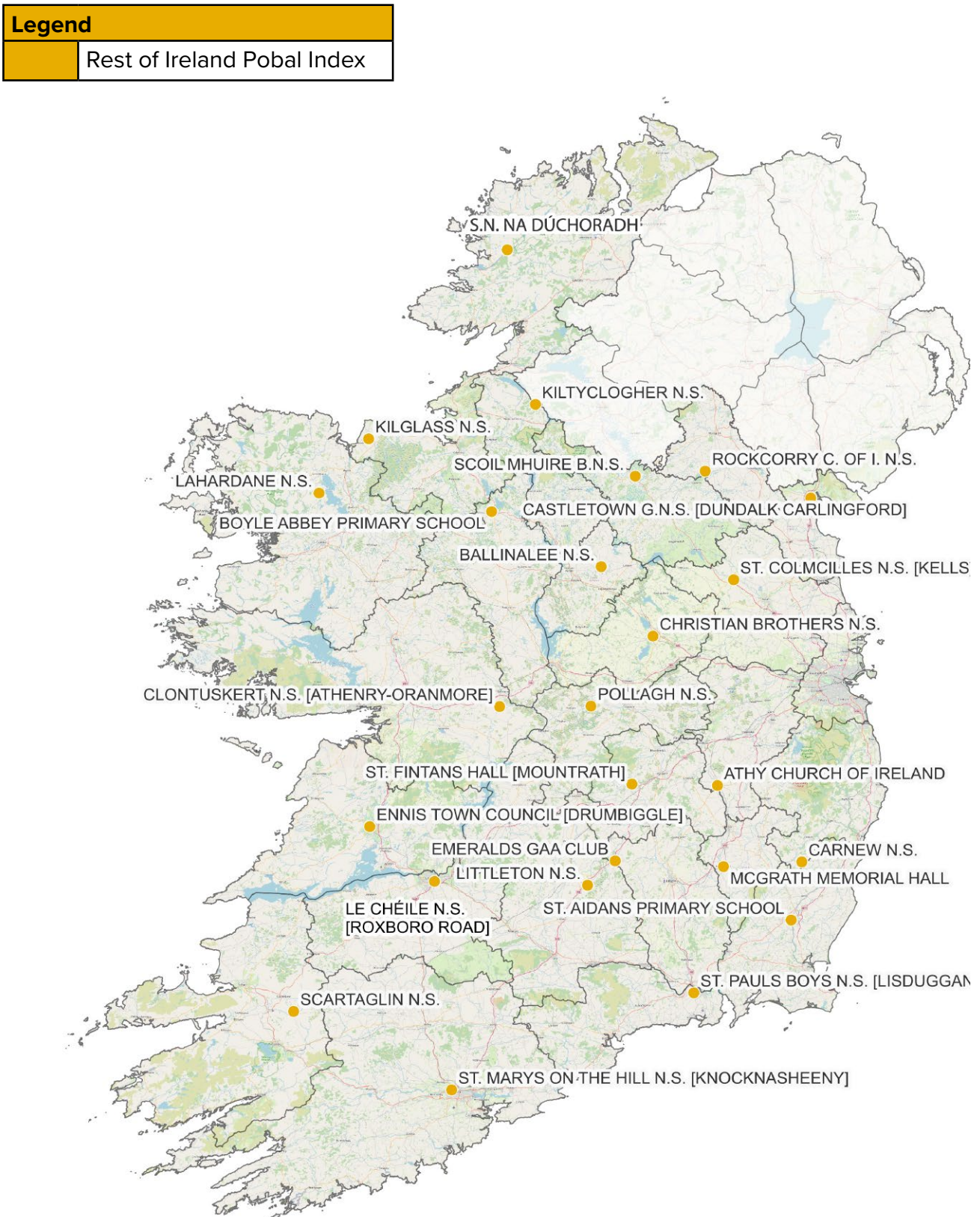
Legend

Electors Aged 18-24



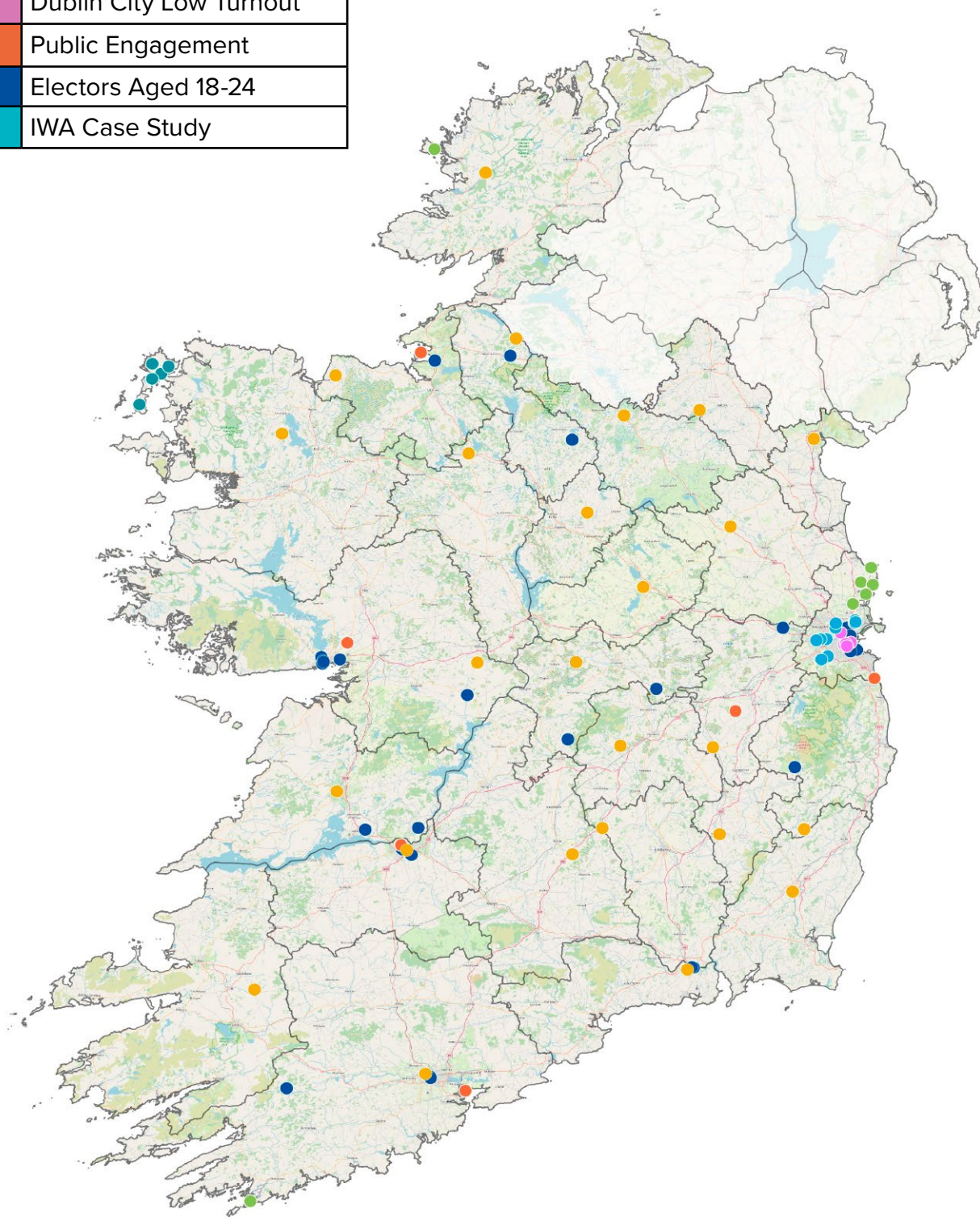
© OpenStreetMap contributors

Map 2. Map of polling stations selected based on the Pobal Index (categorisation of electoral divisions as ‘disadvantaged’, ‘very disadvantaged’ or ‘extremely disadvantaged’).

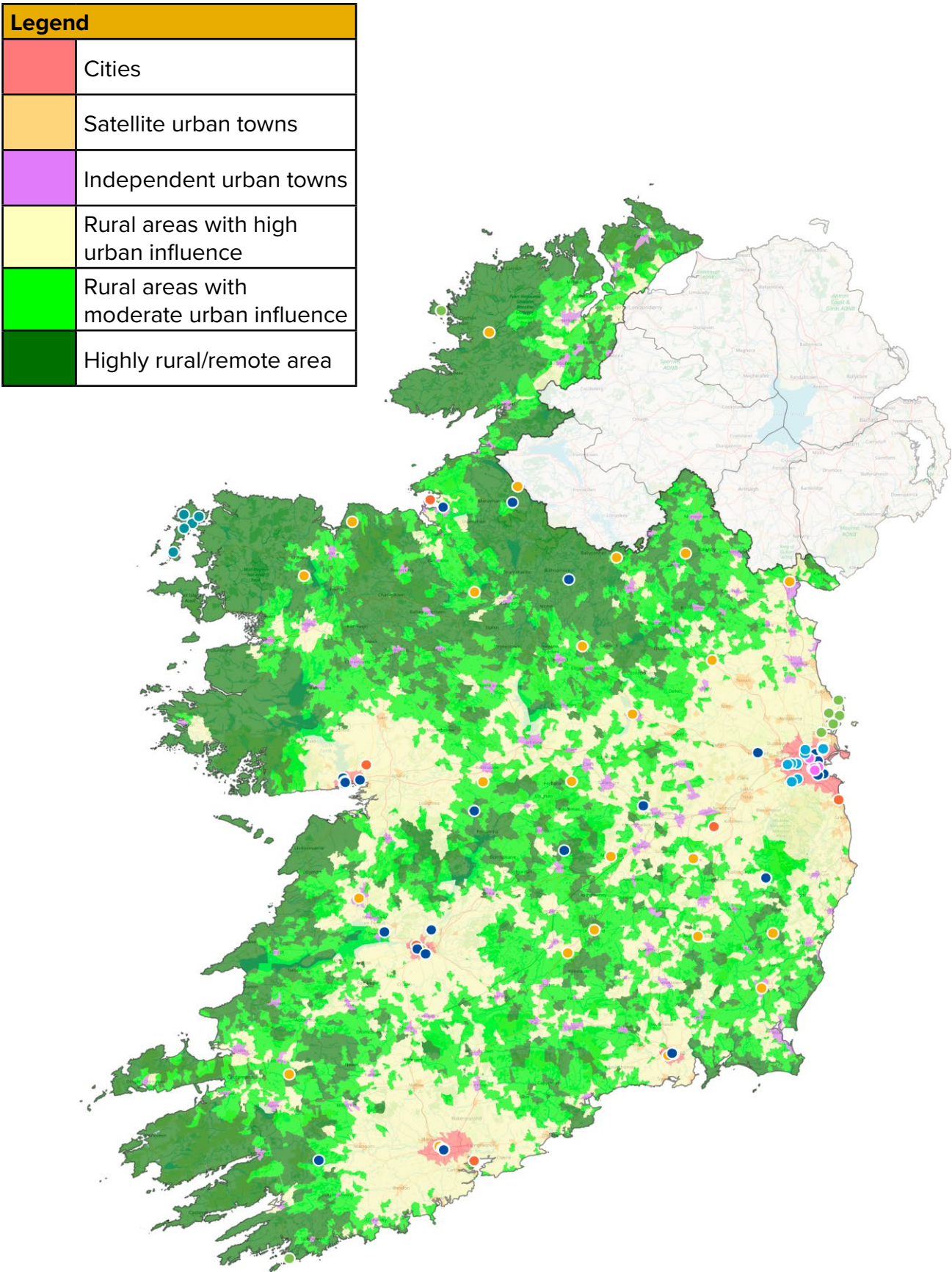


Map 3. Map of final 87 PEER polling stations.

Legend	
	Geographic Distribution
	Dublin Pobal Index
	Rest of Ireland Pobal Index
	Dublin City Low Turnout
	Public Engagement
	Electors Aged 18-24
	IWA Case Study



Map 4. 56 out of 87 polling stations visited (65%) were in CSO urban areas²¹ (cities, satellite urban towns and independent urban towns).



8. Analysis

We were interested to note some new insights into voting procedures and conditions in polling stations nationwide from our November visits, following on from our PEER visits in March and June 2024 (see Appendix 3 - PEER Checklist Statistical Analysis).

On a national level, definite improvements were noted.

Accessibility infrastructure



“Every polling station and polling booth should afford every elector the right to vote with dignity”.

Art O’Leary, Chief Executive, An Coimisiún Toghcháin



Under s.94 of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, as amended by s.3 of the *Electoral (Amendment) Act, 1996*, returning officers must, where practicable, select buildings for polling stations which are accessible to wheelchair users. An Coimisiún considers that universal access for all voters including wheelchair users through one main entrance to be the most desirable objective for polling station accessibility. In the interim, altered access arrangements and the provision of an alternative entrance are options for polling stations with an inaccessible primary entrance.

PEER observer teams advised that 75% of polling stations visited in November had a primary entrance accessible to wheelchair users. Of the 25% of polling stations where accessibility issues were identified with the primary entrance, approximately 55% of these had an alternative accessible entrance for wheelchair users. Including these altered access arrangements, approximately 89% of polling stations visited by An Coimisiún were accessible to wheelchair users. However, a PEER observer team reported that at one polling station visited on polling day, the alternative accessible entrance was an unreasonable distance from the primary entrance. This was also an issue observed in previous PEERs. A further issue was that accessibility signage was displayed at only two of the 22 polling stations with an alternative entrance. Overall, 11% of polling stations were not considered accessible by PEER observer teams due to the absence of an alternative entrance or accessible infrastructure.

The reasons that some polling stations were considered inaccessible included a steep or uneven approach to the entrance, entrances with external steps only, entrances with steep or otherwise inadequate external ramps, entrances with inaccessible dimensions, and entrances with threshold upstands. Approximately a quarter of polling stations visited in November by An Coimisiún had access issues due to entrances with external steps. This represents some improvement compared with previous PEERs: external steps were present at 33% of polling stations visited in March and 30% in the June elections.

We also examined the accessibility infrastructure implemented at polling

stations. PEER observer teams reported that 60% of polling stations provided an external ramp for wheelchair users. Of these, approximately 85% were permanent ramps and 15% were temporary ramps erected for polling day. This represents a minor decline in the provision of ramps compared with the June elections when 65% of polling stations provided an external ramp. As accessibility improved between the electoral events, this is likely a positive development, which is due to an increased number of polling stations having a level entrance accessible to wheelchair users. Indeed, PEER observer teams reported that 37% of polling stations with an accessible primary entrance provided a level entrance accessible to wheelchair users; 63% of polling stations with an accessible primary entrance required a permanent or temporary external ramp in order to be accessible to wheelchair users.

Interestingly, 60% of the polling stations we considered to be inaccessible did have external ramps in place; of these, two-thirds were permanent ramps and one-third were temporary ramps. Access issues at these polling stations partially centred on the inadequacy of the external ramps and on a wheelchair user's ability to use a manually operated door in conjunction with the external ramp. For a manually operated door to be accessible to wheelchair users, sufficient space on the pull-side of the door is required; if an external ramp is required to access the door, then adequate turning-space at the end of the ramp is required to enable the wheelchair user to access the door. At three of the ten polling stations identified as inaccessible, this complication related to manually operated doors was in evidence.

Regarding internal infrastructure, low-level voting compartments are a fundamental accessibility provision as they enable wheelchair users to exercise their right to

vote privately and independently. PEER observer teams reported that 93% of polling stations visited in November provided a low-level voting space. In most cases – approximately 85% – this was a low-level voting compartment: a designated compartment with a low-level platform on which to complete the ballot paper.

In some cases, PEER observer teams instead reported use of a voting desk with a privacy screen. These provide adequate privacy if arranged in a considered manner. In certain instances, the use of a voting desk without a privacy screen was noted and we considered this inadequate to meet privacy requirements. In our engagements with returning officers after previous electoral events in 2024, they advised they were making efforts to invest in modern voting compartments, including a low-level voting platform. Fewer than one in ten polling stations visited had inadequate low-level voting infrastructure. This is an improvement in comparison with March when 26% of polling stations visited had inadequate low-level voting spaces.

The ballot box must also be positioned at an accessible level. Wheelchair users must be facilitated in marking and placing ballot papers in the ballot box in accordance with s.3(2)(b)(i) of the *Electoral Act, 1996*. PEER observer teams reported that the ballot box was accessible to disabled voters at 87% of polling stations visited in November, an improvement from 74% in March and 76% in June.

Voting aids for electors with disabilities

Large-print ballot paper

A large-print ballot paper is included in the election materials provided to presiding

officers to provide partially sighted and visually impaired voters with an additional voting aid. 99% of polling stations visited during the general election displayed a large-print ballot paper for use by voters; similar to a level of 98% observed in June.

At two polling stations visited, the large-print ballot paper was difficult to locate or was displayed in areas with limited lighting. In addition to displaying them in the precincts of the polling station, the *Manual for Presiding Officers at a Dáil Election 29 November 2024* advises that the large-print ballot paper be displayed in a dedicated voting compartment for use by visually impaired voters²².

Ballot paper template (BPT)

The primary voting aid for visually impaired voters is the ballot paper template (BPT)²³, which is designed to enable visually impaired voters to vote independently. This BPT is placed on top of the ballot paper by the elector. It has raised numbering and braille, guiding users to openings on the template which correspond to the candidates on the paper beneath. The BPT was present at 97% of polling stations visited during the general election; consistent with levels of 96% in March and 99% in June.

A slight increase in the use of the ballot paper template (BPT) was apparent in November with PEER observer teams reporting two instances of visually impaired voters using BPTs but experiencing challenges with their use. Most visually impaired electors observed appeared to be voting with assistance from either a companion or the presiding officer. Based on our observations and feedback received, this apparent reluctance to use the BPT is due to the perceived complicated nature of the process. An

Coimisiún is aware that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage is reviewing these matters currently as recommended in the June PEER – ‘Review the guidance and materials on offer to blind or visually impaired voters’ – and this is a welcome development.

Freephone service

Voters can familiarise themselves with the candidates on the ballot paper by calling freephone numbers in advance of polling day to have a list of the candidates read out to them in the order they appear on the ballot paper. These freephone services can be used independently by visually impaired electors, or in conjunction with ballot paper templates (BPTs) available in polling stations on polling day.

In the week leading up to polling day, An Coimisiún checked returning officers’ websites and www.gov.ie to locate the freephone numbers associated with each of the 43 Dáil constituencies. A week before polling day, the service was not available/unlocatable for 24 out of 43 constituencies. In the lead up to polling day, the freephone numbers were published by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the ‘www.gov.ie’ website,²⁴ with a link to the returning officers’ contact details in the event that a freephone number for any constituency was not available.

By polling day, the freephone numbers were locatable for all but one of the 43 constituencies. 42 freephone numbers were answered by an automated answering service which read out the list of candidates to a satisfactory level – the Clare constituency provided an audio file only instead of a freephone line. In one case (Wexford constituency) the message stated that the call could not be connected.

Although connecting callers initially, the freephone line for the Roscommon-Galway constituency was faulty, taking callers to the menu option which either disconnected the call or said it was an invalid entry depending on the option chosen.

On foot of our recommendation in the June PEER to promote the use of the freephone helplines, it is recommended that audio files which list the candidates in the order they appear on the ballot paper, be provided as a supplementary option to the freephone number service.

An Coimisiún notes that Voice of Vision Impairment²⁵ and Vision Ireland²⁶ published the freephone numbers on their websites in advance of the general election which is welcome. Audio files may also be of assistance to their members and service users.

Loop system

A 'loop system' – an aid to a hearing aid which is helpful to deaf/hard of hearing electors – was present in two polling stations visited – Scoil na Léibe, Árainn Mhór (Donegal) and Merlin Woods Primary School (Galway West). In the March PEER, one polling station - Listellick N.S. (Kerry) – was noted as having a loop system, while none were recorded in June.

Voting flow and layout

A vital consideration in election administration is the internal layout of the polling station. The configuration of polling station infrastructure – including the presiding officers' issuing desks, voting compartments and ballot boxes – has implications for the efficiency, accessibility and integrity of the voting process. All 87 polling stations visited in November provided adequate conditions to protect



the privacy of voters and the security of the ballot box and the layout of 98% of stations visited was considered conducive to the flow of voting. In two cases, there was insufficient space between voting compartments and the limited circulation space disrupted the flow of voters. The relevant PEER observer teams were of the opinion that the positioning of the presiding officer's issuing desk – which was difficult to identify from the entrance – contributed to the issue. Increased use of internal signage would mitigate this issue.

95% of polling stations in November had adequate emergency exits, with emergency signage present in the majority of them. It is important to consider the way in which election materials impact emergency evacuation; at one polling station voting compartments were observed as partially obstructing the emergency exit. While uncommon, this is an issue that An Coimisiún has encountered during previous PEERs.

Voter information and election materials

A critical component of election administration is ensuring that the voting process is intuitive to voters. To facilitate this, voting instructions are printed on the ballot paper. Additional instructional material is provided in the form of the 'Electoral Offences' and 'Evidence of Identity' posters, which provide voters with information on voting procedures. The 'Electoral Offences' and 'Evidence of Identity' posters were displayed in 97% of polling stations visited. In addition to these instructional posters, it was also reported that multiple polling stations displayed posters advising electors of the prohibition on photography. This represents a welcome and proactive use of instructional material by returning officers.



Process integrity and voter identity

There is a multiplicity of integrated measures to preserve the integrity of the electoral process. One of these is the requirement for voters to provide evidence of identity, which prevents personation. Guidance issued by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage advises presiding officers to request identity documents from one in four voters. PEER observer teams observed that evidence of identity was requested from at least one voter at 63% of polling stations. This is identical to the rate observed by An Coimisiún during the June elections.

The marking of the ballot paper with the official mark (often called ‘stamping’) is an additional measure to protect electoral integrity. This ensures that each ballot paper in the ballot box is a valid ballot paper completed by a registered voter on polling day. In full compliance with s.101(2)(b) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, PEER observer teams did not observe any failure in stamping the ballot papers in November.

Statistics recently published on the November general election²⁷ show that 0.72% (15,849) of ballot papers were deemed invalid, of which 12.3% (1,956) were invalid due to want of the official mark. Taking the size of the electorate in 2024 into account, this is a slight improvement on the February 2020 general election²⁸ when 0.81% (17,703) of ballot papers were deemed invalid, of which 9.6% (1,702) were invalid due to want of the official mark. For the June 2024 European Parliament elections, 2.96% (54,996) of ballot papers were deemed invalid, of which 2.78% (1,528) were invalid due to want of the official mark. An Coimisiún acknowledges that returning officers have made great efforts recently to address this issue.

However, the large number of unstamped ballots remains an issue of some concern.

Electoral integrity is further protected by ensuring that a voter is marked off the Register of Electors on being issued with a ballot paper. This prevents personation and multiple voting by providing a record of the voters that have voted in a particular electoral event. s.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. There was no failure to mark voters off the register observed in November.

Voter privacy

The integrity of the electoral process is also dependent on voter privacy. This ensures that voters are protected from intimidation and coercion when exercising their right to vote. It is crucial that election infrastructure provides voters with adequate privacy while completing their ballot paper, with voting compartments central to this practice.²⁹ PEER observer teams reported that 99% of polling stations visited during the general election provided voting compartments which facilitated private voting, with only one polling station inadequately positioning compartments from a privacy perspective. This represents an improved level of privacy compared with the June elections, when 10% of polling stations visited provided inadequate privacy. However, separate to our observations, we received feedback from members of the public highlighting concerns in relation to privacy in specific polling stations (see Voter Experiences p.40). These will be followed up by An Coimisiún.

Another integral component of voter privacy is independent voting. Apart from

those voting with the assistance of a voting companion, it is important that voters enter the voting compartment and complete their ballot paper independently and alone. Full compliance with independent voting was observed at 95% of polling stations visited during the general election, an improvement on June when 89% fully complied.

Polling information cards

A recurring issue, observed in previous electoral events in 2024, relates to the privacy of elector data due to the practice of polling staff retaining polling information cards left by voters on the presiding officer's table. Polling staff advised PEER observer teams that they were unaware of any guidance or instruction on the issue. An Coimisiún recommends that guidance regarding the safe and secure disposal of polling information cards left in polling stations by electors be issued in the manuals prepared for presiding officers in advance of each electoral event.

Also, with regard to polling information cards, in certain cases electors reported receiving polling information cards for deceased relatives who should have been removed from the register³⁰. In other cases, individuals who had registered on time failed to receive a polling information card. An Coimisiún received over one hundred (132) pieces of correspondence from voters flagging that they had not received their polling information cards (see also 'Case study: Polling information cards – Limerick City constituency', p.52). As provided for in electoral law, we advised all concerned electors that if they were on the register, they did not need their polling information card in order to vote, and to bring a valid form of ID with them to their assigned polling station.

Canvassing

In accordance with s.147 of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, as amended, guidance issued in the *Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers General Election 2024* states that "the Presiding Officer should also ensure that posters, and so on are not displayed within the polling station, or the building where it is situated, or its grounds, or on the railings or walls of the grounds."³¹ PEER observer teams encountered election posters within 50 metres of the curtilage of the polling station at 20% of polling stations visited in the 85 polling stations where checks were conducted. No alternative forms of canvassing e.g. leafleting were observed within 50 metres of the curtilage of the polling place. This was similar to what was observed during the June elections.

External considerations

The presence of parking facilities is a factor in determining accessibility of a polling station. 92% of polling stations were considered to provide adequate parking facilities for the general public within the vicinity of the premises. This is an improvement from the June elections (83%). It is important to note however the variances in the type of parking facilities available, for example, while a proportion of polling stations visited provided on-site parking, on-street parking was also commonplace. This distinction can have implications for elderly electors and electors with a disability.

58% of polling stations provided accessible parking facilities for people with disabilities. This represents an increase from previous PEERs; accessible parking facilities were observed at 51% of polling stations in March. This decreased to 39% during the June local and European elections, presumably reflecting the difference in polling stations selected.

9. Best Practices Observed

This is the third PEER. It is encouraging that An Coimisiún has observed improvements in specific areas on the checklist between March and November as outlined throughout this report. We have also noticed the emergence of returning officer driven initiatives over that period to improve the voting and electoral process.

Investment in election infrastructure

An Coimisiún observed notable efforts to improve the external and internal infrastructure at polling stations, with particular focus on accessibility-related provisions in the form of altered access arrangements and investment in low-level voting compartments.

Expanded use of informational material

An Coimisiún observed the expanded use of informational materials in the form of posters and public notices designed to promote understanding of the voting process, as well as the introduction of informational posters which facilitated the flow of voting in polling stations. This is a really helpful complement to the educational and awareness-raising work undertaken by An Coimisiún for the general election (see Appendix 1).

One example of this is the introduction of a poster at polling stations advising voters of the prohibition of photography. This preserves the privacy of the voting process and ensures that voters are conscious of their conduct in the polling station.

An Coimisiún has observed the display of this poster in multiple constituencies and

is of the opinion that there is value in its universal adoption.

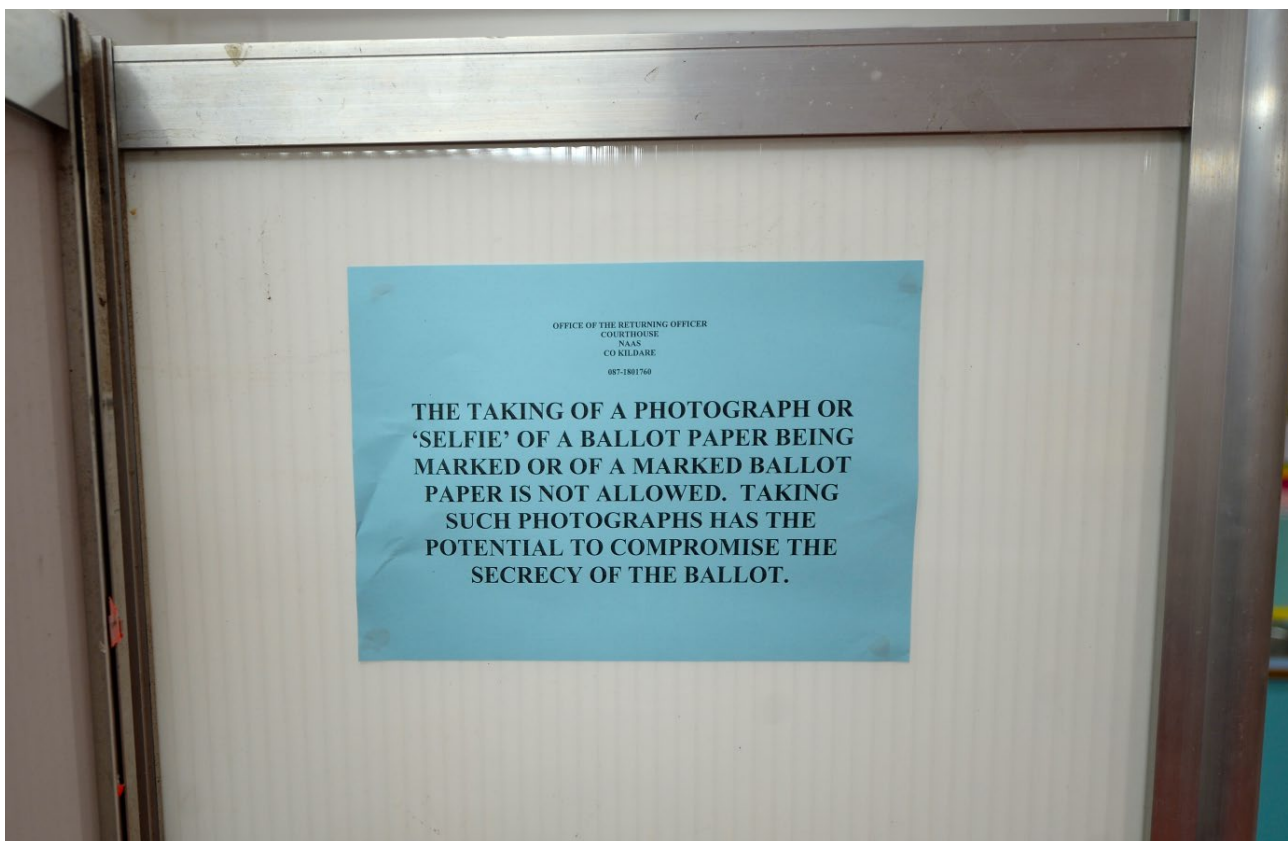
Voting process measures

As mentioned previously, the marking (perforation or ‘stamping’) of the ballot paper with the official mark, ensures that the ballot paper is valid. Observing votes which are ‘spoilt’ due to a failure to stamp the ballot paper is deeply frustrating for everyone involved in the voting process. While we recognise that mistakes can occasionally be made, every effort should be made to reduce the number of mistakes, and one measure is to inform voters of the importance of the stamp and that they should be vigilant.

In some polling stations An Coimisiún observed a notice advising voters to ensure that their ballot paper was perforated with the official mark on being issued by the presiding officer. To facilitate this, a coloured page was on display at the issuing desk reminding voters to check the perforation of their ballot paper. While the presiding officer is primarily responsible for ensuring that ballot papers are issued with the official mark, An Coimisiún considers that this initiative implemented by certain returning officers is of value insofar as it introduces an additional control measure, promoting voter education and engagement in the process.

Adoption of integrated processes

An Coimisiún observed that presiding officers at polling stations in certain constituencies were provided with forms to record details where they were informed by a voter at a polling station that there



was, for example, a decreased family member that should be taken off the register. This may have emerged when a polling information card arrived at their home. At the close of poll, these forms were collected by the returning officers for delivery to the registration authority. While the maintenance of the register is a matter for the registration authorities, the decision by certain returning officers to proactively record requests for amendments to the register is a valuable initiative with demonstrable utility for voters. Indeed, the initiative has capacity for extension, for example, by maintaining a supply of third-party request to amend the register (TPC1) forms³² at issuing desks in polling stations.

Emphasis on voter interaction

An Coimisiún observed an increased emphasis on voter interaction by staff at polling stations, particularly as regards

the assistance provided by presiding officers to disabled voters. PEER observer teams reported that evidence of voting assistance increased from 10% during the Referendums on Family and Care to 13% during the general election. In addition, An Coimisiún observed the adoption of enhanced voter interaction initiatives by returning officers. For example, at certain polling stations a supervisory presiding officer was posted at the entrance to direct voters and to offer assistance to disabled voters – this practice was particularly valuable at polling stations with altered access arrangements for wheelchair users.

It is very important to recognise the best practice and hard work undertaken by returning officers and polling staff. An Coimisiún staff have the opportunity to observe this first hand, and the surveys conducted through the NEDS show very high satisfaction rates with the voting process.

10. Electoral Poll Data: National Election and Democracy Study

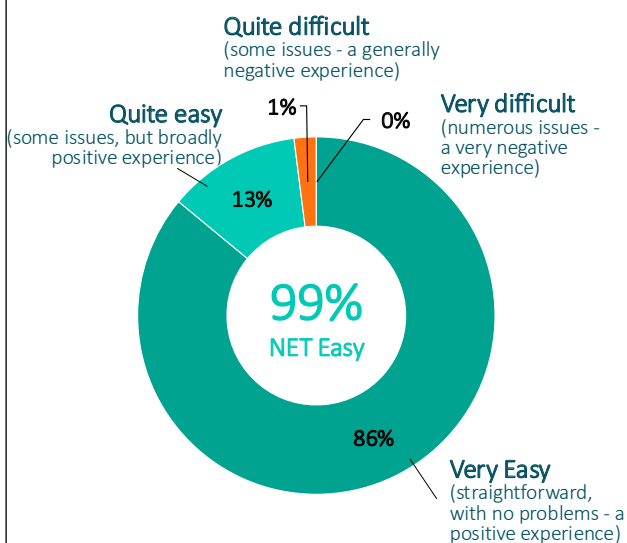
While electoral observation is a key tool used to deliver the PEERs, An Coimisiún has decided to supplement this with larger scale quantitative data regarding voter experience through the inclusion of questions on voter experience in the National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS). Some such data was collected in March, and this was further expanded on and developed in June. The main data set for the general election was gathered from surveys and interviews conducted door-to-door by a random sample of voters with a second supplementary data set from an online panel.

On this occasion, 2,200 respondents from both data sets said that they had voted.

Of these, similar to March and June, an encouraging 99% said that their voting experience was 'very easy' or 'quite easy'.

However, a slightly higher proportion of voters (16%) said that they did not get the assistance they needed from polling station staff compared with 12% in June. Finally, over a fifth of voters (21%) agreed that the layout of the ballot paper was difficult to follow. This suggests that more work may need to be done in voter education, as well as reinforcing the need for An Coimisiún's planned research on ballot paper design.

Difficulty of Voting on the Day



V1. How was your experience with voting?

Base: All respondents who voted; n=1,101

Note scores consistent across demographics



11. PEER Observer Experiences

An Coimisiún member Alex Attwood has participated in all three PEERs, visiting polling stations with An Coimisiún staff in Donegal, Cavan, Monaghan, Leitrim, Louth, Meath and Dublin.

With regard to his PEER observations, Alex firstly highlighted the dedication of the staff in the polling stations: “This level of service is exceptional and that came across

throughout our visits – the commitment and dedication of the polling staff at the desks”.

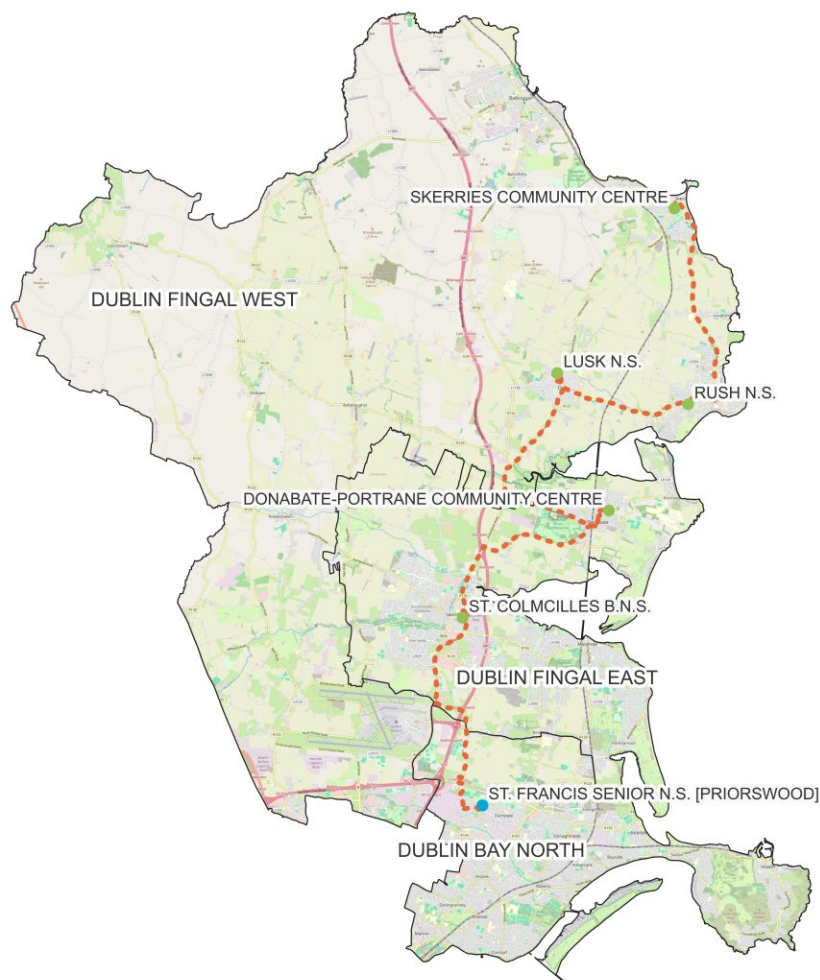
Alex also placed the experiences of some voters to the forefront of his thoughts when encountering “polling stations difficult to access whoever you are – the top of a hill on a rainy dark night with the lighting outside very poor”.



An Coimisiún member John Curran participated in all three PEERs, accompanying An Coimisiún staff to observe voting taking place in Clare, Longford, Westmeath, Offaly, Laois and Dublin.

The key standout for John was the staff in polling stations, whom he found to be “pro-active engaging and very attentive”.

On his most recent PEER route covering north County Dublin on the day of the general election, John noted the large buildings in which polling stations were situated and how seamlessly the voters were met and directed into their respective polling stations. John recalled “the efficiency of the staff from the polling staff to the caretakers on duty”.



Areas for improvement

Given our PEER role, however, we also receive correspondence from voters outlining areas of dissatisfaction with the voting experience.

The following feedback was received from members of the public via our online

channels and reflect some experiences of voters in the November general election. We have passed details on the issues raised to the relevant returning officers, where polling stations were identified. We plan to visit polling stations where specific concerns were raised by members of the public as part of the next PEER in Autumn 2025.

12. Voter Experiences

Electors with disabilities



Galway

"My father is currently very unwell & needs to use a wheelchair. He is a firm believer in the importance of casting his vote. My sister & I brought him to the above polling Station on Friday. It was not wheelchair friendly! It was extremely difficult to get the wheelchair through the door & we also needed to navigate a step to enter. I found this very disappointing. In this era one would expect equal accessibility for all. I believe there would be better options locally for Polling Stations."



Roscommon

"I am disabled and I cast my vote in the 2024 general election at my local polling station...When I entered the polling station I saw three polling booths that were high off the ground and for mobile persons. I asked were there any booths for persons who can't stand and I was directed to a child's school desk in the classroom, to sit at. I had to cast my vote in public view, which greatly angered and upset me."



Waterford

"My father is in a wheelchair... at this voting centre there were two steps, a foot elevation on each step and old doors... another lady had no legs and her elderly father was struggling with her to gain entry to the centre... this is not acceptable and a sad sight to see... you only realise how bad facilities are when it comes to your reality."





Mayo

"I have a constitutional right to vote, as a person with disabilities my right to vote is severely impacted by venues that are not accessible, voting booths that cannot accommodate my wheelchair leaving me to vote publicly where my choices can be noted, the pencil provided and the space to write is not accessible from my chair."

I was in hospital at the time of the last election and while I had my voting card there was nowhere in the hospital where I or my other fellow patients and staff could vote. Hospitals should be able to facilitate a voting process for those who have a voting card.

There should be more information on postal voting and encouragement to apply, needing a medical cert can be problematic and costly, as disabled people we are discriminated in this as no able-bodied person has to show a medical cert to be able to vote. Being disenfranchised because of my disability is an attack on my human rights to my own agency and access."



Privacy issues



Kildare

“Room 1 means a desk (1 of 3) in a big hall. I felt today that the privacy afforded to me and others at this venue was inadequate. The polling booth was positioned at right angles to the desk where one collected one’s voting paper and at a distance of approximately 5 feet. As you know the ballot paper is quite large and it is difficult to block the view. People were queuing very closely behind me when I was voting.

The polling station also had a big table with a chair beside it to accommodate elderly people which was very commendable and my mother-in-law used it, but it was in the middle of the hall and afforded her no privacy whatsoever. People had to pass by the table to get to one of the desks for collecting one’s ballot and her paper was also visible from one of the polling booths... Secrecy in voting is a cornerstone of democracy.”



Louth

“They had only one private voting compartment available and 3 school tables set up in the hall with a chair where people had to sit and mark the ballot paper with everybody able to see what way they are voting. It was very badly organised and extremely uncomfortable as a voter.”



Cork

“Polling station 6 in this location is not suitable for voting. The room is far too small and the voting stations are visible by others waiting to vote. This room has been in use for many years and there are a lot of areas being sent to this room for voting. I would have serious concerns about the suitability of the room for disabled voters and also for the integrity of a secret ballot.”





Dún Laoghaire

“The room was very small and the voting booths near the tables given not much privacy... The table behind me could see me marking my vote card. Can it go back to the big room again and have some privacy.”



Galway

“On Friday last, three polling stations were located in a single small room despite the fact that the venue has a spacious General Purpose Room which has acted previously as Polling Station(s). There were two tables provided without any screening. Two chairs were placed side by side at each table. The room was so small and the tables were located and orientated such that they provided no privacy for voters to make their ballot in secret, as is the right and entitlement of each voter.”



Feedback such as this is invaluable in assisting An Coimisiún to identify areas of priority and engagement in its work programme. In January 2025, An Coimisiún published details of its *Consultation on Education and Public Engagement Strategy*³³ where it sought the views of the public on democracy and voting generally:

“We are preparing a Strategy to try and encourage people to get more involved with our democratic process. We want to amplify the work that is already happening. We want to provide access to education and information on Ireland’s electoral and democratic processes. We want people to tell us what they think should happen. And we want those who do not vote to tell us why.

We want people from all sectors of society, all walks of life in Ireland to use their voice and to vote in elections and referendums.

Whether you have voted in every election or never voted before we want to hear from you. Do you have a brilliant or simple idea as to how we can help people to become more engaged with our democratic system? We want to hear from you. Individuals, groups, organisations, people in classrooms, younger, older and everyone in between.”

The closing date to submit ideas was 25 March 2025. All submissions are currently being considered by An Coimisiún with a draft plan of action to issue for public consultation later in 2025.

13. Case Studies

As mentioned previously, a distinctive focus of this PEER has been to examine in depth various aspects and stages of the voting process, and these are presented as detailed case studies or features in this report.

Case study: “If you see it, you understand it”

An Coimisiún Toghcháin/Irish Wheelchair Association - Belmullet Local Electoral Area, Co. Mayo.

Reflecting feedback received from Disabled Persons’ Organisations (DPOs), An Coimisiún considered it vital to reflect the direct and lived experience of voters with disabilities in the PEER process and we engaged with a number of DPOs with a view to ensuring this was appropriately incorporated into the PEER.

In separate interactions with the Irish Wheelchair Association (see below) they offered to support An Coimisiún in directly observing the voting experience of a number of electors with disabilities. Therefore, as part of this PEER, An Coimisiún carried out a review on the

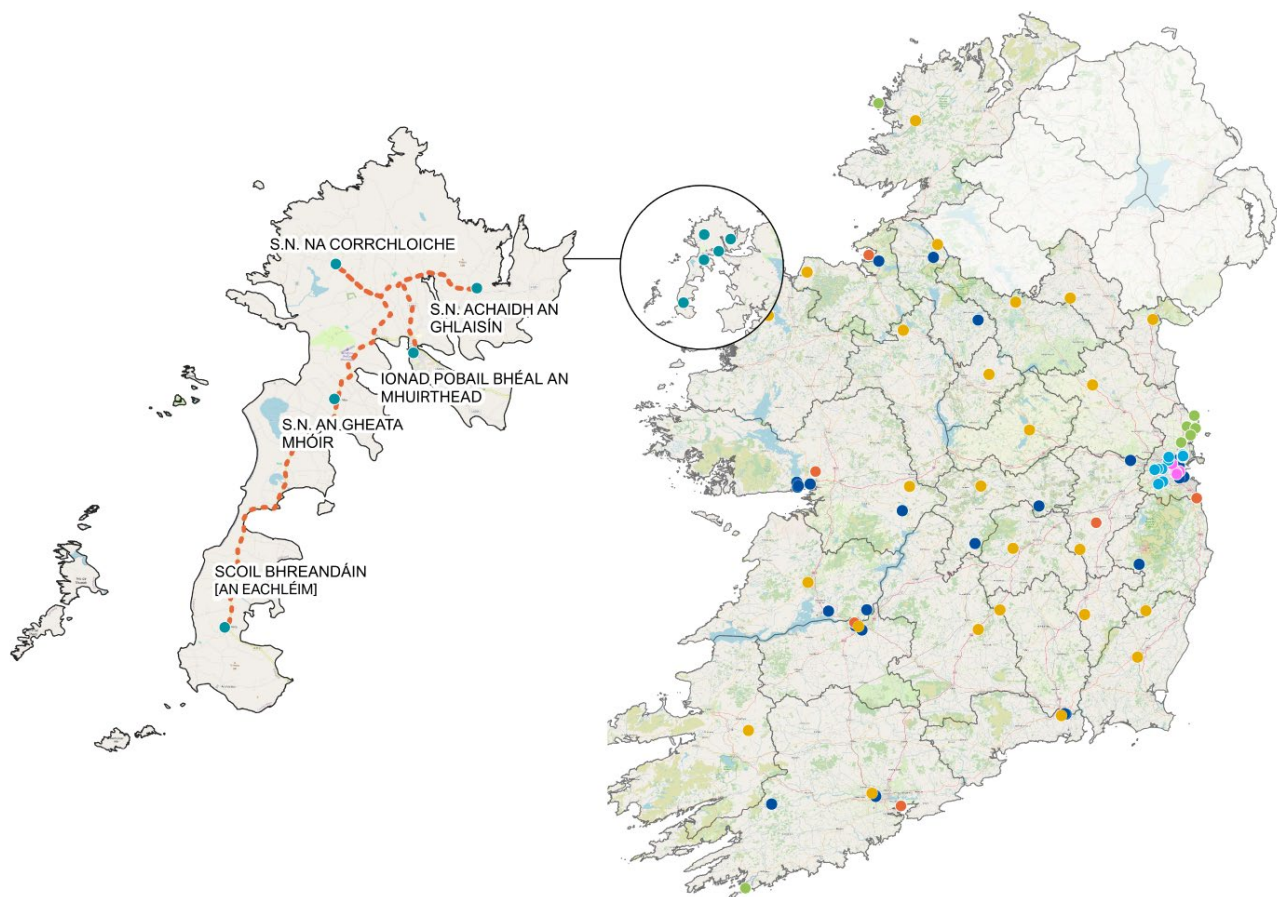
accessibility of polling stations for electors with disabilities on election day in the Belmullet Local Electoral Area.

On 16 October 2024, the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) hosted an online event ‘*The Importance of Your Vote*’, at which Joan Carthy, National Advocacy Manager for the IWA, was joined by An Coimisiún’s Chief Executive, Art O’Leary, to discuss key topics such as registering to vote, postal voting, and what to do if a polling station isn’t accessible. Following the event, An Coimisiún contacted the IWA and outlined that we wished to learn more about the experiences of wheelchair users on polling day.

The IWA has 52 centres nationwide, some of which operate several days a week. The IWA centre in Belmullet provides services every weekday for service users drawn from across north-west Co. Mayo. The Belmullet centre has a client-base which includes ‘school-leaver’ service users which caters for young adults with varying disabilities, some of whom use electric high-power wheelchairs. People who have mobility difficulties or need special assistance and support, may also avail of the services offered.

The IWA and An Coimisiún agreed that two staff from An Coimisiún would follow the route of IWA service users being assisted and transported by the IWA Belmullet Local Access Group to their local polling stations on polling day. The IWA’s National Access Programme Manager, Rosaleen Lally, confirmed her attendance to oversee and co-ordinate the exercise. [Rosaleen Lally is also the IWA’s representative on the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage chaired *Working Group on Disability Voting*].





With the support of An Coimisiún, the IWA drew up a plan to visit five polling stations in the Belmullet LEA. We noted these polling stations had not previously been declared by the returning officer as inaccessible in advance of polling day for the general election, the March referendums or the June local and European elections in 2024.

On polling day, we accompanied the IWA as it took its service users to various polling stations. As well as IWA members who use power chairs and manual chairs, the IWA transported service users with visual impairments and intellectual disabilities, providing us with a broad understanding of the various challenges encountered by electors on a day where inclement weather conditions prevailed. Issues like temporary ramps, steep gradients, space constraints, the absence of accessible parking and a lack of directional signage on the approach

to some polling stations were all identified on the day.

The following polling stations were visited:

Aughleam National School,
Scoil Bhreandáin [An Eachléim]
An Eachléim, an Fód Dubh,
Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 P704

One elector who was a wheelchair user was assisted by the IWA over the threshold lip at the entrance. Both the IWA co-ordinator and the PEER observer team did not consider the wheelchair user could have pushed their wheelchair through the entrance into the building without the assistance of the IWA staff member or of someone else who could provide suitable help. The steep gradient of the entrance was noted, despite the fact that there was a sign at the entrance indicating wheelchair accessibility. There was no alternative accessible

entrance. The question of whether a wheelchair ramp (if made available) would be of any utility was also discussed.

Once inside the building, the interior posed no issues for the wheelchair user regarding turning space. There were no obstacles in evidence. The wheelchair user voted in a modern, low-level voting compartment.

An elector who was visually impaired and was accompanied to the same polling station by the IWA advised a PEER observer that she had brought her own magnifier to read and mark the ballot paper, rather than use the Ballot Paper Template (BPT) which was available for use. A further issue affecting electors with visual impairments was the display of the large print ballot paper in the corridor of Aughlea N.S., in an area with limited lighting. The *Manual for Presiding Officers at a Dáil Election 29 November 2024* advises that “Large print versions of the ballot paper(s) to assist visually impaired persons should also be displayed prominently in the building and also at a dedicated polling booth.”³⁴

Overall, the PEER observer team did not consider Aughlea N.S. to be independently accessible by wheelchair users.

Binghamstown National School, Scoil Náisiúnta an Gheata Mhoir Béal an Mhuirthead, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 TX06

The IWA accompanied two electors who were wheelchair users to the Binghamstown polling station. A sign was in place denoting wheelchair accessibility and a temporary wooden wheelchair ramp was in place which made the entrance accessible. No changes in level and no obstacles or hazards were observed. One of the electors entered the polling station

unassisted using a power chair, whilst the elderly manual wheelchair user entered the building assisted by the IWA staff member.

Sufficient space and lighting were observed inside the polling station, with the layout considered to be conducive to the flow of the polling process, security of the ballot box and secrecy of the vote. A low-level table with a screen was available for the wheelchair users and was situated at an accessible height.

Corclough National School, Scoil Náisiúnta na Corrchloiche Béal an Mhuirthead, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 RW94

The PEER observer team and the IWA visited this polling station unaccompanied, as the elector who the IWA had intended to accompany was in hospital on polling day.

A threshold lip at the entrance was noted, although there was a sign at the entrance indicating wheelchair accessibility. There was no alternative accessible entrance. In addition, the entrance door was manually operated. In reference to IWA guidance³⁵ that a manually operated door should provide sufficient space for the wheelchair user to operate the door while avoiding the door swing, both the PEER observer team and the IWA considered that entry would not be possible for a wheelchair user without assistance. The door also would need to be held open for them. Due to this issue, the PEER observer team did not consider Corclough N.S. to be independently accessible for wheelchair users.

Regarding the interior set-up of the polling station, there was sufficient space and privacy with areas properly laid out and all essential materials present. A modern, low-level voting compartment was available for wheelchair users.

Aughalasheen National School,
Scoil Náisiúnta Achaidh an Ghlaisín
Béal an Mhuirthead,
Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 X763

A sign was in place denoting wheelchair accessibility and a temporary wheelchair ramp of good quality was in place.

However, the door was manually operated and the wheelchair user would have to open it while on the ramp. Overall, it was considered that the low-gradient of the ramp would enable a wheelchair user to operate the door, but it would be difficult. No steps, hazards or obstacles were observed.

The PEER observer team was of the view that the interior posed no issues for a wheelchair user in terms of its entrance corridors, turning space and layout. A modern, low-level voting compartment was available for wheelchair users.

An IWA service user who was intellectually disabled and voted in Aughalasheen N.S. advised the PEER observer team that he always voted in this polling station with “no issues whatsoever.”



Belmullet Civic Centre,
Béal an Mhuirthead,
Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 W5HO

The PEER observer team noted the excellent car parking facilities in place, with designated disabled persons parking spaces located directly outside the pedestrian entrance to the polling station. On the approach to the centre entrance, no hazards or obstacles were observed that would hinder electors with physical disabilities or in wheelchairs.

Inside the centre, the PEER observer team and the IWA met with a service user of the IWA who is visually impaired and has a guide dog. Regarding the interior/set-up of the polling station, the IWA advised that the polling station had been relocated to a different part of the premises from that used in the previous electoral event, the reasons for which were unclear. It was noted that the change in location caused slight confusion for the visually impaired elector initially as he was used to taking a different internal route to his polling station. The PEER observer team considered there were some space constraints layout-wise in the polling station, given there were



three polling booths in a small area. A separate, private area had also been set up for wheelchair users which, it was noted, provided a desk to facilitate voting. When asked by the poll clerk whether he wished to use the ballot paper template (BPT) to vote, the visually impaired voter responded that the BPT was “of no use” and that he would like assistance in person from the presiding officer who proceeded to accompany him to the polling booth and read out the election candidates’ names. After casting his vote, outside the polling station the PEER observer team discussed the BPT option further with the visually impaired elector who outlined to them that he was not familiar with the BPT process, remarking that it sounded confusing.

Conclusion

Overall, the PEER observer team considered that two of the five polling stations visited were not independently accessible for wheelchair users, despite signs signalling that both polling stations were wheelchair accessible. [An Coimisiún wrote to the returning officer for the Mayo constituency thanking them and their staff for their assistance and to advise them of its observations.]

An Coimisiún is immensely thankful to the IWA for its dedicated support and co-operation throughout this exercise. As part of the 2025 presidential election PEER, An Coimisiún plans to repeat and expand the exercise conducted in Co. Mayo in other geographical areas on polling day in Autumn 2025.

Case study: Special voting, Tipperary North

The special vote is for persons ordinarily resident in a hospital, nursing home or similar institution. The *Electoral Reform Act*

2022 extended the special vote to allow electors ordinarily resident in psychiatric or mental health facilities to apply to be included in the special voters’ list. Eligible electors can vote at these locations in the days prior to an electoral event by completing a ballot paper brought to them by a special presiding officer who is accompanied by a member of An Garda Síochána. As provided for in electoral law,³⁶ once a polling day order is made by the Minister, further applicants for the special vote are added to the register in the form of a “balancing list”.

On 22 November 2024, two staff members from An Coimisiún accompanied two special presiding officers and a member of An Garda Síochána to nursing homes situated in the Dáil constituency of Tipperary North to witness (at a remove from the voting itself) the administration of the special vote.

As set out in s.80(4) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*,³⁷ a special voter may not be assisted in voting by a companion. They may, however, ask the special presiding officer to help them, or they may wish to avail of a ballot paper template (BPT). It was observed in some cases how the special presiding officer read out the particulars on the ballot paper in relation to each candidate. Although there is provision for a special presiding officer to mark the ballot paper for an elector replicating the procedure followed at a polling station in such circumstances,³⁸ An Coimisiún did not observe any elector requesting the special presiding officer to mark the ballot paper for them. No ballot paper templates (BPTs) were requested by special voters (An Coimisiún noted the BPT was present in the set of documents and materials issued to each special presiding officer).

When their feedback was sought, voters raised lack of canvassing/interaction opportunities with candidates, as well as



the absence of any election material on the candidates in the nursing homes, as areas of concern.

This observing of special voting was hugely beneficial in gaining an overview of the operational and procedural aspects of special voting. An Coimisiún commends the professionalism and dedication of the two special presiding officers and the member of An Garda Síochána in ensuring the right to vote was exercised wherever possible.

An Coimisiún's awareness-raising and communications in 2025 will continue to include a focus on the rights of persons ordinarily resident in psychiatric or mental health facilities to apply to be included in the special voters' list in line with the recommendation in the June PEER report.³⁹

It is envisaged that a more in-depth examination of special voting will take place as part of the PEER for the presidential election in Autumn 2025. This

would include examining the numbers of electors registered for special voting, special voting data reporting methods and the conduct of special voting itself.

Special voting at national level

The report on the general election published by the Oireachtas shows that 9,902 special votes were issued in November 2024, and in comparison, the number of covering envelopes received from special voters was 7,567, which is a return rate of 76.4%. The highest number of special votes issued in November 2024 were in the Dáil constituencies of Louth (494), Tipperary North (474) and Cork South-West (471).

The lowest numbers of special votes issued were in Dublin Central (28), Laois (46) and Dublin South-Central (70).

Case study: Electors voting in the wrong constituency

In advance of the general election, An Coimisiún introduced a 'Find My Constituency' tool.⁴⁰ This online educational resource played a useful role in assisting individuals to establish the constituency assigned to them.

However, during the general election period, An Coimisiún received reports from a number of electors in Co. Dublin stating their polling information card had shown that they had been assigned to vote in an incorrect Dáil constituency. In some cases, electors consulted the 'Find My Constituency' tool and noticed that the constituency assigned to them was different from the constituency listed on their polling information card.

A week before polling day, a voter contacted An Coimisiún explaining they had been sent a polling information card for the Dublin South-Central constituency

instead of the Dublin Bay South constituency to which they should have been assigned. With assistance from An Coimisiún, this matter was rectified with a letter of correction issued by the relevant returning officer which added the voter to the correct constituency and polling station.

Additional cases became apparent to An Coimisiún on polling day itself and after.

- A TD reported that a housing estate whose electors should have been in the Dublin Bay North constituency was placed in the constituency of Dublin Fingal East. This error was confirmed and rectified by the relevant local authority after the election took place.
- In another case affecting Dublin South-Central and Dublin Bay South constituencies, as soon as the returning officer was notified by an elector they had been assigned to the incorrect constituency, voting was suspended for that particular box/polling station and an alternative 'Register of Electors'



drawn up. This allowed affected electors to vote at an alternative polling station in the correct Dáil constituency. The returning officer estimated that 18 people had voted in the wrong constituency before the error was found.

- In one polling station, an elector stated they advised a presiding officer that they had been issued with a ballot paper for the Dublin Bay North constituency instead of Dublin North-West and the presiding officer indicated that this was not the first time this had arisen. The elector who raised this matter with An Coimisiún maintained that no corrective action was taken to remedy the situation.

An Coimisiún understands the issues highlighted affected a few hundred voters across Dublin Dáil constituencies. The assigning of electors to the incorrect Dáil constituency appears in some cases to have stemmed from errors in polling schemes.

Polling schemes, which are prepared by local authorities, divide a county or county borough into ‘polling districts’, appointing a polling place for each district and indicating where an elector’s polling station should be based on their address. Errors can occur in polling schemes such as when a row of houses is stated to be part of the polling scheme for one electoral division (ED), when in fact a portion of the road or part of the row of houses is actually part of a neighbouring ED. Such errors may have had no consequence for electors in previous electoral events where the EDs were situated in the same local electoral area (LEA) or constituency.

Following the *Constituency Review Report 2023* and enactment of the *Electoral (Amendment) Act 2023*, some EDs moved from one Dáil constituency into another.

In cases where pockets of electors had originally been assigned in a polling scheme to the wrong ED, some electors were subsequently assigned to the wrong Dáil constituency for the general election.

Based on the cases brought to the attention of An Coimisiún, it appears that different approaches were taken by election officials on polling day where cases emerged of voters being assigned to vote in the wrong constituency.

It is recommended that guidance is drawn up to advise presiding officers in polling stations on the procedure to follow when cases occur where electors are issued with ballot papers for the wrong constituency. The guidance manual for presiding officers should be amended accordingly.

At a wider level, the management of polling schemes is a reserved function of each local authority and in accordance with s.28 of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, polling schemes must be reviewed at least every ten years. In addition, it is noted that s.29(1) of the *Electoral Act, 1992* sets out:

“Where, following a revision of constituencies a polling district existing immediately prior to such revision is not wholly situate within a new Dáil constituency, the appropriate officer, after consultation with the returning officer for such Dáil constituency shall, with respect to the part of the polling district situate in the constituency—

*(a) join it or parts of it with any adjoining polling district or districts, or
(b) constitute it as a polling district and appoint a polling place for it.”*

It is recommended that polling scheme reviews be conducted following any changes made to electoral boundaries arising from constituency reviews.

Case study: Roscommon-Galway, Galway East

The *Constituency Review Report 2023* recommended that the number of Dáil constituencies should increase from 39 to 43. In total, seven new Dáil constituencies were formed, while the boundaries of others were amended with some areas added from neighbouring constituencies and some taken away.

In accordance with the *Electoral (Amendment) Act 2023*, several electoral divisions were transferred from the Dáil Constituency of Roscommon-Galway to the Dáil Constituency of Galway East. In advance of polling day, the Franchise Section in Galway County Council advised⁴¹ electors that seven polling districts in Co. Galway would remain in the Dáil Constituency of Roscommon-Galway and that 23 polling districts would be transferred back to the Dáil Constituency of Galway East. Four polling districts were split between the Dáil Constituencies of Galway East and Roscommon-Galway with one of these – Clontuskert N.S. – to host polling booths for both Dáil constituencies of Galway East and Roscommon-Galway. Franchise Section in Galway County Council indicated that as well as the notice issued online, it had written directly to over 14,000 electors to advise them of the Dáil Constituency boundary review and changes to electors' polling stations.

A PEER observer team visited Clontuskert N.S. on polling day and noted there were two constituency polling stations in the same room, separated by two desks. The PEER observer team reported that the set-up presented issues as regards the flow of voting, with electors unsure of their assigned polling booth. An Coimisiún considers that wherever possible such situations should be avoided.

Case study: Polling information cards – Limerick City constituency

An Coimisiún noted reports close to polling day that voters in different areas across the country had not received their polling information cards. Although voters are not required to have a polling information card to vote, the failure of polling information cards to arrive led to confusion amongst some electors as to whether they could in fact vote and where to go to vote. For electors who had moved address or whose polling station had been changed since the June elections, the notification contained on the polling information card would be the chief means by which they could be informed as to their appropriate polling station and its location. The appropriate polling station could also be checked by visiting www.checktheregister.ie or www.voter.ie (Dublin only).

On polling day, An Coimisiún became aware through media coverage of high numbers of voters with no polling information cards in the Limerick City constituency. Reports suggested that well over 80% of voters were arriving without polling information cards because they had not received them, compared to a rate of approximately 20% at previous electoral events. A PEER observer team was in Limerick city visiting pre-selected polling stations, so as an addition to their itinerary, they visited J.F.K. Memorial School, where major delays in voting were encountered. Electors were observed having to go to several presiding officers' issuing desks to establish to which desk they should go to receive their ballot paper. This slowed down the process enormously. The PEER observer team found the polling staff very knowledgeable and experienced.



One PEER observer having participated in all three PEERs, considered J.F.K. Memorial School to be one of the busiest polling places visited as part of a PEER to date, recalling:

“The room in which voting was taking place held a lot of polling booths... I would say most voters had to visit a number of tables to find themselves. There was also additional bother with the register in that it wasn’t in any particular order, so each page had to be searched. I would say there was a significant delay on voters, annoyance was visible.”

The PEER observer also reported to An Coimisiún that the feedback from polling staff in other polling stations visited in Limerick City on polling day, was that the numbers of voters with polling information cards were limited.

Postal voting

Postal voting is an area where we conducted a specific examination as part of this PEER.

Under the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*, An Coimisiún has the power to conduct

research on electoral policy and procedure and to make recommendations to Government arising from that research. *An Coimisiún’s Research Programme 2024-2026* commits to commencing research in 2025 on “the potential for the expansion of postal voting, its advantages and disadvantages and options in this regard”⁴².

In the meantime, our PEER observations have highlighted some issues with the current postal voting provisions, including issues related to timeframes, which could be addressed in advance of the research.

The following commentary notes a number of different aspects of postal voting.

Case study: Barriers to postal voting – cost

Electors who want a postal vote because of an illness or disability may face additional costs.

Persons who are unable to vote in person at their local polling station because of an illness or disability can apply for a postal vote. The registration process for the postal vote was simplified by the *Electoral Reform Act 2022*, so that once a person with a long-term illness or disability is added to

the register their certification is a once-off rather than annual requirement, with notice given by a registration authority before the right to a postal vote is removed. However, the initial requirement for medical certification remains in place and this may incur a charge.

In February 2025, An Coimisiún's Chief Executive, Art O'Leary wrote to the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage requesting this charge to be waived without delay and reiterating its position on the matter:

"it is still unjustifiable that a certain category of electors should have to pay to exercise their franchise. An Coimisiún considers that the current procedures around medical certification imposes an additional cost for many applicants and that this amounts to an unjustifiable barrier to participation. Registration for postal voting where medical certification is required should not impose any financial cost on an applicant." (see Appendix 4)

Registrations for postal voting for electors with illness/disability

In November 2024, 3,564 electors were registered for the postal vote due to illness or disability, a very low number in the context of 22% of the population in Census 2022 who reported experiencing long-lasting conditions or difficulties to any extent. This does however represent a doubling of registrations for this category of postal voter from 1,495 in March 2024 to 3,564 electors registered at the time of the general election. Based on data supplied by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the areas where the highest number of postal voters registered under the category

entitled 'illness/disability' are in the Dáil constituencies of Kerry, Wicklow, Dublin South-West and Donegal. The lowest numbers registered are situated in some of the Dublin Dáil constituencies.

Data collected as part of our National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) for the general election indicated that, of voters with a disability who did not vote, 7% cited their illness/ disability as a reason for not voting. Additionally, 28% of non-voters living with a condition/disability cited the fact that they were 'not registered to vote' as a reason for their abstention in the general election. A postal voting option might address some of the issues faced by these non-voters, by enabling them to vote from home and on a time and day of their choosing, within the deadlines set. It is important however that people with disabilities be afforded the right to vote in person should they wish in an accessible polling station meeting required standards of electoral integrity.

We will continue our awareness-raising and communications in 2025 with targeted information and support to be made available to electors with disabilities to increase their awareness of the possibility of a postal vote. The change brought about by the *Electoral Reform Act 2022* making electors with a mental illness or disability eligible to apply for a postal vote will also be factored into any awareness-raising campaigns.

Case study: Occupation/student postal vote

As provided for in s.63 of the *Electoral Act, 1997*, persons whose occupations are likely to prevent them from voting at their local polling station on election day, including full-time students registered at home who are living elsewhere while attending an

educational institution in the State, may apply for a postal vote. Students based in the State living away from home also have the option of changing their registration address to the place where they reside while studying.

Unlike other categories of the postal vote where the process is postal in its entirety, electors in the 'occupation/students' category encounter additional 'Declaration of Identity' requirements. Postal voters in the 'occupation/students' category may only post their completed ballot form after they have presented themselves at a Garda station where they must complete their ballot paper in the presence of a member of An Garda Síochána (AGS) and have a declaration of identity signed by AGS. The letter in which the postal vote arrived must also be destroyed by AGS. It is then contingent on the elector once they have left the Garda station to post their vote.

Data obtained from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage shows a steep rise in postal voting registrations because of occupational or educational circumstances between electoral events in 2024. For the March referendums, 34 persons were registered for a postal vote under the category entitled 'occupation/students'. This figure jumped to 3,933 for the June local and European elections. Numbers registered for November's general election decreased to 2,131. Nevertheless, the increases in 2024 are noteworthy.

On the basis of its engagement with a large local authority, An Coimisiún Toghcháin understands that many postal voters within the category 'occupation/students' were persons employed at polling stations in 2024. Although there is provision for election staff to have their vote transferred to the polling station in which they are based on polling day, depending on the

electoral event, polling station staff may be assigned a polling station outside of their electoral constituency and in such cases, they would require a postal vote. For the presidential election to be held in Autumn 2025, as a universal ballot paper will be utilised across constituencies, increases in this category of voter of the level seen in June 2024 are not anticipated. However, new factors such as promotion of the postal vote option amongst students could lead to a further surge in demand.

Focusing on the application form for the postal vote, it is notable that the application form for the postal vote makes no reference to 'the Declaration of Identity' and associated administrative requirements: *Form PV4 - Application for postal vote due to work or study reasons*.⁴³ It is recommended that *Form PV4* is amended so that the 'Declaration of Identity' requirements for postal are clearly specified on the application form. Applicants should be fully informed of the need to attend a Garda station if they are to be successful in obtaining a postal vote of this type. This should help for example students in this category in deciding between their three options in this regard: travel home to vote; move registration to student address; or register for a postal vote and undertake the Garda certification process.

Regarding the attendance of this category of postal voter at Garda stations, An Coimisiún received several reports advising of an apparent lack of awareness by AGS members of this provision, including the following correspondence from a member of the public:

"This morning I attended my local Garda station to follow the instructions on the postal ballot and the hardest part was convincing the Garda that they do need to sign and witness it...I

stuck with it and read the instructions which seemed pretty clear that there had to be the Garda signature and stamp. I even said how I had gone out of my way to get a postal vote and was worried that my vote would not be counted if I didn't have the proper signatures. Eventually he signed and stamped the form...If the gardai are required be involved in this process, perhaps the electoral commission could send them some info or give some training to them on it. I would

hate to see people turned away or ballots being thrown out because of this last step."

Acknowledging the abundance of other demands made of Gardaí serving in a public-facing capacity, An Coimisiún considers that levels of awareness may need to be raised in advance of electoral events. We are engaging with An Garda Síochána on this matter given the increase in voter registration for this category of electors.



Case study: Election timeframes and postal voting

Election timing is the product of constitutional, legislative and political factors. In accordance with Article 16.5 of the Constitution, parliamentary terms in Dáil Éireann are limited to a maximum term which, in practice, is five years in accordance with legislation contained in s.33 of the *Electoral Act, 1992*. Article 13.2.1° of the Constitution provides for Dáil Éireann to be dissolved by the President on the advice of the Taoiseach. In order to effect the dissolution of the Dáil, the President issues a proclamation dissolving Dáil Éireann. On the issuing of this proclamation and in compliance with s.39(1) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, the Clerk of the Dáil issues a writ of election to returning officers directing them to initiate election proceedings in their respective constituencies. In accordance with Article 16.3.2° of the Constitution, a general election is to be conducted within 30 days of the dissolution of the Dáil – the particulars of the election date are determined by Ministerial order pursuant to s.96(1) of the *Electoral Act, 1992* which provides for a poll to be conducted on a day between the seventeenth and twenty-fifth day following the day on which the writ of election is issued.

In practice, these procedural measures – the proclamation dissolving Dáil Éireann, the writ of election and the polling day order – are conducted on the day the Taoiseach attends Áras an Uachtaráin to request the dissolution of the Dáil. Operating within the constitutional and legislative parameters, the timing of the election is at the discretion of the Taoiseach. Once the proclamation dissolving the Dáil is issued, the Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage has a legislatively established timeframe within which to appoint an election day. When making arrangements for polling day, there has been a trend in recent decades to employ the lower limit of the timeframe legislated for in s.96(1) of the Act of 1992.

The date of the dissolution of the Dáil determines the timeframe for receipt of postal voting applications, in accordance with s.14(2) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, as amended by s.90(2) (a) of the *Electoral Reform Act 2022* an application to be entered on to the postal voters list for a general election has to be received before the third day after the date of dissolution of the Dáil. The issuing of the writ of election by the Clerk of the Dáil initiates an administrative timeline centred primarily on candidacy procedures. In compliance with the requirement to provide public notice of the conditions for receipt of candidate nominations as outlined in s.44 of the *Electoral Act, 1992* as amended by s.1 of the *Electoral (Amendment) Act 2007*, returning officers are obliged to publish a notice of election within two days following the day on which the writ of election is received. In practice, the writ of election is received by returning officers on the day following the day on which it is issued, in consequence, the notice of election is customarily published within three days from the day on which the writ of election is issued. In accordance with s.49 of the *Electoral Act, 1992* as amended by s.1 of the *Electoral (Amendment) Act 2007*, the timeframe for receipt of candidate nominations commences on the day following the latest date for the publication of the notice of election and concludes on the seventh day following the day on which the writ of election is issued. In this respect, the publication of the notice of election is central to the timeline for candidacy procedures. In accordance with s.54(1) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, the timeframe for withdrawal of candidature concludes on the day following the latest date for the receipt of candidate nominations. It is only after the date for the withdrawal of candidature that returning officers are able to definitively confirm candidates for printing of ballot papers.

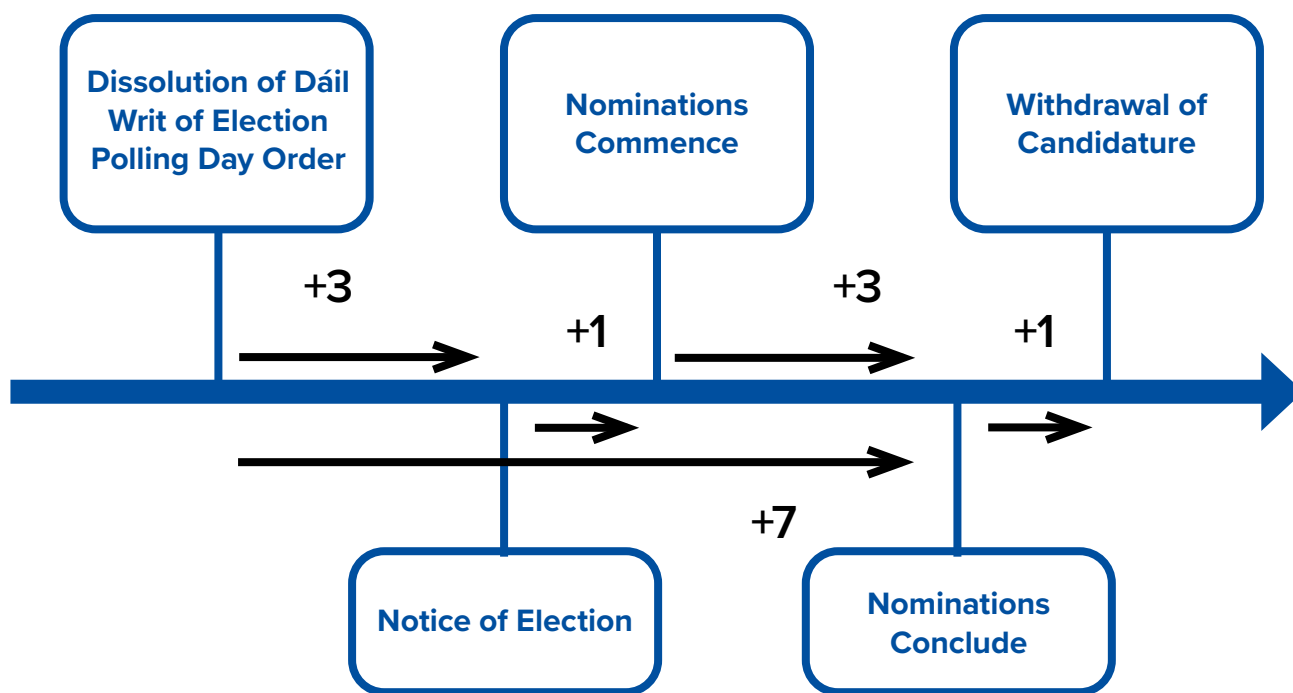


Table 1: Indicates the timeline of procedures in the preparation of ballot papers during the 2024 general election.

Case study: Postal voting overseas – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

In accordance with s.12(1) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*, ‘members of a mission’ – diplomats and civil servants serving outside of the State – are entitled to apply to the appropriate registration authority to be deemed ordinarily resident in the State and entered on the postal voters list: this provision is extended to their spouses or civil partners also. This affords them the opportunity to vote by post. In order to facilitate postal voting for those eligible, an administrative process involving registration authorities, returning officers and the Department is conducted, despite concerted efforts to optimise this process, the limited procedural timeframes provided for in the legislative framework resulted in some postal ballot papers being returned after the close of poll.

The registration of eligible diplomats, civil servants and their spouses or civil partners

is facilitated by registration authorities in partnership with the Department’s Human Resources Abroad Unit (HRAU) which engages with registration authorities at intervals in order to affirm the existing entitlement of diplomats or civil servants that remain on posting and to advise of the emerging entitlement of diplomats or civil servants commencing a posting. The Department advised An Coimisiún that, excepting isolated registration issues, engagement with registration authorities is constructive.

The issuing of postal ballot papers is conducted by constituency returning officers in collaboration with the HRAU which prepares the postal ballot papers for onward dispatch to the Department’s missions. The operation of this process is dependent on legislative timelines. In order for postal ballot papers to issue to the Department for processing, the administrative processes of preparing, proof-reading and printing ballot papers require completion. The timing of these processes is determined by legislative

timelines primarily connected to candidacy procedures. In order to prepare the ballot paper for a constituency, returning officers are obliged to attend to the conclusion of candidacy procedures, in particular, the withdrawal of candidature. The date for this process is informed by the dissolution of the Dáil and the issuing of the Writ of Election – in this respect, the interconnectedness and interdependencies of electoral timelines is apparent. Once the constituency returning officers issue the postal ballot papers in accordance with s.68(1) of the *Electoral Act, 1992* they are delivered to the Department by a Defence Forces courier (the Department collects the postal ballot papers for the Dublin constituencies directly from the returning officers).

On receipt of the postal ballot papers, the HRAU orders the postal votes by mission, ensuring that the appropriate constituency ballot papers are prepared for issue to the appropriate mission. In order to facilitate this process, it has a manifest outlining the constituencies in which mission members are registered to vote. Once it has prepared the appropriate postal ballot papers for a given mission, the postal votes are enclosed in an outer envelope and transferred to the Department's Registry unit for dispatch.

The Registry Unit is responsible for obtaining permissions related to the issuing of postal ballot papers as diplomatic post; depending on the destination, special permissions are required in order for the diplomatic post to enter the State. In addition, the Registry Unit logs the postal ballot papers as diplomatic and prepares them in diplomatic bags. A tracker enables the Registry Unit and the destination mission to monitor the transport of the diplomatic bag and to prepare for its receipt. Once this process is complete the diplomatic bags with the postal ballot

papers are collected by private courier and transported to Dublin Airport for dispatch. It is important to say here that while the use of the diplomatic bag affords various legal protections, it provides limited logistical advantages. Diplomatic bags are transported by private courier – the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade uses DHL – and are consequently subject to standard industry delivery timeframes. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade advised An Coimisiún that it has reviewed the services offered by multiple private couriers and found the delivery timeframes to be identical.

The process of preparing the postal ballot papers for onward dispatch is completed by the HRAU and the Registry unit on the day of receipt from returning officers. On 21 November 2024 – the day An Coimisiún was in attendance – postal ballot papers were delivered to the Department at 12:00, the HRAU had them prepared for onward dispatch by 14:30 and the Registry unit had them processed in diplomatic bags for collection by 15:30.

The Department advised An Coimisiún that existing timelines for the delivery of postal ballot papers are problematic. For certain missions, particularly those that are difficult to access or where the postal service is less reliable, postal delivery timeframes approach up to ten days in one-direction. In the event of a particularly time-sensitive election, in which the polling day is assigned for the minimum rather than the maximum legislative timeframe, postal ballot papers are at risk of being received after polling day – indeed, this issue occurred during the 2024 general election. As a result of the legislative timelines for candidacy procedures and political decisions related to the date for the dissolution of the Dáil and polling day, the Department received postal ballot papers from returning officers

approximately a week before polling day, this all but guaranteed that certain postal ballot papers would arrive after polling day.

According to data collected by the Department, approximately 10% of the postal ballot papers issued during the general election were received after polling day. These ballot papers were received from 14 missions indicating that the issue is not infrequent and relates to a reasonable proportion – approximately 15% – of Departmental missions: it is important to

add that a number of ballots from these missions may have been returned in time, as they were dispatched as and when issued by returning officers. As such, while 14 missions were affected, not all officers at those missions were necessarily affected. The Department advised An Coimisiún that there is limited opportunity for further optimising the process, with this in mind, it is important to examine the election timelines determined by the existing legislative framework and to consider related policy proposals.



“On the long to do list when heading out on posting, updating my voting registration is always a top priority. Voting from abroad is a privilege I don’t take for granted and it is intrinsically linked to serving the State abroad. In the most recent general elections, it became apparent very quickly that the turnaround time for us in Embassy Ankara was going to be very tight, to the point of possibly not getting to vote. We started to look at all the logistical possibilities and contingency planning for receiving and returning the ballots. Trains, planes and automobiles and new, albeit less secure, courier service providers were all considered. There were some highs and lows. When the first diplomatic bag only contained 3 ballots on the Friday evening before polling day, we were deflated as it seemed most of us, including myself, would not get to vote. However, there was high excitement first thing on Monday morning when the remainder of the ballots arrived. As the same courier was taking the bag straight away with the earlier received ballots, we wouldn’t let the courier leave the Embassy until we had witnessed and filled them out in a whirlwind turnaround to make their journey to Dublin on time. We had everything crossed that there wouldn’t be any last-minute glitches, and while two of the team were away and unable to vote, this was unavoidable. All the Embassy team were invested in the tracking of the special ballot diplomatic bag to Dublin, and it was a great relief to see it arrived before polling day. I would like to thank HQ and the team locally for pulling out all the stops to allow us in Ankara to be part of the democratic process - something we truly value.”

Ambassador Clare Brosnan, Embassy of Ireland in Türkiye



In regard to the 2024 general election, circumstances including the date for the dissolution of the Dáil – dissolution on the Dáil on Friday, 8 November 2024 delayed receipt of the writ of election until Monday, 11 November 2024 – created a particularly uncompromising timeframe for the delivery of postal ballot papers. In order to mitigate this issue, it is proposed that the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage examine the legislative timelines and consider areas for improvement of the postal voting process and postal voting challenges encountered by Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade during 2024.

1. Timeframe for general election

In 2024, polling day took place just three weeks after the announcement of the general election. This meant that there was a very short timeframe for postal ballots to reach, and be returned by, officers at the Department's network of missions around the world. Ballots can only be issued after nominations have closed and after the subsequent period for withdrawals has passed. This meant that, for the general election, ballots for postal voting were only available from 21 November 2024 and were to be received, sent out to the mission network, completed and returned to the relevant returning officers by last post on polling day, 29 November. Even with the excellent co-operation that the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said it received from the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, as well as a number of the local authorities, there were very significant challenges in getting the ballots in sufficient time to missions in distant locations, as well as those where the postal service is less reliable. While the transit time varies, it takes a minimum of one to two days for diplomatic mail from Dublin to reach missions in nearer locations, but more than ten days in

others. A similar timeframe needs to be allowed for the return of diplomatic mail from our mission network. According to the Department, these longer timeframes affect officers posted in the Asia Pacific region and in Africa, as well as those serving in active conflict zones. For almost half of the Department's mission network, the estimated timeframe for delivery of diplomatic mail is over four days, and a further four days needs to be allowed for return of same.

2. Postal voter registration

There is currently no formal process or requirement for local authorities to share with the Department the list of the postal voters registered with them as working abroad. Officers who have returned from posting must also contact their local authority to be removed from the register as a postal voter.

Thanks to good co-operation and strong engagement between local authorities and the Department, approximately 60% of local authorities forward their lists of registered postal voters to be crosschecked against Departmental records. This ensures officers who are no longer eligible for postal voting are removed and reverted back to a regular polling information card in time for polling day, as well as ensuring that PV3 registration forms that were sent in by officers have been received and processed by the local authority.

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has advised that the standardisation of this process with all local authorities to ensure that records of postal voters are up to date would be welcome.

Some officers who are serving in locations abroad on a temporary basis are also able to cast a ballot using a PV4 form. However,

any particular guidance that could be issued to local authorities around accepting these forms would be valuable, as some officers reported difficulty in engaging with their relevant local authority to register in this way.

Postal voting data

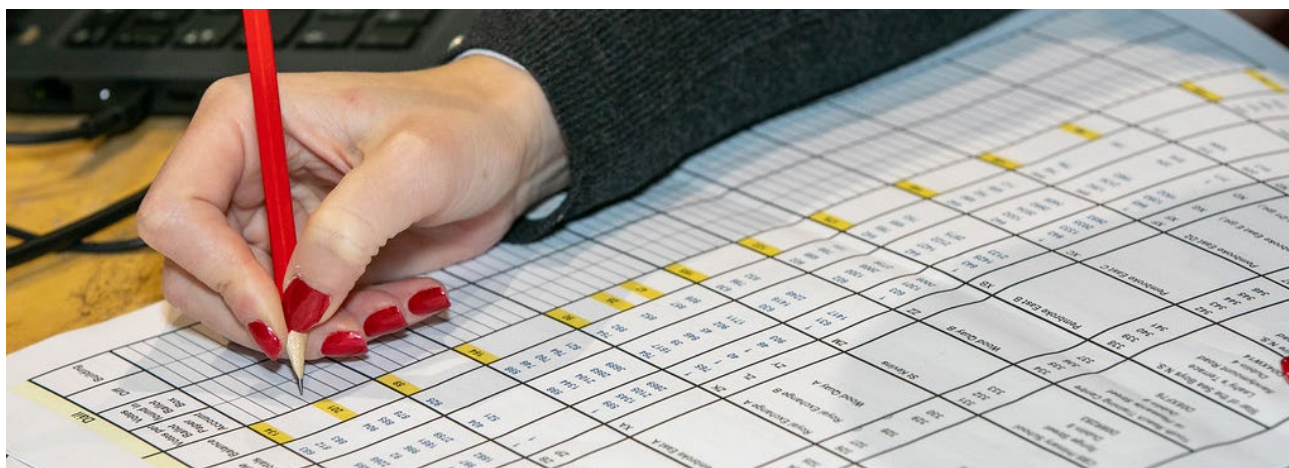
Election reports – *Report on Election to Clerk of the Dáil* – are statistical returns made by returning officers to the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage which are published by the Oireachtas. The reports include data on the number of postal votes issued, the number of special votes issued, the combined number of postal and special ballot papers rejected at opening, and the combined number of postal and special votes both placed and found in the ballot box (see Appendix 5 - Sample Election Report – Dáil Election 29 November 2024).

For the November 2024 general election, 15,499 electors were registered for a postal vote. Based on the election reporting returns made by returning officers for the general election, the overall ‘response rates’ for postal voting can be calculated based on the number of postal votes issued versus the number of postal votes received in the post (some of these ballot papers may ultimately be rejected). Figures









available for the 2024 general election indicate that approximately 62.6% of those issued with a postal vote proceeded to post their vote. In comparison, in the June European Parliament elections, there was a response rate of 55.2%.

The overall response rate for the postal vote (62.6%) varies geographically, with the highest response rate (95.4%) in the Dáil constituency of Dublin Mid-West and the lowest response rates (51-52%) in the Dáil constituencies of Dublin Bay North, Offaly and Waterford. Longford-Westmeath was the constituency with the highest amount of postal votes issued overall (800) out of the total of 15,417 postal votes issued nationwide.






An Coimisiún recommends that the reporting forms completed by returning officers after each electoral event are amended (taking into account the legislative provisions governing postal and special voting⁴⁴), so that postal voting statistics and returns are kept separate from special voting data where possible. Not having the data for postal and special voting counted separately impedes our oversight capacity, in particular in view of the research to be commenced later in 2025 regarding the potential for the expansion of postal voting.








PEER November recommendations

	Waive all charges in connection with medical certification imposed on persons applying for the postal vote because of an illness or disability. An Coimisiún strongly recommends that this should be done in advance of the 2025 presidential election.
	Review the statutory timelines following the dissolution of the Dáil to ensure that voters are given every opportunity to arrange for postal voting, and those wishing to register to vote for the first time or at a new address are able to do so.
	Amend <i>Form PV4 - Application for postal vote due to work or study reasons</i> , so that attendance at a Garda station and the 'Declaration of Identity' requirements regarding voting are clearly specified on the application form.
	Issue guidance to presiding officers regarding the safe and secure disposal of polling information cards left in polling stations by electors.
	Review polling schemes following any changes made to electoral boundaries arising from a constituency review.
	Issue guidance to presiding officers on how to respond to incidences where electors are issued with ballot papers for the wrong constituency.
	Amend reporting forms completed by returning officers after each electoral event so that postal voting statistics and returns are separate from special voting data.
	Display freephone numbers which list candidates' in the order they appear on the ballot paper prominently on the homepage of the returning officer and www.gov.ie websites. As a supplementary option on these websites, provide audio files which call out a list of the candidates in the order in which they appear on the ballot paper.

PEER June recommendations

	Ensure wheelchair ramps are available wherever physical conditions at a polling station so require, and that all wheelchair accessible entrances are clearly signposted.
	Review the guidance and materials on offer to blind or visually impaired voters.
	Promote the use of the freephone helplines for blind and visually impaired electors (once assurance of the operational readiness of the helplines has been checked).
	Targeted information and support to be made available to increase awareness amongst electors with disabilities of the possibility of availing of a postal vote.
	In light of the amendments introduced in the <i>Electoral Reform Act 2022</i> , increase awareness amongst electors with mental health conditions and those resident in mental health facilities of the possibility of availing of the postal and special vote.

PEER March 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 (two amendments to the Accessibility Checklist post March 2024 are noted).
	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 the guidance manuals issued to returning and presiding officers, omitting any confidential operational data. (Implemented). ^{7 8}
	Publish a guidance manual for electors which should explain the facilities and voting aids available at polling stations.

14. Next Steps

The fact that An Coimisiún has the power in the *Electoral Reform Act 2022* to conduct a PEER suggests the Oireachtas valued an independent assessment of the administration of electoral events. The legislation specifies that the experience of people with disabilities is a particular priority. A number of the recommendations in previous PEERs align with feedback we have received from stakeholders and are based on data and real-life experience. It is therefore important that these recommendations are acted upon.

There has been progress in implementing some of our recommendations and we have outlined areas of improvement in this Report from the previous two events we have reviewed to date. However, there is still work to be done in advancing many of our recommendations.

An Coimisiún will review progress in implementing the recommendations in the three PEER reports to date in 2026 after the presidential election. This will include engagement with relevant stakeholders. We will indicate our assessment of progress in implementing the PEER recommendations in our interactions with the Minister and the Oireachtas.

For the presidential election PEER which will likely be due for publication in Q2 2026, An Coimisiún may choose to revisit matters previously examined in the general election, June and March PEERs 2024.

The focus on the suitability of facilities offered to electors with disabilities will continue in accordance with the legislative provisions governing PEERs. We intend to build on the case study conducted in the Belmullet Local Electoral Area by accompanying electors with a range of

disabilities in the presidential election to be held in Autumn 2025. For the presidential PEER, the voting experiences of electors with disabilities will be examined in consultation with the **Groups Experiencing Barriers Working Group** established by An Coimisiún to assist in the development of its Education and *Public Engagement Strategy*.

We seek to develop innovative approaches to future PEERs

Data gathered through the PEER Checklists provides a country-wide sample analysis of the availability of key election day materials and facilities for electors with disabilities. The responses also provide an insight into compliance with electoral procedures. An Coimisiún plans to trial automated input and uploading of the data gathered via the PEER Checklist on polling day during the presidential election. This will allow for a quantitative analysis of the results of our observations to be available soon after an electoral event.

Regarding learnings from **PEER November**:

- An Coimisiún wrote to returning officers detailing the issues encountered by **PEER observer teams** in relation to polling stations visited in their constituencies on 29 November and identified actions that could be taken for improvement in advance of the next electoral event.
- An Coimisiún will engage with returning officers to hear their feedback following the publication of this general election PEER report and to discuss progress on implementation of the

recommendations in all three PEER reports.

- Stakeholder engagement and follow up – in addition to PEER focused meetings held with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage in its role as secretariat and chair to the Working Group on Disability Voting, An Coimisiún's Voter Education and Engagement Unit engages with organisations from a wide variety of sectors including the formal education sector, adult/community education and groups representing electors experiencing barriers to electoral participation, including DPOs, electors with disabilities, as well as the general public.
- Presidential election 2025 PEER:
 - › Thematic selection and focus of PEER presidential – criteria to select polling stations for visits on polling day.
 - › Direct involvement by voters with disabilities in PEER observation visits in consultation with An Coimisiún's **Groups Experiencing Barriers Working Group**.
 - › Experience of voters with disabilities to be captured in the surveys of voters as part of the *National Democracy and Election Study*.



15. Endnotes

- 1 Urban Areas are a new urban Geography developed by CSO, Tailte Éireann and the Department of Housing - see <https://data-osi.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/osi::cso-urban-areas-national-statistical-boundaries-2022-ungeneralised/about>
- 2 <https://ec-report.s3.eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/constituency-review-report-2023.pdf>
- 3 A ballot paper template (BPT) is a transparent plastic device intended to be placed over a ballot paper to facilitate voting by visually impaired voters.
- 4 <https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/09/03150406/Post-Electoral-Event-Review.pdf>
- 5 List of PEER June and March recommendations see p.26-
https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/12/06153929/Post-Electoral-Event-Review_7-June_English_Tagged.pdf
- 6 <https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/08/2911228/Strategy-Statement-2024-2026.pdf>
- 7 <https://assets.gov.ie/312963/3e85cb42-027b-4ede-8249-20112f9f652c.pdf>
- 8 <https://assets.gov.ie/315444/e5739670-fbbf-434d-b923-32f0d0b45cf0.pdf>
- 9 2.3 Persons permitted to be present at polling stations- p.13
<https://assets.gov.ie/315444/e5739670-fbbf-434d-b923-32f0d0b45cf0.pdf>
- 10 <https://www.electoralcommission.ie/how-to-vote/>
- 11 <https://www.electoralcommission.ie/what-constituency-am-i-in/>
- 12 <https://nda.ie/uploads/publications/Accessibility-Checklist-for-Polling-Stations-April-2024-FINAL.docx>
- 13 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/66b9212e-e9b0-409d-88a3-c0e505a5e670_en?filename=SWD_2023_408_1_EN_document_travail_service_part1_v4.pdf, p.17
- 14 <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/indicators-right-political-participation-people-disabilities>
- 15 https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/e/a/477730_0.pdf
- 16 Annex B - Sample Observation Forms for Voting- <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/e/68439.pdf>, pp 109-111
- 17 OSCE Election Observation e-learning
- 18 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 PEER reports, the term “polling station” is used to refer to general premises as well as the particular space provided for electors to cast their ballot.
- 19 <https://www.pobal.ie/pobal-hp-deprivation-index/>
- 20 <https://www.dublincityreturningofficer.com/index.php/european-and-local-elections-june-2024/49-turnout-by-polling-place-june-2024>
- 21 <https://data-osi.opendata.arcgis.com/datasets/osi::cso-urban-areas-national-statistical-boundaries-2022-ungeneralised/about>
- 22 <https://assets.gov.ie/315444/e5739670-fbbf-434d-b923-32f0d0b45cf0.pdf> p.8
- 23 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed632-ballot-paper-template-for-voters-who-are-blind-or-vision-impaired/>
- 24 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/ed632-ballot-paper-template-for-voters-who-are-blind-or-vision-impaired/>

25 <https://vvi.ie/>

26 <https://vi.ie/>

27 https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/electoralProcess/electionResults/dail/2025/2025-04-02_34th-dail-general-election-results_en.pdf

28 <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2b6b9-33rd-dail-election-february-2020-election-results/>

29 s.94(5)(a) of the *Electoral Act, 1992*-
 “5) The returning officer shall provide at each polling station—
 (a) such number of compartments in which the voters can mark their ballot papers screened from observation, as he considers necessary”

30 The *Electoral Reform Act 2022* provides for An Coimisiún to report on an annual basis to the Oireachtas on its assessment of the status and functioning of the electoral registers. An Coimisiún’s Oversight Report on the Electoral Registers was published in May 2025 - https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2025/04/30104313/Oversight-Report-on-the-Electoral-Registers_online_english_tagged.pdf

31 <https://assets.gov.ie/312963/3e85cb42-027b-4ede-8249-20112f9f652c.pdf> p.82

32 <https://www.checktheregister.ie/en-IE/forms> or www.voter.ie (Dublin only)

33 <https://www.electoralcommission.ie/consultation/>

34 <https://assets.gov.ie/315444/e5739670-fbbf-434d-b923-32f0d0b45cf0.pdf> p.8

35 Best Practice Access Guidelines - Designing Accessible Environments, pg85-86, Irish Wheelchair Association. Edition 4, November 2020.
<https://www.iwa.ie/access-guidelines/best-practice-access-guidelines-4/>

36 s.15B Electoral Act, 1992

37 <https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1992/act/23/section/80/enacted/en/html>

38 Memorandum for the Guidance of Returning Officers General Election 2024-
 “The Special Presiding Officer should ensure that in each case where he or she is requested to mark the ballot paper for a Special Voter no other person, except the Garda on duty, may be present while the paper is being marked.” p.53 -
<https://assets.gov.ie/312963/3e85cb42-027b-4ede-8249-20112f9f652c.pdf>

39 “In light of the amendments introduced in the Electoral Reform Act 2022, increase awareness amongst electors with mental health conditions and those resident in mental health facilities of the possibility of availing of the postal and special vote”- p.26

40 <https://www.electoralcommission.ie/what-constituency-am-i-in/>

41 <https://www.galway.ie/en/news/name,49988,en.html>

42 https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/07/09110424/EC_RESEARCH_PROGRAMME_ENG_ACCESSIBLE-1.pdf

43 <https://www.checktheregister.ie/en-IE/forms>
<https://www.voter.ie/general/downloads> (Dublin only)

44 Parts XIII and XIV, Electoral Act 1992

45 <https://www.electoralcommission.ie/what-constituency-am-i-in/>

46 <https://cdn.electoralcommission.ie/app/uploads/2024/09/03150406/Post-Electoral-Event-Review.pdf>

16. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Information campaign for 29 November general election

The commitment of An Coimisiún to public engagement is set out in our Statement of Strategy 2024-2026. It outlines a tailored approach to educate and raise awareness amongst the electorate to engage in electoral events.

Ahead of polling day for the general election and the carrying out of our election day review, An Coimisiún delivered a targeted national campaign to inform and engage the public about the election and the need to be registered to vote.

Our communications focuses were delivered across three distinct phases between 25 October and 29 November, firstly getting people registered to vote, secondly informing people about the general election, and thirdly getting people ready and informed to vote.

We were heartened to see our campaign contribute to 115,130 new online applications to register to vote in November alone and 50,541 online updates to the register in November.

Media engagement


An Coimisiún undertook a detailed programme of media engagements across national and regional media. During the five-week campaign period, our Chief Executive, Art O’Leary, Head of Electoral Operations, Tim Carey, Education Manager, Sarah Keaveney and Communications Manager, Brian Dawson, undertook 81 media interviews with broadcast, print and online journalists, talking about how to register, how to complete your ballot and the need to get out and vote.

Of these 81 interviews 24 were with national media, including podcasts, while 57 were with local or regional media. There were also seven Irish language interviews conducted with An Coimisiún’s Antóin Ó Trínluín. An Coimisiún also responded directly to media queries about the elections through our press office function.

Advertising campaign

An Coimisiún’s advertising campaign was delivered across five-weeks and included advertising across TV, radio, print, out of home, digital display and social media channels. This was complemented by our programme of public engagement and media events across the country. An Coimisiún’s website and social media channels hosted an array of useful content to help the public prepare to cast their vote on polling day.

A particular innovation to support voter education was Ireland’s first ever specific TV and online advert showing people how to complete their ballot paper correctly. The adverts were aired in English and Irish and featured Conor O’Donnell who is a member of the National



Advisory Council of Down Syndrome Ireland and an actor who has also appeared in the ‘Bad Sisters’ TV series.

Analysis of our overall advertising campaign has shown that amongst 18-45 year olds alone it reached an estimated audience of 1.1 million adults. Our post campaign research also showed that 80% of those aged 18-24 want even more information from An Coimisiún on how to vote, what they need to vote, and how to check the register, and this insight will contribute to our future campaign planning.

Campaign events

A key element supporting An Coimisiún’s 29 November general election campaign was a programme of in-person events across the country with a particular emphasis on engaging younger voters.

Staff of An Coimisiún carried out a programme of national engagements which included street canvasses in Tallaght, Blanchardstown, Cork City, Galway City, and in Athlone town centre, we also held meetings with groups representing Travellers, first time voters, disabled people, student societies, and made presentations about voting and participation to nine secondary schools leading up to polling day.

In line with an overall focus on accessibility, An Coimisiún created and distributed two Easy-to-Read booklets with Inclusion Ireland, one focused on how to register and the other on how to vote.

As a new innovation during this campaign, we partnered up with the radio station Spin FM to hold high profile voter registration drives in UCD and TU Dublin, and partnered with UCC faculty members to hold an event and voter registration drive in UCC. These events highlighted a real desire amongst younger people to get themselves on the register.

Social media

An Coimisiún delivered a schedule of engaging and informative posts across a range of social media channels (X, Instagram, Facebook, Threads, Snapchat, TikTok and LinkedIn).

Our general election social media campaigns saw over 1.45m impressions on our Instagram, over 113,000 video views on our TikTok, and reached 1.1m Facebook accounts.

A particular innovation during the campaign was a series of social media videos which responded directly to public questions about the election and voting. Topics covered by our Head of Electoral Operations, Tim Carey in these short videos included how to register, whether you could use your own biro or pencil to vote, and whether you could take photos while voting. This organic content was widely viewed and one video alone saw 90,000 views on TikTok.

A further innovation was the filming and production of a “Journey of a Ballot Box” video, which showed the journey of one particular Dublin ballot box through the election, from

being packed in a warehouse, being sealed for use by polling staff, being used on election day and then being brought to the count and opened. This was intended to increase public understanding of this “behind the scenes” process and was shared across our social media channels as the 2024 general election count was beginning.

Website

Our website, www.electoralcommission.ie was populated with targeted information and FAQs about the general election with a user-friendly layout and a user experience focused on accessibility, particularly for those with disabilities.

During the campaign period we welcomed 330,768 views of our bilingual website made up of 211,201 users, including 87,485 views on polling day itself. Our “*How to Vote*” webpage was the most visited.

An innovation during the general election campaign was the development and launch of a new online “find my constituency” tool⁴⁵ by An Coimisiún’s Electoral Operations team. This new tool allowed people to enter their address or Eircode to be instantly advised exactly which constituency they lived in. This new tool proved to be extremely popular, receiving 138,991 views during the campaign and featuring in media coverage of the elections as a resource for voters.

This constituency finder tool was considered to be of particular importance following the 2023 Constituency Review that saw over half a million people moving constituencies from the previous general election. This tool will be developed further for future elections.

Appendix 2 – Index of Polling Stations Visited

1. Dublin City: Turnout

Five low turnout polling districts (PDs) from the 7 June elections, based on official data published by Dublin City returning officer.

	Polling District	Constituency	% Turnout (June 2024)	Polling Station
1	Rathmines West A1	Dublin Bay South	17.01	St. Louis Primary School, D06 FD92
2	Pembroke West B1	Dublin Bay South	22.38	Ballsbridge College, D04 R201
3	Rathmines East A	Dublin Bay South	23.49	Ranelagh Multi-Denom. School, D06 Y658
4	Cabra East C	Dublin Central	24.48	Christ the King N.S, D07 X950
5	Rathmines East D	Dublin Bay South	24.89	Beechwood Parish Centre, D06 Y176

2. Dublin City: Pobal Index

Five electoral divisions (EDs) categorised as disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged on Pobal HP Index (2022).

	Electoral Division	Constituency	Pobal Index Category	Polling Station
1	Priorswood B	Dublin Bay North	Very Disadvantaged	St. Francis Senior N.S., D17 F978
2	Finglas South C	Dublin North West	Very Disadvantaged	St. Finian's N.S., D11 WN70
3	Finglas North A	Dublin North West	Disadvantaged	St. Josephs N.S., D11 A8PD
4	Kilmore C	Dublin Bay North	Disadvantaged	Northside Civic Centre D17 K462
5	Priorswood D	Dublin Bay North	Disadvantaged	St. Joseph's N.S., Macroom Rd, D17 DY60

3. Dublin County: Social Deprivation

Five electoral divisions (EDs) categorised as disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged by the Pobal HP Index.

Electoral Division		Constituency	Pobal Index Category	Polling Station
1	Tallaght-Killinardan	Dublin South-West	Very Disadvantaged	Scoil Cnoc Mhuire Senior, D24 TF65
2	Clondalkin-Rowlagh	Dublin Mid-West	Very Disadvantaged	Rowlagh N.S., [St. Mary's J.N.S.], D22 H504
3	Tallaght-Avonbeg	Dublin South-West	Disadvantaged	Mountainpark N.S. [St. Dominic's N.S.], D24 P7XC
4	Carna	Dublin South-Central	Disadvantaged	Ballyfermot Community Civic Centre, D10 T042
5	Clondalkin-Cappaghmore	Dublin Mid-West	Disadvantaged	Divine Mercy S.N.S., K78 A393

4. Nationwide: Pobal Index

25 EDs, one ED from each county outside Dublin, categorised as disadvantaged, very disadvantaged or extremely disadvantaged by the Pobal HP Index.

Electoral Division		Constituency (County)	Pobal Index Category	Polling Station (*previously unvisited-based on June Polling Schemes)
1	Galvone B	Limerick City	Extremely Disadvantaged	Le Chéile N.S. [Roxborough Rd.], V94 X2TR
2	Knocknaheeney	Cork North-Central	Very Disadvantaged	St. Marys on the Hill N.S., T23 AH26
3	Letterbrick	Mayo	Very Disadvantaged	Lahardane N.S., F26 XV34
4	Larchville/Lisduggan	Waterford	Very Disadvantaged	St. Paul's Boys N.S., X91 YX80
5	Carnew	Wicklow-Wexford (Wicklow)	Disadvantaged	Scoil Aodán Naofa 'Carnew N.S., Wool Green, Carnew, Co. Wicklow, Y14 XR62

Electoral Division		Constituency (County)	Pobal Index Category	Polling Station (*previously unvisited-based on June Polling Schemes)
6	Mountrath	Laois	Disadvantaged	St. Fintan's Hall Mountrath, R32 X309
7	Muinebeag Urban	Carlow-Kilkenny (Carlow)	Disadvantaged	McGrath Memorial Hall, R21 WR66
8	Mullingar North Urban	Longford-Westmeath (Westmeath)	Disadvantaged	Christian Brothers N.S., Mullingar, N91 HE22
9	Rathmacurkey	Sligo-Leitrim (Sligo)	Disadvantaged	Kilglass N.S., Ballyglass, Enniscrone, Co. Sligo, F26 E682
10	ED: Dawsongrove Small Area: Rockcorry	Cavan-Monaghan (Monaghan)	ED: Marginally Below Average Small Area: Disadvantaged	ED: Dawsongrove Small Area: Rockcorry Polling Station: Rockcorry Cofl N.S., H18 FD93
11	Ennis No. 2 Urban	Clare	Disadvantaged	Ennis Town Council, V95 N1NR
12	Doocharry	Donegal	Disadvantaged	S.N. na Dúchoradh, (Doocharry N.S.), F94 YP28
13	Kylemore	Galway East	Disadvantaged	Clontuskert N.S., H53 X568
14	Derreen	Kerry	Disadvantaged	Scartaglin N.S., V93 Y443
15	Athy West Urban	Kildare South	Disadvantaged	Athy Church of Ireland, R14 HX26
16	Kiltyclogher	Sligo-Leitrim (Leitrim)	Disadvantaged	Kiltyclogher N.S., F91 NF72
17	Lislea	Longford-Westmeath (Longford)	Disadvantaged	Ballinalee N.S., N39 HY57
18	Dundalk No. 2 Urban	Louth	Disadvantaged	Castletown G.N.S., A91 P957
19	Ceanannas Mór Urban	Meath East	Disadvantaged	St. Colmcilles N.S. [Kells], A82 FF86

Electoral Division		Constituency (County)	Pobal Index Category	Polling Station (*previously unvisited-based on June Polling Schemes)
20	Boyle Urban	Roscommon-Galway (Roscommon)	Disadvantaged	Boyle Abbey Primary School, F52 KT52
21	Littleton	Tipperary North	Disadvantaged	Littleton N.S., E41 VW24
22	Enniscorthy Urban	Wexford	Disadvantaged	St. Aidan's Primary School, Y21 WD30
23	Belturbet	Cavan-Monaghan (Cavan)	Disadvantaged	Scoil Mhuire B.N.S., H14 WA46
24	Srah	Offaly	Disadvantaged	Pollagh N.S., R35 K521
25	Urlingford	Tipperary North (Kilkenny)	Disadvantaged	Emeralds GAA Club, R35 K521

5. Electors Aged 18-24

29 electoral divisions (EDs) identified in Census 2022 data as having among the highest concentrations of 18-24 year olds.

Electoral Division		Constituency	Polling Station
1	Cappavilla	Clare	Clonlara N.S., V94 FP92
2	Gillabbey C	Cork South-Central	St. Finbarre's N.S., Gillabbey Terrace, T12 CH96
3	Gillabbey A	Cork South-Central	St. Marie's of the Isle School, Bishop Street., T12 DW99
4	Dangan	Galway West	Bushypark N.S., H91 AF57
5	Mardyke	Cork South-Central	St. Joseph's N.S., Mardyke, T12 YY07
6	Sligo North	Sligo-Leitrim (Sligo)	St. Brendan's N.S., Sunset Dr, Cartron, Sligo, F91 YTK2
7	Poleberry	Waterford	Waterpark N.S., Park Road, X91 D540
8	The Lough	Cork South-Central	Greenmount N.S., T12 HE14

Electoral Division		Constituency	Polling Station
9	Newcastle	Galway West	Westside Community Centre, Séamus Quirke Rd, H91 C1KX
10	Kingsmeadow	Waterford	St. Joseph's Special School, Parnell St, X91 E030
11	Dock D	Limerick City	Scoil Mháthair Dé S.C. Road, Ballinacurra (Bowman), Limerick, V94 VR64
12	Ballysimon	Limerick City	Donoughmore N.S., V94 X051
13	Taylors Hill	Galway West	Dominican N.S., Taylor's Hill, H91 C573
14	Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh	Cork North-West	S.N. Fhionnbarra, Béal Átha an Ghaorthaidh, P12 PC04
15	Roscomroe	Offaly	Roscomroe N.S., Beagh, Roscrea, E53 TY38
16	O'Dempsey	Offaly	Scoil Mhuire, Cloneygowan, Co. Offaly, R35 NP58
17	Blackrock- Glenomena	Dún Laoghaire	Scoil Mhuire na Trócaire, Co. Dublin, A94 V656
18	North Dock B	Dublin Central	Seán O'Casey Community Centre, North Wall, Co. Dublin, D03 AY74
19	Drumline	Clare	Clonmoney N.S., V95 AH94
20	Arran Quay A	Dublin Central	All Saint's Vicarage, Phibsborough, Co. Dublin, D07 Y9T3
21	Whitehall A	Dublin North-West	Plunket College, CDETB, Swords Road, D09 C94K
22	Moat	Galway East	Killimor N.S., H53 DP95
23	Maynooth	Kildare North	Maynooth B.N.S. (St. Mary's B.N.S.), Moyglare Rd, Co. Kildare, W23 Y598
24	Glenboy	Sligo-Leitrim (Leitrim)	St. Michael's N.S., Glenfarne, Co. Leitrim, F91 YW25
25	Ballinguile/ Baile an Ghaill ED	Wicklow	Rathdangan Hall, W91 F897

Electoral Division		Constituency	Polling Station
26	Shantalla	Galway West	Scoil Bhríde Shantalla, Shantalla Road, Galway, H91 VW59
27	Clonskeagh-Windy Arbour	Dublin Rathdown	Our Lady's Grove N.S., Goatstown Rd, Friarland, D14 Y993
28	Corrala	Sligo-Leitrim (Leitrim)	St. Mary's N.S., Drumlea, Carrigallen, Co. Leitrim, H12 P596
29	Murroogh	Galway West	Merlin Woods Primary School, H91 D7VH

6. Case Study: Disabled Electors

Five polling stations visited alongside the Irish Wheelchair Association (IWA) and a selection of disabled voters in Co. Mayo.

Polling Station		Address
1	Belmullet Civic Centre (Áisleann Bhéal an Mhuirthead)	Sráid na hEaglaise, Béal an Mhuirthead, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 W5H0
2	Aughalasheen N.S. (Scoil Náisiúnta Achaidh an Ghlaisín)	Achadh Ghlaisín, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 X763
3	Corclough N.S. (Scoil Náisiúnta na Corrchloiche)	Scoil Náisiúnta na Corrchloiche, an Chorrchloch, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 RW94
4	Binghamstown N.S. (S.N. an Gheata Mhoir)	An Geata Mór, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 TX06
5	Aghleam N.S. (Scoil Bhreandáin)	Scoil Bhreandáin, an Eachléim, an Fód Dubh, Co. Mhaigh Eo, F26 P704

7. Public Engagement

Six polling stations visited due to issues raised by members of the public.

Location		Constituency (County)	Address
1	Cobh Town Hall, Co. Cork	Cork East	Town Hall, Carrig House, Cobh, P24 CH02

	Location	Constituency (County)	Address
2	Ravenswell N.S.	Dún Laoghaire	Ravenswell N.S., Ravenswell, Dublin Road, Bray, Wicklow, A98 X8X7
3	Baile Chláir S.N.	Galway West	Baile Chláir S.N., Droim na Gaoithe, Baile Chláir, Gaillimh, H91 C6D0
4	Rosses Point N.S. (Réalt na Mara N.S.)	Sligo-Leitrim (Sligo)	Réalt na Mara N.S., Rosses Upper, Rosses Point, Sligo, F91 TR29
5	Suncroft N.S. (St. Brigid's N.S.)	Kildare South	Saint Brigid's N.S., Suncroft, Curragh, Kildare, R56 NR27
6	JFK Memorial School	Limerick City	JFK Memorial School, Ennis Road, V94 P9E8

8. Geographic Distribution

Seven polling stations visited to ensure the adequate representation of urban areas and offshore islands.

	Polling Station and Address	Constituency
1	St. Colmcille's B.N.S., Chapel Lane, Ashley Grove, Swords, Co. Dublin, K67 WP65	Dublin Fingal East
2	Donabate Community Centre, Portrane Road, Donabate, Co. Dublin, K36 F598	Dublin Fingal East
3	Lusk S.N.S., Chapel Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin, K45 CX43	Dublin Fingal West
4	Rush N.S., Channel Road, Rush, Co. Dublin, K56 VK88	Dublin Fingal West
5	Skerries Community Centre, Dublin Road, Skerries, Co. Dublin, K34 K377	Dublin Fingal West
6	Sherkin Island Community Office, Sherkin Island, P81 AE02	Cork South-West
7	Scoil Náisiúnta Árainn Mhór (An Leadhb Gharbh), Oileán Árainn Mhór, Dún na nGall, F92 Y978	Donegal

Appendix 3 – PEER Checklist Statistical Analysis

PEER Checklist Question	YES	NO	% YES	% NO	N/A
D1.1 Signage (Directional)	33	54	38%	62%	0
D1.2 Signage (Notice)	75	10	88%	12%	2
D2.1 Canvassing (Posters)	17	68	20%	80%	2
D2.2 Canvassing (Other)	0	86	0	100%	1
D3.1 Car Parking (General Available)	80	7	92%	8%	0
D3.2 Car Parking (Disabled Available)	47	34	58%	42%	6
E1.1 Layout (Adequate)	87	0	100%	0%	0
E1.2 Layout (Conducive)	85	2	98%	2%	0
E1.3 Layout (Security)	87	0	100%	0%	0
E1.4 Layout (Secrecy)	87	0	100%	0%	0
E2. Staff (Identifiable)	86	1	99%	0%	0
E3.1 Emergency Exit (Present)	80	4	95%	5%	3
E3.2 Emergency Exit (Signage)	72	2	97%	3%	13
E4.1 Posters (Offences and Identification)	83	2	98%	2%	2
E4.2 Posters (Large Print Ballot Paper)	84	1	99%	1%	2
E5. Materials	12	73	14%	86%	2
F1. Identification	50	29	63%	37%	8
F2.1 Ballot Paper (Stamped)	84	0	100%	0%	3
F2.2 Ballot Paper (Register Marked)	84	0	100%	0%	3
F3.1 Voting (Compartment Secrecy)	86	1	99%	1%	0
F3.2 Voting (Compartment One Elector)	82	4	95%	5%	1
F3.3 Voting (Photography)	2	85	2%	98%	0
G1.1 Hazards (Steps)	22	65	25%	75%	0
G1.2 Hazards (Other)	8	76	10%	90%	3
G2. Layout (Disabled Use)	77	5	94%	6%	5
G3.1 Wheelchair Use (Primary Entrance)	65	22	75%	25%	0
G3.2 Wheelchair Use (Signage)	39	32	55%	45%	16
G3.3.1 Wheelchair Use (Ramp Available)	52	11	83%	17%	24
G3.3.2 Wheelchair Use (Ramp Permanent)	44	7	86%	14%	36
G3.3.3 Wheelchair Use (Ramp Temporary)	9	12	43%	57%	66
G3.4 Wheelchair Use (Alternative Entrance)	17	9	65%	35%	61
G4.1 Wheelchair Use (Wheelchair Layout)	83	3	97%	3%	1

PEER Checklist Question	YES	NO	% YES	% NO	N/A
G4.2.1 Wheelchair Use (Low-Level Space)	81	6	93%	7%	0
G4.2.2 Wheelchair Use (Low-Level Booth)	74	6	93%	7%	7
G4.2.3 Wheelchair Use (Low-Level Desk)	38	20	66%	34%	29
G4.3 Wheelchair Use (Ballot Box)	76	10	88%	12%	1
G4.4.1 Vision Impairment (BPT Available)	79	3	96%	4%	5
G4.4.2 Vision Impairment (BPT Issues)	2	80	2%	98%	5
G4.4.3 Vision Impairment (Freephone)	1	82	1%	99%	4
G5. Deaf/ Hard of Hearing (Loop)	2	84	2%	98%	1
G6. Non-Physical Disabilities (Assistance)	4	83	5%	95%	0
G7.1 Voting Companion (Assistance)	11	75	13%	87%	1
G7.2 Voting Companion (Oath)	0	7	0%	100%	80
H2.1 Authorised Persons (Personation)	1	86	1%	99%	0
H2.2 Authorised Persons (Issues)	0	87	0%	100%	0

Appendix 4 – Correspondence with Minister James Browne

Mr. James Browne,
Minister for Housing, Local Government & Heritage,
Custom House,
Dublin 1.

21 February 2025

Dear Minister,

At its meeting last week, An Coimisiún Toghcháin agreed that I should write to you about a matter which impacts on the equality and accessibility of the voting process for persons with disabilities. This was highlighted in *An Coimisiún's Post Electoral Event Review*⁴⁶ for the March referendums in 2024 and An Coimisiún asks that you ensure that this is addressed in advance of the presidential election in Autumn 2025.

As you are aware, persons who are unable to vote in person at their local polling station because of an illness or disability may register for a postal vote. This requires medical certification which may incur a charge. While there was a welcome improvement in the Electoral Reform Act 2022 such that certification for this group of voters can be a once off rather than annual requirement, it is still unjustifiable that a certain category of electors should have to pay to exercise their franchise. An Coimisiún considers that the current procedures around medical certification imposes an additional cost for many applicants and that this amounts to an unjustifiable barrier to participation. Registration for postal voting where medical certification is required should not impose any financial cost on an applicant.

An Coimisiún's Research Programme 2024-2026 commits to researching the issue of postal voting, however An Coimisiún has concluded that there is sufficient grounds and evidence to support the removal of this charge immediately.

For example, data collected as part of our National Election and Democracy Study (NEDS) for the June Local and European Elections indicated that 23% of voters with a disability who did not vote cited their illness/disability as a reason for this.

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters heard similar evidence on 25 October 2023 on the impact of this charge and only this week, I received a letter from a wheelchair user on the issue which stated:

"There should be more information on postal voting and encouragement to apply, needing a medical cert can be problematic and costly.....Being disenfranchised because of my disability is an attack on my human rights to my own agency and access."

An Coimisiún would be grateful therefore if you would ensure that this charge is waived without delay so that it does not prove to be a barrier for voters with disabilities who wish to register for a postal vote in advance of the presidential election in Autumn 2025.

Yours sincerely,



Art O'Leary
Chief Executive, An Coimisiún Toghcháin

Appendix 5 – Sample Election Report

Election Report

Dáil Election — 29 November 2024

1 Postal And Special Voters

- A Number of Ballot Papers Issued To Postal Voters
- B Number of Ballot Papers Issued To Special Voters
- C Number Of Postal Voters' Envelopes Returned As Undelivered, Including Envelopes Re-addressed And Re-issued By Returning Officer
- D Number Of Covering Envelopes Received From Postal Voters Before Close Of Poll
- E Number Of Covering Envelopes Received From Special Voters Before Close Of Poll
- F Total [D + E]
- G Number Of Postal & Special Ballot Papers Rejected At Opening Of Ballot Box (Including Receipts Not Accompanied By A Ballot Paper)
- H Number Of Postal & Special Ballot Papers Placed In Ballot Box For Subsequent Verification Of Ballot Paper Accounts
- I Number Of Postal & Special Ballot Papers Found In Ballot Box For Subsequent Verification Of Ballot Paper Accounts
- J Number Of Covering Envelopes Received From Postal Voters After Close Of Poll

2 Verification Of Ballot Paper Accounts

- A Total Number Of Ballot Papers Recorded As Placed In Polling Station Ballot Boxes (i.e Excluding Postal Ballot Box)
- B Total Number Of Ballot Papers Found In Polling Station Ballot Boxes (i.e Excluding Postal Voters Ballot Box)

3 Invalid Ballot Papers

- A Want Of Official Mark
- B First Preference Not Clearly Indicated, Including Unmarked Ballot Papers
- C First Preference Clearly Indicated For More Than One Candidate
- D Writing Or Mark By Which Voter Could Be Identified
- E Total Rejected

Returning Officer

Date

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