

Launch of the Communities Integration Fund 2018

The Ark Children's Cultural Centre

Eustace St, Temple Bar, Dublin 2

3.00 pm

21st March 2017

**Remarks by Mr. David Stanton, T.D., Minister of State at the Department
of Justice and Equality**

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today to launch the Communities Integration Fund for 2018. Let me start by saying something about why.

We live in a time when the word “migrant” is very often associated with another word – “crisis”. And indeed, there are great challenges associated with the movement of people in our globalised world. We have become used to images of families fleeing, thousands camped on borders, people unsure of what the future will bring, or where and how they might live. The news will, as the news must, tell those stories, show those images, and invite us to debate the challenges involved. Ireland does, as a nation, have responsibilities to those fleeing war and persecution. Under the Irish Refugee Protection Programme, these are responsibilities we are working hard to live up to.

Yet we must not come to believe that this is the typical experience of migrants, be they in Ireland or elsewhere. For many, migration is a success story – as it was for many Irish migrants in previous generations and still today. People make new lives, new friends, grasp new opportunities. These success stories we hear less often. They are local, varied, individual, private. But for the

individuals, families and communities involved, they are no less vital. Communities too can make a great success of inward migration. Communities that may, understandably, be initially anxious about change, often come to embrace it, adapt to it and learn to cherish and prize their greater diversity.

We want to understand how those success stories occur and what we can do to help people to integrate into our communities successfully. One thing we are confident of, is that successful integration of migrants is, in part, about successful interactions. It's about communities that offer a generous welcome. It's about the willingness and, sometimes, bravery, to accept that welcome. It's people with different cultures and backgrounds coming together.

This is what the Communities Integration Fund is all about. It is at the local community level that the fund does its work.

This is the second year of the Fund and we will again provide five hundred thousand euro (€500,000) in government funding to local organisations. The purpose of this funding is straightforward – to promote migrant integration in these local communities. Organisations can apply for grants of up to five thousand euro (€5,000). This will allow for a new and diverse selection of projects. We hope and expect that these projects will make a creative and innovative contribution – an expectation born of our experience of the projects funded in 2017. Today's event gives us an opportunity to reflect on that contribution.

When I set up the Communities Integration Fund last year, my aim was to encourage local community groups to think innovatively about how they might promote integration in their own area. I wanted to harness the tremendous goodwill that I know exists towards our new arrivals in communities across the

country – that desire to welcome them. I wanted to help people to translate that goodwill into action – to bring that welcome to life.

The Communities Integration Fund brings people together, particularly people who perhaps wouldn't ordinarily have the opportunity to interact or to get to know one another. I firmly believe that to build truly integrated communities, we need to interact with one another, to build new connections, develop mutual understanding and enjoy shared experiences. This is not just my belief. This is what the evidence suggests – that interaction is a vital part of this integration process.

In its first year of operation, the Communities Integration Fund supported one hundred and thirty-one (131) projects – at least one in every county. The projects were, truly, diverse. People didn't just come together to talk – adults and children cooked together, danced together, played together and sang together. They learned about each other's art and culture; they tried new crafts and games.

All these activities have, in their own way, made a positive contribution to integration at the local level. We wanted to get an idea of the size of that contribution, so each project was required to report back on what they had done. They gave us estimates of the number of people who had been involved and the numbers of migrants who had taken part in their project. As some of the projects are still going on, the full picture is still emerging, but based on what we know so far, we estimate that up to sixty thousand (60,000) people, one-third of whom are migrants, are likely to have participated in some way in a Communities Integration Fund initiative in 2017. I think all involved can be proud of this achievement.

Today we are publishing this report on how the projects fared in 2017. I would encourage you all to take the time to read about these projects and to consider how we might build on what was achieved and do even more this year. And, of course, there are lessons for us in how we administer the Fund, which we will use to improve how it operates this year.

You are going to hear shortly from some of the people involved in the 2017 projects. But before that, I want to tell you a bit about two projects that I visited myself. These I think give a brief flavour of some of the excellent work that was carried out with the support of the Fund in 2017.

The Offaly Sports Partnership ran a programme to introduce more children and young people from migrant backgrounds to athletics. Over a four month period the programme attracted hundreds of children to participate in athletics events, including afterschool academies and a Diversity games at the Athlone International Indoor Arena. I was proud to open this event and to present medals to talented and inspiring young athletes from many different migrant backgrounds.

I also had the privilege to visit a project in my own area of East Cork. One of the difficulties of being a migrant is that you may not know some of the things that the native population take for granted – what to do, where to go, the services and amenities that are available to you. Love and Care for People, a community organisation that works with migrants, ran a project to address this very issue. They held ten weeks of workshops to provide this information to migrants and to help them to meet and hear from local organisations including sport and youth clubs. Here I saw the value of fostering not just *engagement* of migrants at community level, but migrant *leadership* at community level, as some of the migrants acted as mentors and facilitators for others.

These are just two examples of projects supported by the Communities Integration Fund that I had the privilege of visiting myself. There are many more projects described in the report and you will hear more about some of them in a moment. Copies of the report are available here today and it is also published on the website of the Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration integration.ie.

I want to move on now to the 2018 Communities Integration Fund, which opens for applications today. We want to continue to operate on the basis of principles that worked well in 2017, but also to build upon them.

It is perhaps a good exercise to try to put yourself in the position of someone new to the country and to think about the types of difficulties and barriers that such a person might encounter in different aspects or stages of their lives here. Vital services and systems may work differently. Everyday things you took for granted in your old life may no longer be there, while in your new life you may be confronted with the surprising, the uncomfortable, perhaps even the incomprehensible. We can help to make the transition to life in this country smoother, easier and less daunting. And it is human interaction that is crucial to promoting understanding, to overcoming difference, to generating a new home comfort.

Given the importance of human interaction, it is important to understand that the grants we are making available are not only for organisations already engaged in the process of migrant integration. We want to reach out further and to encourage applications from community groups that may not previously have run projects and events with migrants specifically in mind. Community organisations have social capital – networks, experience and systems, often built

up over years of local operation. We want this social capital to benefit our migrant communities too, so that they can be a part of what has been built and in their own way enrich it further. If it is interaction that is vital to migrant integration, these are the organisations well placed to make that happen.

It is also important for migrants to be enabled to take on roles in our communities. Integration is better achieved when migrants are not just interacting with local organisations but become part of them and help to generate and re-generate them. In such roles, migrants will become important figures for others who follow in their footsteps. What's more, getting new people involved in local groups or organisations can give a vital lift to the community. It can inject new energy, new enthusiasm, new thinking into local activities. For all of these reasons, we want to see projects that enable migrants to take on leadership roles in their local communities. Consequently, we would particularly encourage applications that can facilitate migrants themselves to play active roles in promoting integration.

It is clear that everyone has a role to play in integrating our communities – host communities, government agencies, employers, the media and the local community and voluntary groups. We all have a responsibility where integration is concerned. We can all play our part to ensure that migrants are welcomed and that they feel a sense of belonging in our communities. Local communities play a key role in this regard as the most effective integration takes place at a local level. We know all too well that misunderstandings and fears can flourish when communities are segregated. The process of integrating migrants must involve the whole community.

Many of you here today carried out Communities Integration Fund projects in 2017. Through your work in these projects, you have brought people from

diverse backgrounds together, you have broken down barriers and encouraged inclusion in the local community. I commend your work and offer you my sincere thanks for your contribution to community integration. As an acknowledgement of this contribution, all of the 2017 projects will receive this certificate recognising their role in creating and fostering integrated communities.

Community is at the heart of Irish life. We must never forget that. It is in the daily interactions, in workplaces, schools, social gatherings, and places of worship, that migrants will determine their sense of belonging here. Diversity is a reality. To realise its benefits, integration is an imperative. I call on communities throughout the country to play their part in making Ireland a place where migrants find the welcoming environment where they can live fruitfully and happily.

Thank you for your attendance here today. I know we can count on your participation and support in the challenging task of building the Ireland of the future. To this end, it is my pleasure to announce the launch of 2018 Communities Integration Fund.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.



