

# Open Doors Pre-Budget Submission 2025



[opendoorsinitiative.ie](https://opendoorsinitiative.ie)

# The Open Doors Initiative

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The Open Doors Initiative (ODI) enables equitable access to employability for marginalised communities.

ODI supports individuals experiencing barriers to employment. We work with public bodies, and government departments to deliver impactful programmes that lead out in the area of equity and inclusion.

The work carried out by ODI is informed by lived experience and research. It is under-pinned by the business case for diversity and inclusion. Research has shown a more diverse team is better for business and is in line with the SDGs in reducing poverty and exclusion.

Despite the business case for diversity and inclusion being well researched, those seeking employment are still experiencing barriers to access and supports.

In this pre-budget submission, ODI is calling upon the government and policymakers to prioritise inclusion and tackle employment disparity with practical and meaningful solutions.

## **ODI PURPOSE**

Our **PURPOSE** is to enable equitable access to employability for marginalised people.

## **VISION**

Our **VISION** is of an inclusive Ireland, where diversity in business thrives and equitable measures are adopted to eliminate inequality so that everyone has fair access meaningful employability

## **MISSION**

Our **MISSION** is to guide those who are facing barriers to employment and to support companies through collaboration and innovation



## The Statistics

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Despite many reports of Ireland's near full employment, the reality of data and statistic paints a different picture where many communities are still experiencing barriers to employment, high levels of unemployment or insecure work.

This socio-economic exclusion must be addressed. These numbers underscore the significance of the challenge at hand and a demand for attention with concrete actions to rectify the situation.

- Disability employment rate in Ireland is 32.6%, we are the worst performing in Europe where the average is 51.3%.<sup>1</sup>
- 81% of respondents in an Irish Penal Reform Trust survey stated having a previous conviction has had a negative impacted on their ability to secure work<sup>2</sup>.
- Over a four year period, only 45% of international protection applicants informed the Labour Market Access Unit (LMAU) of their employment. This suggests that applicants with the ability to work are encountering challenges in securing employment in practice.<sup>3</sup>
- The rate of unemployment in the Traveller community is at 80%<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Disability Federation of Ireland: Fact Sheet - Available here: <https://www.disability-federation.ie/publications/disability-in-ireland-factsheet-2024/#>

<sup>2</sup> Irish Penal Reform Trust: Survey - Available here: <https://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/iprt-survey-demonstrates-need-for-expanded-rehabilitation-law/>

<sup>3</sup> ESRI: Labour Market Integration of International Protection Applicants in Ireland - Available here: <https://emn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EMN-Ireland-Labour-Market-Integration-of-International-Protection-Applicants-in-Ireland.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> CSP 2016: - Irish Travellers, Ethnicity and Religion - Available here: <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cp8iter/p8iter/p8itseah/#:~:text=There%20were%2010%2C653%20Travellers%20in,cen%20for%20the%20general%20population>



## Key Recommendations for Investment: A Vision of Inclusive Ireland

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We believe the Government has a significant role to play in reducing inequalities in employment and ensuring that those who may be at risk of poverty do not experience further barriers. Supporting measures that remove these barriers to employment should be core to the Government's budget for 2025.

### Inclusive Integration



### Practical Supports



### Promoting Equity



- **Make the living wage the minimum wage**
- **Deliver intensive language classes, to support migrants and refugees improve English language skills and increase employability opportunities**
- **Fund an employer information service to support the inclusive hiring and retention of employees who have a criminal history**
- **Amalgamate and streamline existing employment supports for a person with a disability**
- **Invest and support more entrepreneurship training for marginalised individuals**
- **Actively support remote working opportunities with further investment and commitment to accessible remote working spaces**
- **Invest in the creation of a centralised resource hub hosted by ODI for all employability information and guidance for those who are marginalised and experiencing barriers to employability.**



## Make the Living Wage the Minimum Wage

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We know from the work we do that those who are experiencing barriers to employment are at high risk of poverty, people from a migrant background have to engage with insecure work and often times people with a disability are under-employed.

The current minimum wage is €12.70, according to Living Wage Ireland the recommended amount, reflective of cost of living and inflation, should be €14.80.<sup>5</sup>

Setting the minimum wage at the level of a living wage ensures that individuals and families can meet their basic needs without falling into poverty. Decent work should provide individuals with a sense of dignity and allow everyone to support themselves and their families. Paying a living wage acknowledges the value of labour and ensures that people are fairly compensated for their contributions to society. It is a crucial step in reducing income inequality and promoting corporate social justice.

This is also in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goal 8, to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.

## Integration for Migrant and Refugee Community

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Support the delivery of intensive language classes, including sector-specific and Irish work culture courses, to help migrants and refugees improve English language skills and increase employability opportunities. Access to employment has been named as a key indicator of successful integration:

- a total of 12,181 international protection applicants were granted initial labour market access permissions. During the same period, 5,428 applicants informed the Labour Market Access Unit (LMAU) of their employment or self-employment status, representing approximately 45%. This suggests that applicants with the ability to work are encountering challenges in securing employment in practice.<sup>6</sup>

We would suggest, that these courses be funded by utilising the surplus from the National Training Fund employers' levy which has gone unspent in 2024. According to Chambers Ireland, there is a surplus of €1.5 Billion in this fund<sup>7</sup>. And as Ireland continues to experience a skills and talent shortage, delivering practical measures that can remedy this shortage and lead to successful integration for international protection applicants is vital.

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<sup>5</sup> Living Wage Annual Paper. Available at [https://www.livingwage.ie/download/pdf/living\\_wage\\_2023-24.pdf](https://www.livingwage.ie/download/pdf/living_wage_2023-24.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> ESRI: Labour Market Integration of International Protection Applicants in Ireland - Available here: <https://emn.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/EMN-Ireland-Labour-Market-Integration-of-International-Protection-Applicants-in-Ireland.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Chambers Ireland: Closing the Skills Gap: <https://chambers.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Closing-Skill-Gaps-Intensive-Language-Training.pdf>



## Supporting Candidates with a Criminal History

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Provide multi-annual funding of €90,000 (per year) for a national information service to support employers in hiring and retaining employees who have a criminal history as well as an information campaign to raise awareness and inform the public of the available resources.

Employment has been identified as one of the key tools in reducing recidivism rates, improving the life of those with a criminal history and as a result creating fewer victims and safer communities<sup>8</sup>.

In 2022, the average cost of a prison space was €84,04 per year per person<sup>9</sup>. Simply put, by reducing recidivism rates, we have an opportunity to positively impact on individual lives, wider society and essential Irish Prison Service and Probation Service funding.

Funding an information service that provides employers with information, as well as dispelling any myths and fears is key to closing the unemployment gap for this community.

## Promoting Disability Inclusion

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Amalgamate existing employment supports for a person with a disability in to one accessible grant, modeled on the UK's Access to Work Scheme and move these supports in to the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment as they are employment supports, not social welfare supports.

To support access to grants funds, the development of an online application platform for all grants and supports will ensure full accessibility. Further to this, remove the onus from the employer to apply for grant support and empower the individual with a disability to seek work while their supports are already in place.

Provide €20m to extend personal assistant supports for those with a physical disability to all forms of employment, not just limited to specific schemes.

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<sup>8</sup> ODI: Inclusive Hiring People with Convictions - Available here: [https://www.opendoorsinitiative.ie/userfiles/files/ODI%20Inclusive%20Hiring%20PWC%202024\\_WEBV3.pdf](https://www.opendoorsinitiative.ie/userfiles/files/ODI%20Inclusive%20Hiring%20PWC%202024_WEBV3.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Irish Penal Reform Trust: Facts & Figures - Available here: [https://www.iprt.ie/prison-facts-2/#:-:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20average%20cost,of%208.7%25%20\(%2B330\)](https://www.iprt.ie/prison-facts-2/#:-:text=In%202022%2C%20the%20average%20cost,of%208.7%25%20(%2B330))



## Nurture Marginalised Entrepreneurs

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Invest and support more entrepreneurship training for marginalised groups such as those carried out by TU Dublin for people with [disabilities](#) and [refugees, asylum seekers and migrants](#). These courses are hosted online making them accessible to attendees across the country.

These courses have seen a number of entrepreneurs go on to build their own business, providing services to their local communities and developing creative outputs. Students are supported by mentors through the Local Enterprise Offices and hear from professionals and experts in the area.

To run one semester of this course, for 20 students, costs €20,000. In order to see a range of marginalised communities supported in this area, ODI is calling on the Irish Government to further support and invest in this work with funding of €100,000 a year.

## Invest in Accessible Remote Working Spaces

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Remote work has become a staple of modern employment and alongside it the number of remote working hubs continues to grow, with 329 hubs part of the Connected Hubs Network so far<sup>10</sup>. According to research, Ireland has the fastest growing remote working workforce in Europe. In 2019, 7% of employees were reported to benefit from remote work and in 2022 25% of the workforce is now working remotely or as part of a hybrid model. And approximately 24,000 people across Ireland using remote working hubs in their local communities<sup>11</sup>.

By utilising the ODI Accessible [Remote Working Hub Charter](#), significant support for remote and hybrid working with further investment in accessible remote working spaces, such as The Impact Hub@The Crann Centre, Cork, there is an opportunity to support and nurture local communities and create inclusive employment opportunities.

There is opportunity to work with companies who have disused buildings to convert these into fully accessible remote work hubs, which can act as further community hubs. As well as further supports by providing Connected Hubs Vouchers, as previously rolled out by the Department of Rural and Community Development<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Connected Hubs - Available here: <https://connectedhubs.ie>

<sup>11</sup> The Irish Examiners - Available here: <https://www.irishexaminer.com/business/economy/arid-41200393.html>

<sup>12</sup> The Department of Rural and Community Development - Available here: <https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/736a3-our-rural-future-new-voucher-scheme-for-remote-working-hubs-goes-live/#:-:text=Register%20for%20your%20vouchers%20at%20ConnectedHubs.ie&text=At%20least%2010%2C000%20hot%20desk,will%20run%20over%202%20phases>





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