

**Speech by Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration
David Stanton T.D. at the launch of the report “Language and Migration
in Ireland” (published by the Immigrant Council of Ireland) in the Royal
Irish Academy.**

7 November 2017

“Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you here today at the launch of such an important report ‘Language and Migration in Ireland’. I would, first of all, like to acknowledge the work of Dr. Anne O’Connor and Dr. Andrea Ciribuco, assisted by Dr. Anita Naughton, their colleagues, and key partners, such as the Irish Research Council and the Immigrant Council of Ireland in putting together this significant research. I am very grateful to be invited here today and delighted that I have the opportunity to support vital research into the role of language in successful integration.

I would like to congratulate all involved in the report’s success. The report is a great example of a thematic focused research project on the experiences of migrants in Ireland. I am delighted to see so many nationalities participate in the surveys, focus groups and interviews. This report and the research project has provided a wonderful opportunity for some of our migrant voices to be heard, for their concerns in certain areas to be raised and their challenges to be identified.

Our approach to migrant integration, including in many of the key thematic areas addressed by the report, will be guided over the next three years by the Migrant Integration Strategy – A Blueprint for the Future. This is a living document which I launched 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 language provision; public services; education; employment; political participation, and more. Its implementation is overseen by a cross-sectoral committee, involving all the relevant public authorities. Some of our key civil society organisations working in the area of integration also have a voice. I am glad to say that I recently chaired the second meeting of this committee, and that further meetings to progress specific key areas are taking place this month. I am enthused by the dedication and energy from all the committee’s members.

The Government has committed significant resources to language training and up-skilling programmes to help integrate people into society. Earlier this year, I was pleased to announce the results of an Open Call for Proposals under the National Funding Programme to Promote the Integration of Immigrants, the Communities Integration Fund, the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, and finally the European Social Fund. Close to €10m has been granted to 40 national and 130 regional projects to support integration over the next three to four years with both EU and Irish Government funding. The majority of these projects are led by Community and Voluntary organisations who are implementing a range of activities, including projects with a language focus, to support migrant integration. These projects are operating in various locations across the country with a common purpose to support migrant integration.

I was interested to see the findings of the research on the experiences of migrants in accessing public services. As the report addresses, this is an essential interface migrants have with Irish society and government. It is an important principle for our approach to integration that migrants have the right to access mainstream services in the like manner and to the like extent in all respects, as a native Irish citizen. This is reinforced in our National Integration Strategy and a number of actions are underway to ensure that this is not just the policy, but the practice. A specialised sub-group from the Strategy's Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee, made up of Government Agencies, Departments and NGOs will work to fulfil these actions. In addition, there are a number of targeted initiatives such as resource and drop-in centres available throughout Ireland, which are supported through Government and EU funding. These projects work with refugees, asylum seekers, and all migrants, providing advice, advocacy and translation on housing, social welfare, health and wellbeing, education, family reunification, citizenship, and support with integration.

I was particularly interested in the very fitting question during the focus group research, which asked *"If you had one minute with Minister of State for Integration, what would you tell him?"*. This is a very pertinent question, one that cuts to the essence of what the migrant 'lived experience' really is, and how we in Government can work to change it for the better. One respondent wished for a greater diversity within the public service, and I couldn't agree more. The Government continues to work to break down barriers to employment, and demonstrate the benefits of diversity in the workforce, particularly in the public sector. There are a number of specific actions within the strategy to that effect, including the aim to have 1% of the civil service from ethnic minorities. These actions 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.

The recent census figures, as referenced in the report, reveal that over 600,000 people in Ireland speak a foreign language at home. 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 successful integration of migrants and their families, ensuring they can reap the benefits of living in Ireland. Integration is not the same as assimilation, another important point the report addresses. 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.

Which brings me back to why we are here this evening. We are here to launch this informative report and to encourage further research in the field of integration. Once again, well done to everyone involved - I wish you every success in the future with your research.”