

**Speech by Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration
David Stanton T.D. at the Graduation Ceremony for participants in the
Employment for People from Immigrant Communities (EPIC) programme
(operated by Business in the Community (BITC)) in the House of Lords,
Bank of Ireland, College Green, Dublin 2.**

26 October 2017

“Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you here this morning at the Graduation Ceremony of the EPIC Programme: Employment of People from Immigrant Communities. I would, first of all, like to acknowledge the work of Tina Roche and her colleagues in Business in the Community and thank you for inviting me here today to this Graduation Ceremony.

I congratulate all of you are graduating today from the EPIC programme. I have had the pleasure of speaking with some of you earlier and heard first-hand about the various skills honed through participation in this programme, such as English Language skills, IT skills, interview, life and work skills and more, I am sure what you have learned will be of tremendous benefit to you. I would also like to thank and congratulate all of the tutors, teachers and key business partners who collaborate with Business in the Community on the EPIC programme. Their involvement in the various elements of the programme has no doubt helped you to achieve a successful outcome in your classes.

I would like to congratulate Business in the Community on the programme's success. The EPIC programme is a great example of government, business and non-profit partnership. EPIC provides an innovative programme which aims to assist people from immigrant communities to find employment or enter further education. I am delighted to see so many nationalities participate in the programme as employment is such a vital tool for integration. Apart from the independence and personal fulfilment which result from being an active member of the workforce, once people secure employment, they make new friends and contacts and establish links of all kinds with the wider community.

Of course, securing employment is not always easy and immigrants may face more barriers than most. They are new to the Irish labour market and may be at a disadvantage by virtue of that fact alone. Their English language competence may not be quite what is needed for the available positions and,

more generally, they may need help with presenting themselves and their credentials to prospective employers in the best possible light.

My Department has worked with Business in the Community for a number of years on a variety of training programmes and the experience has always been a positive one. Much has been achieved through the delivery of these programmes. EPIC not only aims to provide our new communities with the tools to seek and find employment but - what is equally important - it provides an introduction to the social and work environment in which members of these new communities will operate into the future. The success of EPIC is in large part due to the work and dedication of those involved in providing these courses and in ensuring its relevance to its target group.

My Department's National Funding and EU funding, under the European Social Fund, has played a vital part in the funding of EPIC down the years. Earlier this year, I was pleased to announce the results of an Open Call for Proposals under the European Union Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund and the European Social Fund. Close to €8m has been granted to 25 national and regional projects to support integration over the next three to four years. The majority of these projects are led by Community and Voluntary organisations who are implementing a range of activities to support migrant integration. These projects are operating in various locations across the country with a common purpose to support migrant integration.

As you know, Business in the Community was selected to receive a European Social Fund grant under this call. A grant of €1.9 million was awarded for the four year EPIC project, 50% of which is funded by the EU and the remainder funded by the Irish Government. Over the four year period, EPIC will promote active inclusion, equal opportunities and participation to improve employability and integration of migrants. It will support disadvantaged and vulnerable migrants, including those distant from the labour market, to raise their skills and actively help them to find employment and employment related training opportunities including work placements and mentoring. EPIC will also continue to provide English language classes including literacy and life skills. In addition to this EU funding, Business in the Community was also successful in receiving National Funding from my Department of €150,000 over three years for the RISE (Refugee, Integration, Skills and Employment) programme, a specific programme to meet the needs of refugees. I would like to wish Business in the Community continued success in subsequent years with these important projects.

English language skills for employment are vital for successful integration. The recent census shows that over 600,000 people in Ireland speak a foreign language at home. 30% of these people were born in Ireland. These figures

are an excellent illustration of the rich diversity among our population. But they also help to show us where supports may be needed. For migrants without the necessary level of English language proficiency, access to English language education is an essential step towards employment. And employment is a powerful driver of integration. Access to employment, supports for employability, and opportunities for education, such as the English language classes and other skills provided by the EPIC programme, can all help to promote the successful integration of migrants and their families, ensuring they can reap the benefits of living in Ireland.

Integration is a two-way process. With truly successful integration, migrants are able to participate actively in Irish society and have a sense of belonging, without having to relinquish their own cultural identity. Because it is a two-way process, integration also requires Irish society and institutions to work together to promote integration.

Our efforts in this will be guided over the next three years by the Migrant Integration Strategy – A Blueprint for the Future, which was launched by the Government last February. The Strategy adopts a Whole-of-Government approach that seeks to build on existing good practice and provide additional supports where needed. It contains a broad range of initiatives in areas such as access to citizenship and public services; education; employment; political participation, and more. Its implementation is overseen by a cross-sectoral committee, on which some of our key civil society organisations working in the area of integration also have a voice, alongside Government Departments and key agencies. I am glad to say that I chaired the second meeting of this committee earlier this month, and I was enthused by the dedication and energy from all the committee's members.

A key thematic area on which the integration strategy focuses on is 'Employment and Pathways to Work'. The Government has committed significant resources to training and up-skilling programmes to help integrate people into the labour market. We will continue to support initiatives that break down barriers to employment, and demonstrate the benefits of diversity in the workforce. There are a number of actions within the strategy to that effect and these will be implemented by the responsible Departments and Agencies within the broader national framework for integration that I have described. This approach will help us all to work together to make our integration vision a reality. That vision 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 fully.

Which brings me back to why we are here this morning. We are here to share in your success, to celebrate your educational achievement. Well done

to each and every one of you - I wish you every success in the future. It is with great pleasure that I now present you with your Certificates.”