

Fine Gael Intercultural

Building A Republic of Opportunity – Incorporating the voices of our new communities

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Fine Gael Intercultural (FGI) is a members grouping within Fine Gael working to promote the voices and perspectives of our new communities in Fine Gael policies and structures. We have over 600 members in Fine Gael from our new communities who are active in Fine Gael Intercultural.

Fine Gael Intercultural Roundtable

FGI held a roundtable event in February 2018 to discuss the Fine Gael policy document 'Building a Republic of Opportunity'. Three NGOs were invited to give a response to the document (1) Immigrant Council of Ireland (2) AkiDwa – womens migrant network (3) Forum Polonia. Over 50 members and supporters attended the event. FGI welcome the opportunity to give an input into such an important document and hope that our contribution will strengthen both the inclusive and equality dimensions of the next iteration.

Building Inclusiveness

Contribution

Migrant communities contribute significantly to economic and social development in Ireland. This requires a stronger emphasis within the policy document which currently relies on migration as a 'problem' to be fixed rather than an opportunity or strength. Furthermore, migrant communities are diverse and the document could benefit from a stronger reflection of the diversity within our migrant communities, and to pay particular attention to the needs and voices of migrant women.

Voices

In order to build a Republic of Opportunity there is an opportunity to strengthen the voices of our new and migrant communities across all aspects of our society; economic, social and political life. This will ensure we harness the goodwill and experience of our new communities so that we can all share in building a diverse, vibrant and inclusive Ireland

This vision and understanding of our migrant communities as a strength and valuable resource is clearly embodied in the current Migrant Integration Strategy led by Minister David Stanton (February 2017). The Strategy sets as its vision that migrants are facilitated to play a full role in Irish society, that integration is a core principle of Irish life. FGI welcome the establishment of the Migrant Integration Strategy Monitoring and Co-ordination Committee, with membership from Government Departments, agencies and NGOs.

FGI, with their experience of supporting migrants in their local communities on the ground, welcome the Communities Integration Funding programme under the Strategy and the focus on supporting political participation. In our experience, smaller migrant organisations may not have the capacity to apply, any support to engage them in the application process would be helpful.

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Gender Proofing

A key omission is the lack of gender proofing, and consequent lack of attention to the lived experience of migrant women. Gender proofing would draw attention to:

- Ensuring migrant women have improved access to services, especially health care.
- Experience and trauma caused by gender based violence against women
- Female Genital Mutilation
- Need for specific programmes of support for migrant women in accessing education and the labour market.
- Access to affordable and inclusive childcare.

Education Issues

FGI want to highlight the importance of the recently adopted Strategy For Foreign Languages In Education 2017-2026 (Minister Richard Bruton) which introduced curricular specifications for heritage speakers for Polish, Lithuanian and Portuguese.

FGI welcome the direction taken by the Department to support inclusion in schools which will offer greater choice for all parents. Attention could be drawn to the improved educational outcomes that could be achieved through the provision of foreign language lessons in Irish primary schools at the earliest opportunity.

Ireland is experiencing a shortage of teachers. Ireland is not tapping into a pool of already qualified teachers as their qualifications are not being recognized. Allied to this is the issue of the length of time it takes to process registration applications through the Teaching Council.

The Irish language requirement is causing a barrier for migrant teachers, especially in Primary level. Research to design a positive action programme to overcome these barriers could help to address the labour shortage in teaching.

Schools with pupils from diverse cultural backgrounds would benefit from intercultural supports utilizing the Special Needs Assistants and supports for other extra curricular activities.

Employment Issues

Fine Gael Intercultural welcomes the establishment by Minister Flanagan of an interdepartmental Taskforce to address the implications of the Supreme Court judgement on the right of applicants to seek employment and inclusion of self employment measures. The interim measures are highly restrictive and do not facilitate the inclusion of Asylum Seekers and Refugees in the workforce nor address any labour market shortages. We are hopeful that the review currently being undertaken will provide a more inclusive framework that addresses these issues.

Labour market integration measures for migrants necessitate language support, tailored training, mentoring, coaching and support bridging/transition programmes for employees to address any gaps in qualification. In particular measures to support newcomers access internship and apprenticeship programmes would be welcome.

The persistence of non-recognition of foreign qualifications was highlighted with IT, Teaching and Pharmacy mentioned in particular. Calls were made for employers to be given the support to check relevant qualifications quickly.

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Key Strategies Required

1. Public Agencies need to provide data that differentiate service users and their needs, so that service providers can identify the gaps and identify the specific needs of migrants.
2. Dept of Justice and Dept of Employment initiate a pilot positive action programme to ensure the delivery of the 1% public employment from migrant background. This would help to ensure employment opportunities for migrants particularly in front line staff roles.
3. Provision of quality Interpretation services where required, particularly for vulnerable groups of migrants accessing services.
4. Ensure sport organisations in receipt of Sports Capital Grant have a specific programme of support for our new communities, and that sporting facilities are provided in areas of high migrant populations.
5. Ensure migrant communities are resourced and empowered in order to enable them to fully engage in the two-way integration process. Investment in the process could include: support of capacity-building programmes, mentoring and shadowing programmes, supporting migrant-led organisations.
6. Introduce Hate Crime Legislation.
7. Introduce regulation for undocumented workers.

Recommendations for Fine Gael

FGI want to continue to contribute to Fine Gael success and believe there is scope to:

1. Incorporate and present a strong commitment to diversity, and develop Inclusion and Diversity guidelines for the Party.
2. Examine ways to support members from our new communities get more involved in a branch and constituency level, including the provision of updated inclusion guidelines for Constituency Equality Officers.
3. Consider having a Senator for Migrant Communities (similar to the current focus on the Diaspora).



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