



## **BUDGET SUBMISSION 2021**

The Open Doors Initiative are a collaboration of over 100 organisations (companies and NGOs – see members here: [Open Doors Initiative / Creating Work Opportunities For All](#), who work with Government departments to create pathways to employment for marginalised people.

These include refugees and migrants, youth from disadvantaged backgrounds, people with disabilities and any intersectionality therein. We are expanding to work with other marginalised groups, including the Travelling Community, people with a criminal past, LGBTQI+ who align with these groups.

We organise training, work experience, mentoring, research and employment.

We have helped over 2,300 people on pathways to work in our first year and had over 600% growth last year, helping over 14,500, despite Covid.

### **Employment**

Employment matters- it leads to income, security and all the benefits inherent. It creates skills, knowledge and experience and integrates the person into wider society. There is a strong business case for inclusion and diversity. Countless studies show that a diverse workforce benefits a company, its existing employees; the person themselves; impacts positively on the bottom line; creates a company culture of creative and lateral thinking. In short, better workplaces, better bottom lines and a better society.

Work gives you stability, access to housing, education, health. It engrains you in the wider community. One of the first questions you are often asked is - where do you work?

Yet many are cut out, even during the recent times of nearly full employment.

- Only 36.5% of people with disabilities were in employment pre covid
- 1 in 8 of the population are from a migrant background – yet many have difficulties finding suitable work
- An early school leaver is twice as likely to be unemployed than their peers
- Over 80% of the Travelling Community unable to find work

Difference is a must have in the workplace. Homogeneous thinking stifles creativity and problem solving. Diversity means hiring difference and the different perspectives rather than mirroring our own selves in the hiring and retention processes.

The feedback we have had from our own companies are that existing employees are more engaged, and proud of where they work.

Leadership from the top is also required to bring the entire workforce on the journey. D&I has to be a truly held value – not lip service. It is also not just for awards and CSR outputs, but also essential during times of recession.

We aim to assist more people into work where possible. We have carried out research into this area, through Prof Thomas Cooney, TU Dublin. Research into Barriers and Supports to marginalised people in entering employment (here):

<https://www.opendoorsinitiative.ie/news/tanaiste-leo-varadkar-marks-open-doors-day-2020>

### **Recommendations:**

- Make Dublin a “City of Inclusion” – work with Dublin TDs, the Lord Mayor, DCC, Dublin Chambers etc to promote the use of marginalised people through business, offer training and onboarding seminars and encourage positive employment. This can expand to other cities in Ireland
- Build Dedicated Online Hubs - the biggest challenge providers and recipients of support services face is understanding the vast array of information, organisations, programmes and welfare benefits that exist for each group. There is a need for a dedicated knowledge hub for each of these areas similar to the Employer Disability Information website [www.employersforchange.ie](http://www.employersforchange.ie) which has been launched under ODI. Similar websites need to be established for Refugees and Migrants (one is under construction) and for Youth
- Design and Implement Regional Strategies – similar to the Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities 2015-2024, similar employment strategies are needed for both Refugees and Youth, that would help co-ordinate all of the activities and organisations involved in the area
- Enterprise is at the heart of Ireland’s economy and supporting marginalised groups into enterprise is key to the success of our economy. Further investments in supporting entrepreneurs and self-employed people from marginalised groups is needed.
- Promote Entrepreneurship - each of the three target groups have substantial entrepreneurial capability and yet no national strategies or tailored programmes have been designed to enable people from these marginalised communities to pursue self-employment as a career opportunity. Cooney and Aird (2020)<sup>75</sup> proposed a cost-effective funnel approach in their report “Pathway to Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities in Ireland” which could be similarly adopted for the other communities
- Secure Ring-Fenced Funding – additional funding is needed to co-ordinate the multitude of activities that already exist. It would require an oversight committee who would identify clear metrics to measure success and who would monitor the progress against an agreed Action Plan. It would also require a single organisation to manage the fund and implement the plan
- Create an inclusion fund to specifically assist with creating job placements for people with a disadvantaged background or from marginalised groups
- Increase Local Government Percentage of Diverse Hiring – given the challenges that lie ahead for marginalised communities in securing employment, local government should take the lead and proactively increase the percentage of people that it employs from marginalised communities

- Establish a Large-scale Mentoring Programme - encourage businesses to join a mentoring programme that would instil confidence in job seekers from marginalised groups, allow them to begin a support network and lead them through applying for jobs and interview skills
- Maximise Access to Hardware, WIFI and Training in Digital Skills – the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the digital divide that exists and underlined how people from marginalised communities do not possess the same levels of digital access as the general population. A targeted Digital Skills initiative would allow them to pursue opportunities and be work ready when they arise. Assisted learning has an important role towards ensuring a strong uptake and completion of courses. This could potentially be rolled out as an adjunct to a mentoring programme
- Broadening awareness training support schemes to include racial/ethnic/cultural diversity etc to raise awareness of inclusion and to recognise the intersectionality of marginalised groups

**Further Pathways to Employment (Case study of the Travelling Community) but there is a commonality and intersectionality between the different groups. The Travelling Community has an over 80% unemployment rate**

- In terms of employment and societal gain, the more members of the Travelling and Roma Communities who are hired and retained in different jobs, the greater chance this will lead to understanding about their background and needs. People should be offered targeted access to apprenticeships, training, further education and other paths to jobs where they would not have considered applying before  
  
Through specific training programmes and scholarships directed at the community, these opportunities become tangible. Education and information to support this process is key to getting engagement in these. It takes more than just creating them – the correct and supportive environment to encourage participation have to be created also
- All programmes must be guided by members of the Travelling Community itself – they are the best placed to know what their needs are and what would encourage them to participate and how best to do this. This is not one size fits all. Specific training, education pathways and job supports such as pre-work assistance and on-the-job supports need to be put in place. This helps both the employer and employee and ensures fair recruitment on merit, retention and career progression. Targeted initiative should be developed in collaboration with Traveller and Roma organisations with resources and funding provided where necessary
- Role models are key to helping others to aspire to different employment and can pave the way for others. In this sense mentoring both from employed members of the community and people in different sectors, can assist. See it, be it
- Discrimination needs to be addressed in a myriad of fora, including the training of media so that negative perceptions are not compounded. We are trying to create media scholarships and placements, aimed at diverse participants, to help this situation, by increasing different viewpoints on all aspects of the news, within all media
- We would encourage the inclusion of anti-racism training for employers and employees, as part of the learning process



## **Employers for Change – recommendations for People with Disabilities (Supported by Ibec and Chambers Ireland). A targeted project of The Open Doors Initiative for Employers hiring people with Disabilities**

There are 1.3 billion people across the world living with a disability and together with family and friends, the spending power of the disabled community is almost 8 trillion dollars. In Ireland 1 in 7 people is living with disability. It is critical for the success of any business or economy to be disability inclusive. Indeed, a variety of studies have shown that being an inclusive employer with a diverse workforce leads to lower staff turnover and higher morale within the organisation. In fact, people with disabilities have been found to be more loyal to their employer than their non-disabled peers.

Far greater investment in evidence-based employment supports is warranted to benefit individuals with disability, the economy and society. In addition, it would be useful to Rework and update current grants e.g.

- ▷ Personal Reader Grants should allow for assistive technology.
- ▷ Disability Awareness Training Scheme should be open to all employers without identifying an employee with a disability or be provided free to all employers through state funded trainers e.g., through state funded projects or not for profit organisations or a pre-approved list of trainers from a variety of sources. This would remove the need for an application process.
- ▷ The Wage Subsidy Scheme is outdated and focuses on the medical model of disability. The terminology is off putting to both employers and people with disabilities. It also fails to take into consideration people with disabilities who are capable of working to the same level as non-disabled peers but at reduced hours e.g. time needed to set up personal equipment, meaning an 11am work start instead of 9am etc.
- Amalgamate all the current disability supports into one grant that will cover an employee's needs as achieved by the UK's Access to Work scheme.
- Create an online application platform for all grants and supports, ensuring full accessibility.
- Remove the onus from the employer to apply for grant support and empower the jobseeker with a disability to seek work with their supports already in place.
- Provide €15m to extend personal assistant supports available for persons with a physical disability who work on certain schemes (e.g. CE schemes) to persons in other forms of employment.
- Increase the Subsidy Scheme for persons with a disability from its current level at 55% of the minimum wage to 70% of the minimum wage level and index it to future increases.
- Remove the threshold of 21.5 hours work per week required to access the Subsidy Scheme for persons with a disability - this would enable people with disabilities who may work from 5 to 15 hours per week to access part-time employment.

- Introduce an Access Employment Programme for people with disabilities. This programme will subsidise a paid work placement with an employer for up to 6 months. It will be applicable to long-term unemployed members of the disabled community who need work experience and to upskill to start or restart their employment journey. This will encourage employers to create opportunities for people with disabilities. The model will be similar to the Work Experience Placement Programme, allowing the jobseeker to retain their full benefits for the duration of the fixed term placement.

More needs to be done to address employer concerns and provide relevant, effective and appropriate programmes to assist people with disability. To achieve this requires a sea change in attitudes and perceptions around disability and instead of “othering” people, making the necessary changes to ensure we have an equitable society for all. We need to take a collaborative approach across both the public and private sector to ensure that the necessary changes are made and that the essential supports follow the individual. A whole of government approach will be essential to this as the current siloed approach ensures that issues can fall between the span of different areas and fails members of our existing and potential workforce from fulfilling their potential.

ENDS -