



Opening Statement to the Oireachtas Committee on Disability Matters

By Enterprise Ireland and Local Enterprise Offices

10 April 2024

Implementation of the UNCRPD at a local level; inclusive enterprise and community development.

Enterprise Ireland – Overview

Enterprise Ireland's purpose is helping Irish companies to start, grow, innovate and win export sales.

We work with internationally focused Irish enterprises across all sectors of the economy, predominately with small and medium enterprises (SMEs), supporting them to strengthen their competitiveness and productivity, increase innovation, and realise their growth potential, contributing to employment and economic growth across all regions.

We also work with the network of 31 Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) through our Centre of Excellence to support the growth of micro-enterprises across the country.

Local Enterprise Offices – Overview

Local Enterprise Offices are the 'first stop shop' locally for businesses, providing a signposting service for supports available to SMEs, and providing high quality supports for business ideas. The mission of the LEOs is to promote entrepreneurship, foster business start-ups, and support and develop micro and small businesses to drive job creation.

With 31 dedicated teams across the Local Authority network in Ireland, Local Enterprise Offices offer a wide range of experience, skills and services.

The LEOs' five core goals are:

- To drive the development of local enterprise, putting local micro and small business at the heart of job creation in Ireland.
- To drive and support business start-ups and promote a 'can-do' business culture.
- To increase the job potential of new and existing micro and small businesses.

- To increase the number of innovative businesses with potential to export.
- To be proactive in response to the needs of clients.

A key action of the Local Enterprise Offices is the promotion of inclusion and accessibility in entrepreneurship, particularly among under-represented groups.

Overall approach to employment and entrepreneurship for people with a disability

Both Enterprise Ireland and the LEOs are committed to equality, diversity and inclusion.

Enterprise Ireland and LEOs have a range of specific programmes and initiatives to increase labour market participation and entrepreneurship among people with a disability. Both organisations also have active programmes to ensure diversity and inclusion in their own organisations.

Our work in this important field encompasses four main areas, drawing on Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which focuses on work and employment.

The four areas are:

Access – ensuring that our programmes and supports are available for people with a disability.

Education – working with partners to provide people with a disability the skills and confidence required to start an entrepreneurial journey.

Information – promoting the benefits of inclusion and diversity in recruitment practices among the companies we support.

Opportunity – Working to embed the principles of equality, diversity and inclusion and provide employment and entrepreneurship opportunities to people from across society, including people with a disability.

I'll now outline of a number of programmes and initiatives we are currently involved in to achieve our goals in this area.

Promotion of Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities (a new LEO-supported initiative)

The LEOs are a partner with Technological University, Dublin (TUD) to host and deliver a new online course '**Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities**'.

This programme is open to anyone who self-identifies as having a disability and wishes to start their own business. This initiative was co-founded and is proudly supported by the Open Doors Initiative.

This new course builds on the experience and outcome of a pilot programme delivered by TUD and supported by partners, including the LEOs in 2021/22.

20 places are available on the programme which consists of 12 two-hour lectures delivered online. Applications for the course open on 1 June this year.

The experience gained through the pilot programme has been used to inform the new course offered by TUD. The programme is supported by AIB and there is no fee for participants. Other partners include, Disability Federation of Ireland, DoTheFinancials.com, Microfinance Ireland and SimVenture.

In addition, TU Dublin are currently developing a set of online resources regarding 'Entrepreneurship for Persons with Disabilities' which will include an eLearning module. These resources will be shared across the 31 LEO offices once they come to hand in early June.

LEO partnership with Open Doors:

The Local Enterprise Offices have engaged Open Doors to provide Disability Awareness training for LEO staff beginning in April 2024.

The objective of this training includes:

- Create disability awareness within the LEOs.
- Broaden LEO staff understanding of disability beyond visible disabilities.
- Explore the barriers faced by people with disabilities in a work context.
- Provide guidance on supporting an employee or colleague with a disability.
- Increase the recruitment and retention of employees with disabilities.

LEO Disability Champion

The LEOs are seeking nominations from across the LEO Network for an Executive to undertake the role of 'disability champion' to ensure that the LEOs continue to develop initiatives, share knowledge and act as liaison with disability advocacy organisations.

Enterprise Ireland partnership with Open Doors

In September 2022 Enterprise Ireland co-signed a partnership agreement with Open Doors.

The Open Doors Initiative provides opportunities to some of the marginalised members of society. It creates pathways to work through training, education, employment and entrepreneurship.

Enterprise Ireland has provided mentors for five Open Doors Mentoring programmes since January 2023 which have been a great success for both participants and mentors.

We recently completed Disability Awareness Training workshops with Employers for Change which is a programme of the Open Doors Initiative. In the coming months we intend to use our partnership

to progress the establishment of a work placement programme for persons from marginalised communities, including people with a disability.

We have plans, working in partnership with Open Doors to develop awareness campaigns and programmes that will utilise success stories of self-employed and entrepreneur role models with a variety of disabilities.

At the Enterprise Ireland Summit in April 2023 we were delighted that Jeanne McDonagh (CEO Open Doors) chaired a panel featuring representatives from organisations; AslAm, Change is Possible, Public Appointments Service and Inclusio focused on unlocking the benefits of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

New Frontiers Programme

The New Frontiers Programme is Ireland's national entrepreneurial development programme delivered through the Technological Universities and Institutes of Technology across 18 locations nationwide in partnership with Enterprise Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland continues to work with the New Frontiers Programme teams to make the programme more accessible to people with disabilities. Phase 1 of the programme is now delivered virtually which makes participation more accessible. Phase 2 requires the participant to attend workshops within the colleges and accessibility for New Frontiers participants who may have a disability is covered under the individual colleges' policies.

Information regarding Enterprise Ireland companies on employment incentives and recruitment

Enterprise Ireland promotes the employment supports offered by the Department of Social Protection, including supports for hiring people with a disability, through its Intreo service.

We have directly communicated with client companies highlighting the supports available and include up to date Intreo information on our website. We have also promoted these supports in our weekly client ezine.

Supporting entrepreneurs with a disability and or product / service for people with a disability:

Both LEOs and Enterprise Ireland work to ensure that its entrepreneurial, mentoring and capability supports are available to all emerging entrepreneurs, including people with a disability.

We have backed entrepreneurs and companies led by people with a disability, and companies and entrepreneurs providing innovative solutions for people with a disability.

Prominent examples include:

- A Dublin-based software company with a mission to make buildings more accessible.
- A Dublin-based award-winning brand with global ambition whose product transforms a medical device into a piece of fashion and self-expression.
- A company that has developed a revolutionary reading programme, based on the globally recognised Orton-Gillingham (OG) method for children with dyslexia.
- A new Limerick based company that aims to make access to hospitality & other venues easier for people with disabilities. The product offering of the business will be an easily fitted

'kit' for transforming regular bathrooms into disabled bathrooms 'temporarily' in just a few minutes.

Conclusion:

Enterprise Ireland and the LEOs are committed to enhancing the employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for people with a disability.

As public sector agencies, Enterprise Ireland and LEOs are dedicated to upholding equality and human rights principles in their activities, interactions with stakeholders, and provision of services in line with our Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.

In the programmes we deliver, either individually or with partners, we endeavour to ensure that people of all abilities can access the range of supports we offer.