



Údarás Náisiúnta Míchumais
National Disability Authority

31 Jan 2024

Minister for Rural and Community Development,
Heather Humphreys, T.D

Subject: New National Social Enterprise Policy

Dear Minister Humphreys, T.D

The National Disability Authority (NDA), as an independent statutory body, provides information and advice to the Government on policy and practice relevant to the lives of persons with disabilities and promoting Universal Design. We welcome the opportunity to make a submission on the development of a new national social enterprise policy.

A key observation from the NDA is to ensure social enterprises are defined within a context that supports the employment of disabled people. while ensuring that disabled people are not 'warehoused' in an employment model that is similar to the sheltered workshops of the past. The safeguards necessary to ensure this include providing:

- employment contracts with career progression,
- supports for ownership of business,
- a mainstreaming and inclusive approach to employment.

Increasing social enterprise can lead some businesses to consider the potential of public procurement in particular the use of Article 20 of Directive 2014/24/EU which allows member states to reserve the right to participate in public procurement procedures to sheltered workshops and economic operators whose main aim is the social and professional integration of disabled or disadvantaged persons. However, within an Irish context this directive requires further research and understanding of its implementation, as the Irish government has requested the dis-establishment of sheltered workshops.

The NDA recommends that the new national social enterprise policy for Ireland should consider the findings from the 2022 OECD [Designing Legal Frameworks for Social Enterprises](#) report. This guide provides a rationale for adopting legal frameworks to clarify what a social enterprise is, facilitate access to finance and markets, and create growth opportunities for those in this sector including those from disadvantaged or marginalised groups.

Many people with disabilities encounter significant barriers to employment, with the general disability employment gap currently at 37%. Barriers including lack of availability of accessible transport, access to reasonable accommodations and discrimination by employers exist. Therefore, many choose self-employment as it provides flexibility and the ability to pace work in accordance with their individual needs. Among people with a disability who are employed in Ireland, 14.8% are self-employed.¹ OECD research shows that the share of part-time self-employment for persons with disabilities in Ireland is twice the observed share for persons without disabilities.² The NDA recommends that the intent regarding the inclusion of disabled people as social entrepreneurs is clearly stated in any new policy, and details of specific measures and interventions that will support more disabled persons to access supports and services are provided. Moreover, this recommendation could be informed by the 2022 OECD workshop examining inclusive entrepreneurship for Ireland, and lead to the production of a high-level roadmap describing steps that can be taken to strengthen social entrepreneurship and provide supports for target groups.³

The profile of those with disabilities that are involved in social enterprises is captured in the work of social enterprise Ireland⁴ describing social enterprises in Irish dance, motion technology and café ownership. However, if social enterprise was promoted as a route to employment more disabled people could access the model. This could be achieved with a doubling the training grant for work-integration particularly for social enterprises whose participants are furthest from the labour market. Another feature to support more disabled people interested in social enterprises would be to increase the duration of labour market activation programmes like Tús and Community Employment (CE).

¹ CSO 2016 NDA factsheet 2

² <https://www.oecd.org/cfe/disability-work-and-inclusion-in-ireland-74b45baa-en.htm>

³ OECD workshop for DETE on the results of the OECD-EU Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool, April 28 2022

⁴ <https://www.socialentrepreneurs.ie/category/areaofimpact/disability/>

The NDA note that there is a lack of public awareness of social enterprises among public and state bodies with very little referral of disabled people to Local Enterprise Offices (LEOs) for support to further explore this option. The NDA are of the view that the employment units in Department of Social Protection, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment and Department of Rural and Community Development should work jointly with disabled people to co-design a public awareness campaign to explain the benefits of this form of employment.

Local and regional supports should be designed to ensure that people with disabilities are informed of available services and supported in entrepreneurial and social enterprises activities. The NDA advise ensuring that LEOs are accessible, similarly that mentors and contractors employed in the social enterprise field are appropriately trained to support persons with disabilities. Research has found that many people with disabilities who are self-employed never received any help from official institutions and that many enterprise support agencies still do not recognise or appreciate the additional and distinctive challenges that people with disabilities face when establishing their own business or considering their involvement in a social enterprise.⁵ Tailored solutions are required if agencies wish to address such challenges in a supportive and inclusive manner. Barriers should be addressed through local and regional development plans with clearly described goals relevant to disabled people, with adequate resources allocated and clear implementation timelines. Ireland, through Pobal, work with the OECD's Local Economic and Employment Development Programme on a joint OECD/ EU Commission initiative, which has led to the development of 'The Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool' which describes implementation of supports for social enterprises and inclusive entrepreneurship,⁶ which the NDA recommend implementing.

Finally, the lack of a well-resourced national representative body for social enterprises continues to limit the growth of this sector. Consideration should be given to funding for the core costs of a national representative body for social enterprise in Ireland.

Yours sincerely

⁵ https://www.ilo.org/global/publications/ilo-bookstore/order-online/books/WCMS_PUBL_9221064573_EN/lang--en/index.htm

⁶ [Homepage | The Better Entrepreneurship Policy Tool](#)

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Aileen Hartney". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A' and a long, sweeping tail on the 'y'.

Dr Aileen Hartney

Director