

Speech by Minister of State for Equality, Immigration and Integration, David Stanton T.D., at the Indoor Diversity Games, organised by Offaly Sports Partnership in the Athlone International Indoor Arena.

16 January 2018.

“Good afternoon everyone. It is a great pleasure to be here today in the Athlone International Indoor Arena for today's "Inaugural Indoor Diversity Games". I would like to thank the Offaly Sports Partnership for the kind invitation to come here this morning and open the games. It is a pleasure for me to visit this wonderful arena with its great association with the promotion of sport. It is heartening to see so many people taking the time to come together to further diversity in sport and simultaneously promote a healthy Ireland.

I would like to commend the Offaly Sports Partnership for the continued positive contribution it makes towards integration. Through this initiative and others, it seeks to increase participation, performance, and visibility of migrant communities in the sport of athletics. It has also established an integrated after school athletics academy which aims to support young people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds to participate in athletics at provincial and national level.

This has never been more important than it is today. Ireland has over the past two decades become more culturally and ethnically diverse. Our most recent census shows that just under 12% of our population have a nationality other than Irish. The census also shows a huge increase - to over one hundred thousand - in the numbers of people who hold dual Irish citizenship. This attests to increasingly settled migrant communities – people who are long-term residents here and call Ireland their home. These new communities have an increasing sense of belonging to the Irish nation, without relinquishing their identity or nationality of origin.

Cities, towns and rural areas across Ireland are now made up of increasingly diverse communities. This is a new Ireland, one in which the benefits of diversity are all around us. Equally, the integration of new arrivals and diverse communities has never been more important.

To guide our work in this area, the Government has adopted a four year Migrant Integration Strategy that was published early last year by my Department. This Strategy provides a framework for action on integration by central and local Government and public service providers for the period from 2017 to 2020. The Migrant Integration Strategy has been devised to respond to the challenges that we anticipate in the years ahead and is targeted at both EU and non-EU nationals, including refugees. It is also targeted at foreign-

born Irish citizens and their children. It aims to enable migrants or persons of migrant origin to participate on an equal basis in the life of the country with those of Irish heritage. Its primary objective is to ensure that any barriers to full participation in Irish society by migrants or their Irish-born children are identified and addressed.

The important contribution that sport can make to integration is acknowledged in the Strategy. It contains a commitment to explore further the potential of sport in the integration of migrants through encouraging active participation, volunteering and involvement in governance. It also requires public providers of grants to sports organisations to include a criterion on the promotion of integration activities in funding decisions.

The Government is committed to supporting integration at the community level. For my own Department, we do this primarily through a series of funding programmes for community-based organisations. Early last year we saw the launch of a new Communities Integration Fund to provide grants for local integration projects and events. As you may know, Offaly Sports Partnership was successful in this call and I hope will continue to be successful in further funding calls as their great work is clear to see. Many other organisations working to promote integration through sport also received funding for integration projects.

To conclude, I would like to wish all the competitors today every success in their races and I look forward to presenting medals. Without further ado, I would like declare the indoor diversity games open!

Thank you.