



Opening Statement

The Open Doors Initiative is a group of over 95 organisations who work 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

- We organise training, work experience, mentoring, research and employment.
- We have helped over 2,300 people on pathways to work in our first year.

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. Poverty leads to exclusion. There is a strong business case for inclusion and diversity.

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.

Recommendations

- 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 to do this. Peer led services will have the most success.
- 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 recruitment on merit, retention and career progression. Targeted initiatives should be developed in collaboration with Traveller and Roma organisations with resources and funding provided where necessary.

- Discrimination and racism need to be addressed in a myriad of fora, including recruitment and HR, employers and unions. We would encourage the inclusion of anti-racism training as part of the learning process.
- People from marginalised backgrounds have substantial entrepreneurial capability and yet no national strategies have been designed to enable people from these marginalised communities to pursue self-employment as a career opportunity. A great example was highlighted last week by through a report launched by the St Stephens Green Trust. It featured Bounceback recycling, a Traveller led social enterprise.
- Increase Local Government and Public Sector Percentage of Diverse Hiring – given the challenges that lie ahead for marginalised communities in securing employment after Covid, local government should take the lead and proactively increase the percentage of people that it employs with quota targets for the Travelling Community. This has been successful in the past through the Dept of Justice internship programme.
- 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 build connections and lead them through applying for jobs and interview skills.
- As childcare, caring roles and transport can be an issue, build a network of remote working hubs nationwide to accommodate people to work away from home, if that is their choice or requirement, with reasonable accommodation. Link in with industry to create specific internships and jobs for people in these settings.
- Maximise Access to Hardware, WIFI and Training in Digital Skills – the COVID-19 crisis highlighted the digital divide that exists
- In terms of employment and societal gain, the more members of the Travelling and Roma Communities who are hired, the greater this will lead to understanding about their background and requirements. People should be offered access to apprenticeships, training, further education and other paths to jobs where they would not have considered applying before.

Education and information to support this process is key to getting engagement. The correct and supportive environment to encourage participation must be created also.

- The IPS service helping people with mental health issues into work could be a model for targeted Liaison Officers to assist in Traveller employment.

- 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. The Traveller Graduate network currently being created is a very good example of this peer support.

Possible Model: Employers for Change

We have launched a project aimed at directly aiding people with disabilities into work, in conjunction with the Dept Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

The aim of Employers for Change is to provide an employer disability information service. The service will empower employers with all the information and advice needed to hire inclusively and to employ, manage and retain staff with disabilities.

A similar hub with information on the Travelling Community, pointed towards employers would be useful. There is discrimination, misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge of the culture, language and needs of this Community, who are particularly marginalised when it comes to employment, with over 80% unemployment.

Summary

There is a requirement for targeted supports to be put in place to ensure fair and full representation in the workplace for the Travelling Community. Diverse workplaces help business, existing employees and the person itself. There is also a greater societal benefit because of inclusive practices, by the reduction of stigma, bias and racism.

Support by government is key to this, and we welcome the new strategy being prepared by Minister O’Gorman’s department, to help progress employment within this community.

Jeanne McDonagh

jeanne@opendoorsinitiative.ie

CEO



The Open Doors Initiative are a collaboration of over 95 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, 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.

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.

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>

Some of our recommendations from the research are:

- Promote Entrepreneurship – people from marginalised backgrounds 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)⁷⁵ proposed a cost-effective funnel approach in their report “Pathway to Entrepreneurship for People with Disabilities in Ireland” which could be adopted.
- Secure Ring-Fenced Funding – additional funding is needed to co-ordinate the activities that already exist targeted at the Travelling Community and Employment. 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.
- Increase Local Government and Public Sector 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, with quota targets moved on more quickly.
- 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.
- Build a network of remote working hubs nationwide to accommodate people to work away from home, if that is their choice or requirement, with reasonable accommodation. Link in with industry to create internships and jobs for people in these settings.
- 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. This problem needs to be addressed within this initiative.

Further Pathways to Employment

- 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 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.

Possible Model: Employers for Change

We are launching a project aimed at directly aiding people with disabilities into work, in conjunction with the Dept Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. There will be learnings from this that can apply to all marginalised groups. We are already mirroring this by building a specific hub to assist the Refugee and Migrant population to provide similar supports.

The aim of Employers for Change is to provide an employer disability information service. The service will empower employers with all the information and advice needed to hire inclusively and to employ, manage and retain staff with disabilities. *(detail in the appendix)*

A similar hub with information on the Travelling Community, pointed towards employers would be useful. There is discrimination, misunderstanding and a lack of knowledge of the culture, language and needs of this Community, who are particularly marginalised when it comes to employment, with over 80% unemployment. This needs to be addressed for those looking for work in all sectors and to aid career progression.

Summary

There is a requirement for targeted supports to be put in place to ensure fair and full representation in the workplace for the Travelling Community. Diverse workplaces help

business, existing employees and the person itself. There is also a greater societal benefit as a result of inclusive practices, by the reduction of stigma, bias and racism.

Support by government is key to this, through working with NGOs in the sector and enabling them to progress their work aimed at aiding employment within this community.

ENDS -

Appendix



The Employers for Change service is being launched on March 11th with the Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD, Sinead Burke, disability advocate and author, Francesca McDonagh, CEO, Bank of Ireland and Síne Breslin, an employee.

It aims to:

- Provide a dedicated helpline giving advice and information to employers about recruiting and employing people with disabilities.
- Host a central web-based information resource incorporating guidance and a FAQ section.
- Provide and participate in awareness raising and outreach activities.
- Maintain links with employer stakeholders and disability stakeholders.
- Promote the positive business case for the employment of people with disabilities.

Website

The website will contain an array of information:

- Advice & Information for employers, such as relevant legislation, inclusive recruitment practice, managing disability in the workplace, reasonable accommodation, health & safety and FAQs.
- Resources & Supports, such as toolkits for employers, information on assistive technology, grants & schemes and additional supports for employers and employees with disabilities.
- Useful links to other NGO websites, government websites, international practices and further reading.
- Voices of Experience, sharing personal stories of employees with disabilities and employers.