

**Speech by Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration  
David Stanton T.D. at the opening of SPIRASI's newly refurbished  
premises and launch of their Strategic Plan.**

**7 March 2018**

“Good Morning Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to join you here this morning at the launch of Spirasi's refurbished premises and Strategic plan. I would like to begin by thanking Rory Halpin (Director) and colleagues for inviting me. I applaud the initiative taken by Spirasi and their board in developing this strategic plan, that this important work can be guided by a comprehensive document, which outlines Spirasi's priorities in an ever-changing landscape, whether it is recent legislative changes, government commitments, or the service needs of clients.

I commend all of those involved in the hard work that is, the refurbishment of the Spirasi premises. I know well the range of services and programmes that Spirasi facilitate, many on behalf of the Irish Government, to have adequate and fit-for purpose premises, is key in fulfilling this function. I am sure these programmes such as English Language classes, Computer Skills, Art, Numeracy, and more will be well utilised here and will be of tremendous benefit to all of Spirasi's service users.

I also want to acknowledge the valuable work Spirasi do with asylum seekers, refugees and other migrant groups. I am aware of the ongoing outreach support work carried out in a number of Reception Centres to the newly arrived Syrian refugees, and the innovative befriending programme that aims to support integration into Irish society and culture. These are vital supports to those who need them most. The Government is committed to supporting such integration initiatives through a range of different funding programmes. From my perspective as Minister with special responsibility for Equality, Integration and Immigration, I am keenly aware of the plight of those migrants who are undertaking treacherous journeys in a bid to reach Europe in search of a better and more secure future.

Last 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, Spirasi was selected to receive funding under this call. A grant of €750,000 was awarded for a three year project, to improve the holistic care and educational supports offered to victims of torture, asylum seekers and refugees. This project now fully underway, increases the numbers of initial assessments carried out, developments individualised care plans and medical

legal reports to asylum seekers in the protection process. It also provides English language classes including literacy and life skills. I would like to wish Spirasi continued success with this important project.

English language skills 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 are 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 life skills provided by Spirasi, 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 by the Migrant Integration Strategy – A Blueprint for the Future, which was launched by the Government last year. 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. I am glad to say that I chaired the third meeting of this committee in January, and I was enthused by the dedication and energy from all the committee's members.

Key to the strategy's successful implementation is activity at local level. I firmly believe that supporting initiatives that bring host communities and migrants together can promote integration, break down barriers, and demonstrate the benefits of diversity. Later this month, I am launching the Open Call for Proposals under the Communities Integration Fund 2018. In 2017 Approximately 130 Local Community Projects received grants from this fund. Grants of up to €5,000 were allocated to organisations for activities to support the integration of migrants in their communities. I was delighted to see the results of many of these projects in 2017 and I look forward to seeing further great initiatives over the coming months with the 2018 call, please keep an eye on the [Integration.ie](http://Integration.ie) website for further details.

These local integration actions will take place 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 – as set out in our 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 fully.

Which brings me back to why we are here this morning. We are here to launch another important strategic plan, Spirasi's, and also to celebrate the completion of the refurbishment of their premises. Well done indeed, it is with great pleasure that I here to today to do so.

Thank you"