

Ground breaking migrant integration scheme launched

By: Joe O'Brien

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Last week a ground breaking migrant integration scheme was launched which will see migrants and new Irish citizens shadow the daily work TDs and Senators. Called 'Opening Power to Diversity' (OPD) the scheme is being run by Crosscare Migrant Project and it is proposed that it will have an impact at three levels:

- To promotion of ethnic diversity among politicians, the political establishment and society at large
- For the participants they will get a knowledge of, connection with and insight into the political system
- A stronger connection, understanding and sense of relevance of the political system among people of migrant background.

The scheme has started to recruit for the migrant participants who will begin the shadowing of participating TDs and Senators in the autumn after the Dail returns from recess. Crosscare Migrant Project is being supported by the European Commission via the European Integration Fund to carry out the pilot scheme which six TDs and Senators have signed up to already. Joe O'Brien of CMP stated that:

We want people firstly to get a unique

first-hand experience of what life for an Irish politician is like. We also want people to be inspired and feel that politics is now something that they can get involved in. Our migrants and new Irish citizens have come to Ireland with energy, fresh ideas and different perspectives – these are things that politics in Ireland needs.

One of the TDs participating in the scheme Maureen O'Sullivan – Independent stated that:

I am very happy to take part in this innovative project which I believe will promote greater social justice for our new communities. I hope the experience will be mutually beneficial - I will be learning and I hope the volunteer will get a good insight into the political workings in this country.

The OPD scheme is being set up following a recommendation in a report by the Africa Solidarity Centre in 2003 called 'Positive Politics' and it draws on the model that has been used in the UK since 1999.

The scheme will run for 6 months and migrant participants will get first-hand experience of a working day in Leinster House one day per week and constituency level work for one day per week. Closing date for applications is Monday August 15th. Details of the application process are at www.migrantproject.ie

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