

Check on Delivery

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

Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here today to support this event. Firstly, I would like to express my congratulations and thanks to all those involved in making today a reality. I understand that this a joint effort of migrant focuses groups and organisations. It is encouraging to see so many organisations joining together to achieve an impact in such an important area. I am also delighted to see so many representatives from our political parties. Seeing so many people here today makes it clear that migrant participation in politics is not only a Government priority, but also an important issue among our communities.

Diversity has become a fundamental characteristic of the Irish population and it has brought us great benefits. It has broadened and deepened our skills base and strengthened our cultural knowledge. Our migrant communities are active in all sectors of the economy, bringing their wealth of skills, experience and talent to bear in diverse ways that we can all benefit from. In addition to the economic contribution made by members of our newer communities, we are all enriched by Ireland's increased cultural diversity. Increased diversity brings with it both challenges and responsibilities. To ensure that we can fully realise the benefits of diversity in society, we must develop a greater focus on diversity in politics.

I view diversity as a strength, which can only serve to enrich the political discourse in Ireland, boost our position on the global stage and benefit our society as a whole. I believe greater migrant participation in political life is a fundamental aspect of migrant integration. According to the 2016 census figures, roughly 12% of the population is of non-Irish background, yet one only needs to look around the Oireachtas chambers or the local councils to realise that the level of migrant participation in public life and politics is nowhere near as representative as it should be. Participation by all members of society, including migrants, in the political decision-making process is crucial to the legitimacy of all democratic political systems, it must represent the society it serves.

Over successive generations, Irish people have emigrated to far-away places, such as the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom. We can see today the impact this Irish diaspora has had in their new homes, with new generations elected to overseas parliaments and assemblies. They continue to be active spokespersons and advocates for the Irish communities there. This must be the case for our own new communities, they must have voices to represent them at the heart of decision making.

We must remember that running for political office is not the only way to become engaged in politics. There are many ways each of us contribute to shaping our community, our county and our country. First and foremost is registering to vote and exercising that vote. This

is a civic duty and shows that we care about and trust the political system, and that we are wholly invested in the country. We can also volunteer, join a trade union, join a political party or participate in public consultations. These are all part of participating in the political process. Whether we were born here or abroad, we each have a role to play in shaping our future.

I believe this event has the potential to be a significant step towards achieving the goals of the national Migrant Integration Strategy, which was launched last year. The strategy specifically challenges public servants to encourage *migrants to register to vote and to exercise their franchise*, and also to *participate in local and national politics*. The overall vision of the strategy is that migrants are facilitated to play a full role in Irish society, that integration is a core principle of Irish life and that Irish society and institutions work together to promote integration. A crucial step towards the achievement of this vision is political participation.

Clearly, there is already a developing synergy between what is happening at national strategic level and what local communities are trying to achieve through events like today. My own department, with an alliance of NGOs, hosted a similar migrant political participation event in Dublin in March. It brought together 100 migrant leaders with political parties, encouraging increased political engagement among minority communities. This is the second event of its type supported by the Department and I am pleased to announce

that planning is already underway for a third and final event in the West of Ireland early next year. At all of these events, our message to our migrant communities is clear: vote in local elections and run in local elections, and encourage the members of your community to do the same.

The Government has committed significant resources to help integrate migrants into Irish society. Making funding available for the types of supports that promote integration is a key element of our Strategy. Recently, I was pleased to announce the results for the Open Call for Proposals for the Communities Integration Fund for 2018. 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. We hope and expect that these 115 successful projects will make a creative and innovative contribution – particularly in light of our positive experience of the projects funded in 2017.

Diversity is a reality. To realise its benefits, integration is an imperative. I hope this event will provide opportunities for meaningful engagement with the political process and help identify and address any barriers that have prevented greater migrant participation to date. I encourage all participants to use their experience today to support us in the challenging task of building the Ireland of the future.

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Thank you for your attendance here today.

