

Check Against Delivery

Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today to launch this Bridging Programme – ‘Being a Teacher in Ireland’ - as part of the Migrant Teacher Programme. I would like to extend my thanks to the Marino Institute of Education for inviting me to launch this important programme. Events like today give us an opportunity to celebrate the work of a wide range of stakeholders. I commend all those involved in developing the programme for their expertise and dedication.

Prior to beginning my work as a T.D, I was a teacher by profession, so today I feel that I am on familiar ground. My work as a teacher cemented my belief in the fundamental role teacher’s play in society and the role that they have to play in shaping our shared future. Although teachers are often the unsung heroes of our lives, I am sure that many of us here today can think of a teacher that had a major impact on our understanding and appreciation of the world.

This profound and lasting influence that teachers can have on those whom they teach is one reason why we need programmes such as the Migrant Teacher Project. According to the most recent census, non-Irish nationals represent approximately 12% of the population of Ireland. 17% of our population was born abroad. Yet, too often, we do

not see these statistics reflected in the composition of our workforces. This is true for the teaching profession in Ireland. It is also true for the wider civil and public service and, as I have seen in my current role, it is true in Irish politics. People of migrant background are, by-and-large, under-represented in key areas of public service.

I strongly believe this is an issue that needs to be addressed. Representation can be instrumental in the process of learning and developing and most importantly in inspiring. We all need role models. Imagining a career or future can be difficult if we do not have role models that we relate to, whose example we can follow. Our teachers should be reflective of the society they serve and the children that they teach. This need for representation has been recognised in the Government's National Migrant Integration Strategy, which runs until 2020. Action 27 of the strategy clearly states that:

“Proactive efforts will be made to attract migrants into teaching positions”

Our support for the Migrant Teacher Project is one way in which we are demonstrating our commitment to this. As the chair of the Monitoring Committee for the Integration Strategy, I have the good fortune to hear first-hand of the many activities that are being carried out under the Strategy by all Government Departments, including the Department of Education and Skills, and I am encouraged by the

progress that we have seen as we approach the half-way mark of the implementation period.

We must work to ensure that migrants are represented in all aspects of Irish life. The teaching profession is only one of a range of professions and sectors where we need to see further progress. The integration strategy also focuses on migrant political participation. Migrants are significantly under-represented on the voting register and amongst candidates and representatives. My Department has funded a number of initiatives in this area. Recently, I had the opportunity to speak at events in Cork and Dublin that focused on raising migrants' awareness of their voting rights and encouraging them to become more engaged in politics. So I would like to take the opportunity to highlight this to our attendees to today. Ireland has a progressive stance in terms of political participation, anyone who is resident in Ireland has the right to vote in local government elections. I encourage everyone here today to pass on this message and, indeed, to use your franchise and become involved in the political process in the many ways that are open to you.

We are also working on initiatives in relation to employment, aiming to improve the access of migrants to training and skills development, with courses tailored to meet their specific needs. This includes helping them with language and knowledge of the Irish working environment. Measures like these are important for generating equality of opportunity. We also recognise that it is important for us to help

employers to be ready and able to create and respond to a more diverse workforce. That is one of the great strengths of the Migrant Teacher Project – that it has been developed to address the needs of employers and employees in an integrated way.

As regards the public sector, the strategy includes outreach and support measures designed to increase the number of people from immigrant backgrounds working at all levels in the civil and public service. Part of the strategy is also to encourage the private sector to focus on integration and I have seen many positive engagements from private companies. I recently attended a signing event of the Diversity Charter, which encourages organisations to become more diverse and “diversity friendly”.

Ireland’s experience and history of inward migration is relatively short. We see now a generation of children whose parents were immigrants to Ireland, who are growing up in Ireland, going to Irish schools. These children and their parents will contribute to Ireland’s story and they are an essential part of the fabric of Irish society. It is of critical importance that we get this right. As we move through this important phase, I am determined that we will work together to ensure that Ireland becomes a positive role model of successful integration.

A key task in this is to monitor the outcomes for migrants and their children across key domains including education, employment, social

inclusion and active citizenship. Only by collecting and analysing data over time can we understand where integration is working well and where we may need to intensify supports. Last week I was pleased to launch a comprehensive new Integration Monitor compiled by the ESRI. This provides a wealth of information to policymakers and practitioners alike on how migrants are faring. The success of programmes such as the Migrant Teacher Project will help to ensure that we see progress on those key integration indicators in the years ahead.

I would like to thank you all once again for coming here today to support the launch of this very important programme, with special thanks to Dr. Rory McDaid and his team for their work so far. Perhaps most importantly, I would like to thank the teachers who will be participating in the Bridging Programme, I wish you the best of luck in the programme and I hope that you will all have long and successful careers, teaching in Ireland. Your contribution to Ireland's story is one which we greatly appreciate. Go n'eirí an bóthar libh!

Thank you.