



Oifig an Tánaiste
Office of the Tánaiste

18 October, 2012

Mr. John O' Brien
Policy Officer
Cross Care Migrant Project
1 Cathedral Street
Dublin 1

Dear Mr. O' Brien,

Thank you for your recent letter in relation to the Opening Power to Diversity scheme.

I wish to warmly endorse the Opening Power to Diversity measure which is part of a wider Crosscare project receiving 75% of its financing from the European Fund for the Integration of Third-Country Nationals for which my colleague, Minister Alan Shatter, is responsible.

The 2011 Census shows that non-Irish nationals make up 12% of our population and, in turn, 29% of that number are third-country nationals. They face a bigger challenge in integrating into our society than do those immigrants which come here from Europe. So, it is all the more important that every feasible effort is made to smooth this integration process.

Participation in political life, through voting, being active in political parties and putting oneself forward for election, is a key indicator of integration. Third-country nationals are eligible to vote and be elected to local authorities and I would hope that, over time, many such persons will choose to acquire Irish citizenship and so be fully eligible for the franchise and for all Offices.

While it is important for immigrants to be active politically in their own interest, it is also important for society as a whole that their input is made to the decisions that affect everyone.

The Opening Power to Diversity measure is an imaginative initiative which to date has involved 10 members of the Houses of the Oireachtas each being 'shadowed' by an immigrant. It is apparent, not least from the testimonies of immigrant participants, that they have derived great benefit from this and are very much empowered to engage confidently with the political system in the future. I believe that the benefits have been mutual and that the Oireachtas participants give positive feedback on the project too.

I wish Crosscare continued success with this initiative and, indeed, with all its commendable work with immigrants.

Best Wishes

Eamon Gilmore TD
Tánaiste and Minister for Foreign Affairs & Trade

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