



Budget 2023 Submission

July 2022

Introduction:

The Open Doors Initiative (ODI) supports people who are marginalised on their journey to work, to further education or in starting a business. We work with people with disabilities, migrants and refugees, LGBT+ people and young people. Through our member companies we provide resources, training, interventions and promote job opportunities. In 2021 the Open Doors Initiative family of programmes delivered:

- 41,870 people completed an initiative led by a member company to enhance their employment prospects
- 4,753 people secured fulltime employment
- 452 secured a paid internship
- 42 established a business
- 13,122 member companies' employee hours were spent on interventions, including 519 events, webinars and training sessions, and on direct mentoring.

The organisation is funded by membership fees and corporate and some public sector grants. It has a staff of four people.

ODI has developed significant experience in understanding the barriers which some people face when seeking a decent job or beginning a journey to work or further education. Our submission for Budget 2023 includes some recommendations from our work that would have meaningful and material impact on the journey to work for people who are marginalised.

Key proposals for Budget 2023 from our proposals below that would have vital multiplier effects are:

- Amalgamate all the current disability work-related supports into one centralised, easy-to-access grant that will cover an employee's needs, modelled on the UK's Access to Work scheme, removing the onus from the employer to apply for grant support and empowering the jobseeker with a disability to seek work with their supports already in place.
- Fund the mainstreaming of the highly successful Pobal-funded ODI programme [Towards Work](#) that supports people with a disability, building on the considerable successes so far to become a firmly established part of the journey to work for people with disabilities.
- The Recognition payment of €400 for hosting a person from Ukraine should apply to a family or person hosting any refugee, regardless of where they originate from. The disparity of treatment

with refugees from other countries emerging contributes to a lack of equitable treatment and hampers integration aims, including the opportunity for employment.

- The resourcing of research to identify and develop a Youth Hub that would support young people currently marginalised or facing additional barriers on their journey to work, and the piloting of supports using the skills and resources of ODI member companies to address the identified challenges.

1.. People with Disabilities

The Open Doors Initiative (ODI) run two programmes, [Towards Work](#), which supports individuals with a disability to prepare for and access work, and [Employers for Change](#), which resources and supports employers to build inclusive workplaces and expand their workforce to include more employees with a disability.

From our experiences working directly with people with disabilities and with employers we recommend the following for Budget 2023:

(i) Supporting people with a disability

- Enhanced investment in evidence-based employment supports is required to benefit individuals with a disability, the economy and broader society.
- An awareness raising campaign targeting employers and potential employees who have disability to provide clarity on the available supports and grants.
- 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.
- Rework and update current grants
 - ▷ 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.
- Create an online central application hub for all grants and supports, ensuring full accessibility to build a high level of engagement from employers.
- 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 would subsidise a paid work placement with an employer for up to 6 months. It would 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 would be similar to the Work Experience Placement Programme, allowing the jobseeker to retain their full benefits for the duration of the fixed term placement

Towards Work

- [Towards Work](#) is a person focused initiative from ODI that directly supports any person who has a disability on their journey toward employment, self-employment or further education. By providing free practical training, resources, and bespoke mentorship opportunities through our member companies, we educate and empower participants to take the next steps towards their goals.
- Our work in ODI began with the very successful [Employers for Change](#) programme, supporting employers as they recruited and inducted people with disabilities into their workforces. It became clear that the other ‘half’ of that initiative was also required – direct support to people with disabilities to engage with employers, often for the first time, building capacity, confidence and knowledge about entering the workforce.
- With funding from Pobal Dormant Accounts Fund, ODI launched the pilot programme [Towards Work](#) in September 2021. The programme has already engaged with over 300 participants at different stages of their professional journey and have had considerable success in supporting people’s transition to work.
- The pilot has amply proven that it can make a considerable difference and be a productive partner to the [Employers For Change](#) Initiative.
- We are now seeking support to transfer the pilot to a core part of the work of ODI, building on the successes so far to become a firmly established part of the journey to work for people with disabilities.

(ii) Supporting employers

More needs to be done to address employer concerns and provide relevant, effective and appropriate programmes to assist private and public sector employers to build workplaces that are open and accessible to people with a disability.

This requires a sea change in attitudes and perceptions around disability and instead of “othering” people, making the necessary changes in advance to ensure there is an equitable and accessible

society for all. A collaborative approach across both the public and private sector is required to ensure that the necessary changes are made and that essential supports follow the individual. A whole-of-government approach will be essential to this as the current siloed approach means that issues can fall between the span of different areas and fails members of the existing and potential workforce from fulfilling their potential.

Enterprise is at the heart of Ireland's economy and supporting marginalised groups into enterprise is part of the route to the success of the economy. Further investments in supporting entrepreneurs and self-employed people with disabilities as well as other marginalised groups is essential to build a thriving, diverse entrepreneurial sector.

In these contexts, our recommendations for Budget 2023 are:

- Currently, there is one access officer for all Local Enterprise Offices in Ireland. All team members of LEO should be training in disability awareness training, to best support disabled entrepreneurs.
- Broaden awareness training support schemes to include racial/ethnic/cultural and other diversities to raise knowledge and understanding of inclusion and to recognise the intersectionality of marginalised groups.
- An inclusion fund for employers to specifically assist with creating job placements from people with a disadvantaged background or from marginalised groups.
- Continued support and funding of information services, such as [Employers for Change](#), which is providing employers with support and education in the area of hiring and retaining staff with disabilities.
- The development of a "Disability Confident" badge, similar to the system used in the UK, where employers can undertake training and audit their processes and procedures to ensure they are inclusive. This will result in the creation of more visible and equitable opportunities for people with disabilities.

1.2 Migrants, Refugees and Asylum Seekers

Open Doors Initiative developed a new programme - [Pathways to Progress](#) - launched by the Tánaiste in May 2022, which supports all migrants, people seeking asylum and refugees to access work, further education or entrepreneurship. This followed on from significant work done by ODI supporting refugees, including supporting a group of 26 people from Afghanistan from October 2021, leveraging the resources and skills of ODI member companies and their staff. The new programme is rolling out the models developed by ODI in the area of disability to support potential migrant employees to find decent work or paid internships in Ireland, and to support employers to build inclusive and supportive workplaces for migrant employees.

The following recommendations for Budget 2023 are based on our work in this area over the last year:

- The Recognition payment of €400 for hosting a person from Ukraine should apply to a person or family hosting *any* refugee, regardless of where they originate from. We have already hosted 29 Afghan refugees in people's homes and there is a disparity of treatment in dealing with refugees from other countries emerging, which contributes to a lack of equitable treatment and hampers

integration aims, including access to employment. This measure would have significant benefits in expanding the community hosting pool, essential as Ireland provides resources to large numbers of refugees, in particular from Ukraine.

- Universities of Sanctuary – we recommend enlargement of scheme and establish a single point of contact to help people engage effectively and efficiently.
- PLC courses admission - English language classes need to be increased in scope and quality to ensure a common experience and good outcomes. Quick interventions are needed with intensive training for all ages. Train more trainers to increase capacity
- Recognition of Qualifications from non-EEA countries is very slow and is leading to significant gaps in people’s CVs and atrophying of skills. Investment in standardising the approach to all qualifications transferrals and more speed in doing do is essential to ensure refugees in Ireland access jobs for which they are qualified and which will be a major positive force in integration. There is an urgent business case for increasing a pipeline of talent. An easily accessible, centralised point for information will greatly assist.
- Central helpdesk for displaced Ukrainian people seeking access to third-level education. This service needs to be extended to all refugees and asylum seekers to ensure parity of access and an equitable approach and prevent a ‘two tier’ system emerging in terms of treatment and engagement with refugees, asylum seekers and migrants
- Apprenticeships in Entrepreneurial development – A National Apprenticeship in Entrepreneurship programme is being developed in conjunction with Open Doors, Chambers Ireland and other consortium members. We also have developed a successful model with TUD on entrepreneurship for people with a disability. This model will need strong cross-departmental Government support to succeed.
- Local Training Initiatives – Trainers need certainty of contracts and continuity to ensure that talented people do not move on to other areas and leave the most vulnerable without quality supports, which have been proven to work. Dedicated and enhanced funding to these courses is needed ensure the continual availability of high-quality training professionals on a constant basis.

1.3 Disadvantaged Youth

Disadvantaged Youth Hub and Research

Open Doors is seeking to carry out research into the barriers to employment for disadvantaged young people and their disengagement from current supports. The outcomes would shape a new offer, along the lines of Towards Work and Pathways to Progress already developed by ODI, to leverage the skills and resources of our member companies and their employees that would develop, pilot and implement the necessary supports for marginalised younger people, in collaboration with Government and other partners.

This could include the development of a new web-based hub for supports for this cohort, similar to [Employers for Change](#) and the [Migrant Hub](#)

An early school leaver is twice as likely as their peers to be unemployed. While Ireland has a low rate of youth unemployment at present (5.4%) this figure does not account for differences due to

education, socioeconomic background, migrant or disability barriers. Young people in these often intersectional cohorts would be targeted as part of the research and pilot programme to build a service to overcome barriers to education and employment

- There has been a noticeable drop off in engagement in services, supports, education and employment, noted by many NGOs in the sector. Some of the underlying reasons include: the legacy of the high PUP payment, computer fatigue, lack of usual supports such as mentoring, sports, education, lack of access to broadband, complex family situations, a background in criminality
- Mental health conditions have been compounded during the pandemic as have addiction, criminality and homelessness for some people

This complexity and intersectionality of these issues for marginalised young people mean that for some access to employment and supportive employers are limited. A dedicated resource to engage with them and spend time and effort in meeting their needs and building employer capacity in this area, will significantly enhance the young people's chances. This applies across different cohorts of young people, including those with a criminal past, young people with health or mental health difficulties, and LGBTQI+ young people who will be included in the research to that the services and resources designed as an outcome will be directly supportive and accessible.

Budget 2023 is a key opportunity for Government to resource this action-research, with a view to enabling new supports to be in place towards the end of 2023.

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