Department of Trade Enterprise and Employment White paper on enterprise policy

NDA submission August 2022

# Introduction

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the independent statutory advisory body on disability policy and practice, and on Universal Design. It is within this remit and area of expertise that the following comments regarding the Department of Trade Enterprise and Employments (DETE) development of a White Paper on Enterprise are offered.

## Employment and Inclusive enterprise

The NDA advise that a concerted effort is required to address the persistent employment gap for persons with disabilities in Ireland**.** Currentlythe employment rate of persons with disabilities in Ireland is about half of the rate for persons without disabilities - 36.5% vs. 72.8% (aged 20-64) in 2016[[1]](#footnote-1). Within the EU, Ireland has one of the largest disability employment gaps. However, among people with a disability who are employed, 14.8% are self-employed in Ireland.

Data from Europe and the US suggests that self-employment rates are higher among disabled people than those without (e.g. Schur 1997; Blanck et al. 2000; Boylan and Burchardt 2002; Meager and Higgins 2011). A study of 13 of the then 15 EU member states using European Community Household Panel data for the period 1995-2001 found that self-employment rates among disabled people are higher than among people without disabilities[[2]](#footnote-2).

This evidence illustrates how enterprise routes such as self-employment and entrepreneurship are increasingly important employment options for people with disabilities. This fact is further evidenced in a 2021 consultation with people with acquired disabilities in Ireland, where respondents stated that they found it challenging to find information and services to support them back to work after acquiring their disability or condition, with 47% finding it very difficult or difficult.[[3]](#footnote-3) With some of these respondents suggesting that self-employment was their preferred employment option.

## Recommendations

The NDA recommend that DETE’s white paper on enterprise policy requires a detailed section on inclusive enterprise and what inclusive enterprise means in an Irish context. Designing an enterprise policy that is both inclusive and responsive to marginalised groups can bring people from diverse backgrounds in from the margins. Universal Design Principles and Guidelines1 can be used to ensure that the next enterprise policy is more equitable for all. The NDA also recommend that all parties involved with preparing enterprise related communications, work to align these communications with the design guidance in the NDA/CEUD – DPER co-published, [Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach](https://universaldesign.ie/Products-Services/Customer-Communications-Toolkit-for-the-Public-Service-A-Universal-Design-Approach/).

The NDA also recommend that the white paper on enterprise policy to 2030 requires a statement of intent regarding the inclusion of disabled people as entrepreneurs and business owners, and requires measures and interventions that will support more people with disabilities to access supports and services. A narrative within the white paper can include the innovations that disabled people have designed and introduced both locally and nationally, for example Izzie’s wheels[[4]](#footnote-4), Mobility Mojo[[5]](#footnote-5) and other Irish entrepreneurs with disabilities[[6]](#footnote-6). Moreover this section of the white paper should be informed by the OECD[[7]](#footnote-7) who facilitated a workshop examining inclusive entrepreneurship for Ireland, resulting in the production of a high-level roadmap describing steps that can be taken in Ireland to strengthen entrepreneurship training schemes and supports for the noted target groups.

# Establishing inclusive enterprise growth policies

The Department of Trade Enterprise and Employment acknowledges the diverse reach a future focused enterprise policy fit for Ireland requires. By addressing challenges faced by businesses including micro enterprises and SMEs to the Multi-National firms based in Ireland such a policy must have a level of specialism relevant for each sector. This recognition of specialism and individual target groups can be informed by OECD reporting on countries entrepreneurial practices. OECD work in this area has consistently reported on the omission of marginalised groups in enterprise and more specifically entrepreneurship policies. This omission has led to a series of publications called ‘untapped potential’.[[8]](#footnote-8) This work should be referenced in the DETE white paper. To ensure inclusion of diverse or marginalised groups’ enterprise policy concerns, strategies and instruments will need to vary across different subgroups within the enterprise cohorts. Therefore policy action will need to address multiple sources of disadvantage in order to improve self-employment/ enterprise inclusion rates among multiple disadvantaged groups. DETE can acknowledge the role of the wider ecosystem of social welfare benefits and educational programmes which need to ensure that disabled people are not penalised because they embark on entrepreneurship or self-employment.

### Regional development

An enterprise policy that is ‘fit for purpose’ will require further support and develop local infrastructure. Local and regional supports can be redesigned to ensure that people with disabilities are informed about and supported in enterprise endeavours. This action should include local enterprise offices (LEO) being accessible and that mentors and contractors employed by LEO are competent in supporting people with disabilities who make contact with their local offices. A study from Harper and Momm[[9]](#footnote-9) identified that many people with disabilities who are in business for themselves, like most other entrepreneurs, never received any help from official institutions but merely made the best of their resources, using whatever family or other supports available at that time. This study also found that many enterprise support agencies still do not recognise or appreciate that people with disabilities face additional and distinctive challenges when establishing their own business and that tailored solutions are required if agencies wish to address such challenges in a supportive fashion. Addressing these barriers is through local and regional development plans with clearly described goals relevant to disabled people, with resources and implementation timelines.

Ireland through the offices of Pobal work with OECD’s Local Economic and Employment Development Programme have worked on a joint OECD/ EU commission initiative. This joint project has led to the development of ‘The Better Entrepreneurship policy tool’[[10]](#footnote-10) which describes implementation of supports for social enterprises and inclusive entrepreneurship. This tool should be operationalised in the next enterprise policy.

## Skills and talent availability to support enterprise development

Across the spectrum of enterprise support development, certain strategies are required. A 2011 International study on Income Generation Strategies[[11]](#footnote-11) analysed 81 self-directed employment projects. This study highlighted four success factors:

1. A self-directed identity (self-confidence, energy, risk-taking);
2. Relevant knowledge (literacy and numeracy, technical skills, business skills);
3. Availability of resources (advice, capital, marketing assistance);
4. An enabling social and policy environment (political support, community development, disability rights)

These practical skills are important competencies to support enterprise development and should be made available in flexible delivery options including part-time.

For an enterprise policy to benefit from technological and design developments, creative ways of encouraging talent are necessary. For 9 years The Universal Design Grand Challenge **(UDGC)** a student competition[[12]](#footnote-12), which promotes and awards excellence in student projects that feature solutions that work for everyone has generated such innovations.

## Enterprise policy support for the Sustainable Development Goals,

Global Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) now include disabled people. These goals with the Irish government’s ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with disabilities requires commitments to deliver in the next enterprise policy. The SDG’s identify people with disabilities in a number of key objectives pertinent to the new enterprise policy. These are:

* 4 Quality Education
* 8 Decent work and Economic Growth
* 9 Industry Innovation and Infrastructure
* 10 Reduced Inequality
* 11 Sustainable cities and communities
* 17 Partnership to achieve the goals

SDG’s and evidence from business and academic literature present a clear case for the inclusion of people with disabilities in the next Irish enterprise policy.

# Why disabled people choose enterprise options

Looking at the personal characteristics of disabled entrepreneurs, self-employment rates vary by type and severity of impairment, gender, education and residential location. Self-employment rates were higher among people who were severely limited in their daily activities than among those reporting some or no limitation in daily activities.[[13]](#footnote-13)There is some evidence on self-employment rates among people with specific disabilities. Boylan and Burchardt (2002) found that, in the UK, men and women with musculoskeletal problems, and women with mental health problems, are particularly likely to be self-employed, while men with sensory impairments are relatively unlikely to be self-employed[[14]](#footnote-14).

Evidence gathered suggests that there are numerous benefits of self-employment for people with disabilities, including greater customisation of the job and flexibility in hours worked. For others, self-employment may offer more autonomy, a stronger sense of dignity or a greater opportunity to follow career aspirations. However, individuals with disabilities encounter a number of barriers and challenges to self-employment and entrepreneurship. Self-employment training and guidance is often not a major component of workforce development and for people with acquired disabilities the lack of vocational rehabilitation services continue to prevent individuals with disabilities from gaining critical business skills.

# Conclusion

The NDA recommends the following considerations for inclusion in the white paper on enterprise policy. Implementing these as key developments within the next enterprise policy will support more people with disabilities in their enterprise journey.

* Develop and articulate a vision statement that promotes the inclusion of all persons with disabilities in the new Irish enterprise policy, it is not sufficient to assume inclusion, disabled people should be included as a target group
* The data shows that self-employment and entrepreneurship are routes that disabled people are accessing, however with further support more people with disabilities will take this route.
* Develop and articulate a longer term vision for a fully universally designed enterprise policy. Include Universal Design (UD)) as a core methodology to underpin the design and delivery of an inclusive enterprise policy. The Centre for Excellence in Universal design (CEUD) promotes UD which is more equitable for all. The NDA also recommends that all parties involved with preparing enterprise related communications work to align with the design guidance in the NDA/CEUD – DPER co-published, [Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach](https://universaldesign.ie/Products-Services/Customer-Communications-Toolkit-for-the-Public-Service-A-Universal-Design-Approach/)
* Give consideration to the particular requirements of disabled people ensuring those who need targeted supports have access to them. Using an approach that responds to the diverse needs of learners is important to achieve full inclusion. Things that may specifically benefit this group may include more access to part-time or evening courses.
* People with disabilities are understood to be included in 8 of the SDG, however a fully inclusive enterprise policy would also be in line with obligations in the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in particular article 27[[15]](#footnote-15)
* A Learner Pathway concept is in place in the Further Education and Training sector. This pathway can be adapted to include entrepreneurial and enterprise driven outcomes for all people. This approach can be seen as a mechanism to ensure prospective entrepreneurs and self-employed disabled people can identify a pathway into business for themselves.

The NDA, as the statutory advisory body on disability policy and practice, welcomes the opportunity to submit these recommendations to the white paper on enterprise policy of the Department of Trade Enterprise and Employment. We would also welcome an opportunity for further engagement and discussion with the department as the development of the white paper on enterprise policy takes shape.

1. CSO Census 2016: [NDA Factsheet 2: Employment | The National Disability Authority](https://nda.ie/Resources/Factsheets/NDA-Factsheet-2-Employment/NDA-Factsheet-2-Employment.html) The NDA has also analysed data that shows that among 16-24 year olds, the percentage of disabled people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is also more than double that of those in this age group who do not have a disability – at 23% vs 10%. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Ricardo Pagán (2009) Self‐employment among people with disabilities: evidence for Europe, Disability & Society, 24:2, 217-229, DOI:[10.1080/09687590802652504](https://doi.org/10.1080/09687590802652504) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://nda.ie/file-upload/experiences-of-support-for-return-to-work-among-people-with-acquired-disabilities-or-conditions.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. https://www.izzywheels.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. https://www.mobilitymojo.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. [21 Award Winning Irish entrepreneurs who have a disability | Focusondiversity.ie](https://focusondiversity.ie/2021/12/01/21-award-winning-irish-entrepreneurs-who-have-a-disability/#origin=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F&cap=swipe,education&webview=1&dialog=1&viewport=natural&visibilityState=prerender&prerenderSize=1&viewerUrl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2Famp%2Fs%2Ffocusondiversity-ie.cdn.ampproject.org%2Fc%2Fs%2Ffocusondiversity.ie%2F2021%2F12%2F01%2F21-award-winning-irish-entrepreneurs-who-have-a-disability%2Famp%2F) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. OECD workshop for DETE on the results of the OECD-EU Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool, April 28 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. https://oecdcogito.blog/2021/12/03/open-for-business-how-to-create-opportunities-in-entrepreneurship-for-everyone/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_PUBL_9221064573_EN/lang--en/index.htm> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. [Homepage | The Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool](https://betterentrepreneurship.eu/) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. cited in World Health Organisation/World Bank (2011: 247 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. https://universaldesign.ie/awards/student-awards/ [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Jones, M. and Latreille, P. (2011) ‘Disability and Self-employment: Evidence for the UK’, Applied Economics, 43, 27, 4161-4178. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Kitching J, Entrepreneurship and people with disabilities. OCED 2022 <file:///H:/Downloads/background-report-people-disabilities.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-27-work-and-employment.html [↑](#footnote-ref-15)