

**Address by Mr David Stanton T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Justice and
Equality with responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration at IMPACT's
Conference on Equality in the Workplace: a Reality?**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank IMPACT for extending an invitation to me today to address this conference on Equality in the Workplace: a Reality? Today's conference provides a timely opportunity to review the progress that has been made so far on equality in the workplace and to consider what needs to be done over the years ahead. Trades unions led the way for much of the journey towards greater equality for workers. I wish to acknowledge the important role played by trade unions such as IMPACT as equality champions both in the workplace and in wider society.

It is now forty years since the Employment Equality Act 1977 prohibited employment-related discrimination on the grounds of sex and marital status. It is almost twenty years since the enactment of the Employment Equality Act 1998 which extended protections to the nine equality grounds. This legislation has enabled millions of workers to acquire equality rights and to be able to vindicate those rights. However, we now know that legislation, no matter how ground-breaking, is only one part of the picture. Legislation sets out what must and must not be done. It offers protections against discrimination. However, it cannot on its own change attitudes. The process of making equality a reality within the workplace is multi-faceted. It requires action by Government, employers, managers and trades unions but also by workers themselves. Furthermore, the turbulence of the last year internationally has brought home to me that equality is not a given. Gains made can be overturned. The consensus painstakingly achieved can be threatened. The process of making equality a reality is like a complex machine that requires constant attention, vigilance and care.

I propose to speak today of what the Government is doing to play its part in promoting equality in the workplace over the years ahead. Turning firstly to gender equality, on 3 May

2017, the Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald T.D. and I launched the National Strategy for Women and Girls. The Strategy includes 139 actions which aim to advance socio-economic equality for women and girls, to promote their physical and mental well-being, to increase their visibility and participation in leadership and to combat gender-based violence. I worked with Government Departments and civil society to ensure that the Strategy would reflect the concerns raised in the consultation process. For me the Strategy must be more than a nicely designed document. It has to become an implemented reality for women and girls. I am chairing the Strategy Committee which is driving forward the implementation process. I held the second meeting of the Committee yesterday. I will be working to ensure that actions are completed and that targets are met over the next three years.

The Strategy recognises that achieving progress on gender equality in the workplace requires simultaneous action on a number of fronts, on childcare, pay, working conditions, education and career advancement. As you are aware, the Government committed an additional €121.5m investment in childcare in Budget 2017, focusing on early years care and education. The Government is working on legislation to tackle precarious working and to make zero hours contracts a thing of the past. A consultation process is currently underway on the actions needed to tackle the gender pay gap. One of the key actions planned by the Government in this regard is to undertake wage surveys to establish the state of play within individual workplaces.

One issue that was raised repeatedly in the consultation process on the National Strategy for Women and Girls was the need to get more women into leadership positions in workplaces and in Irish society. Promoting women's leadership in the public sector is a priority for the Government. As you are aware, Minister Mitchell O'Connor has announced a taskforce on tackling the continued under-representation of women in leadership positions in higher education. The action taken over the past years in the Civil Service has confirmed that positive action can achieve significant change quickly. **In 2013, the percentage of women at Principal Officer and at Assistant Secretary grades was 34% and 24% respectively. Women are now 33% of Assistant Secretaries, while the percentage of women Principal Officers has increased to 40%.** This is encouraging, however I do recognise that there is still much to do. One of the first steps is to understand the factors that encourage women to

go forward for promotion. Equally, we need to understand what may inhibit women from doing so. With this in mind, in partnership with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform my Department has commissioned the ESRI to carry out research on women and leadership in the Civil Service. The research is drawing on the last Civil Service Engagement Survey as well as interviewing women themselves and the Civil Service leadership. It will provide us with valuable learning as to the next steps needing to be taken. At the same time, the Top Level Appointments Commission (TLAC) has agreed a positive action measure that where two candidates of equal merit get through the TLAC process to become Assistant Secretaries, preference will be given to the female candidate where women are under-represented on the Management Board of the Department or Office in question. This measure is intended to ensure that the process of achieving gender parity in the leadership of the Civil Service happens quickly.

On 7 February last, the Tánaiste Frances Fitzgerald T.D. and I launched the Migrant Integration Strategy. It constitutes the Government's blueprint for action on migrant integration for the period to 2020. It includes actions on a range of issues, including employment, education, access to services, community integration and political engagement. I would like to focus in particular on two aspects of the Strategy this morning. Certain areas of the public service have led the way on workplace diversity. The health service is a model in terms of bringing employees from diverse nationalities and cultures together to provide a vital service to the people of Ireland. The HSE has consciously worked for years to develop intercultural expertise. Indeed, it is in the process of finalising its second National Intercultural Health Strategy as its framework for action for the next five years.

However, other areas of the public service remain much less diverse. The Civil Service, in particular, remains much too homogeneous. If it is to understand the needs of a diverse population, it will have itself to become more diverse. The Migrant Integration Strategy sets a target that at least 1% of the Civil Service will be of minority ethnic or migrant origin by 2020. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform will monitor progress on meeting that target. That will establish a useful baseline against which we can measure the ethnic composition of the Civil Service for the future. It is also intended that awareness raising campaigns will be undertaken for the general public as well as in schools and third level

institutions to make persons of migrant origin more aware of the potential of a Civil Service career.

Many of you here today are public servants. When we undertook our consultations on the Migrant Integration Strategy, one of the main issues which arose again and again was that of migrants' experiences of public services. Many acknowledged the valuable assistance given by a wide range of public servants. However, many also talked of inconsistency and of variability of service. The services that they received often depended on the person behind the desk or at the end of the phone. Equally, information varied depending on who was delivering it. Migrants urged public services to become more attuned to their needs, to understand that they might not always be able to wade through complex schemes. Indeed those schemes might not always respond to the migrant's particular circumstances.

In response, one of the actions in the Migrant Integration Strategy is to remind public services to mainstream integration issues into the work of Government Departments and to ensure that a systematic approach is taken to service delivery for a diverse population. That requires - and will require - Government Departments to adapt training strategies so that frontline staff have the training on an ongoing basis to respond to diverse service users. It will also require Government Departments to review existing schemes to ensure that they include the particular situations of migrants drawing on these services.

I would urge you, as managers and as service providers, to look again at your current service delivery models with migrants in mind. Can your services potentially accommodate migrants' complex situations? As managers, are you ensuring that your frontline staff get intercultural training on an ongoing basis so that they can respond more effectively to migrant service users?

Turning to Traveller equality, I am delighted to see that Martin Collins will speak shortly to highlight Traveller equality issues. I was very pleased to work with Martin, with representatives of other Traveller organisations, with politicians across the political spectrum

and with Government Departments on the recognition of Traveller ethnicity. When An Taoiseach formally recognised Traveller ethnicity in the Dail last March, it was an incredibly powerful and emotional moment. I believe that the recognition of Traveller ethnicity will provide the catalyst for us to work together to build positive relationships between Travellers and the settled community. Just as the trades union movement played such a positive role in advancing the case for marriage equality, I believe that trades union can work with their members to break down the layers of suspicion and lack of understanding between Travellers and the settled community.

The National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy which I launched on 13 June last has 13 actions relating to employment, including targeted public service recruitment, active promotion of jobs and training for the long term unemployed and facilitating Traveller entrepreneurship, amongst others. These actions will help to break down the barriers that prevent Travellers from accessing public sector jobs. We have to make it our shared goal to enable Travellers to have the same opportunities to enjoy meaningful work as the settled community.

The last years have been ground-breaking in terms of LGBTI equality. However, more needs to be done. I am now beginning preparatory work on a LGBTI strategy in fulfilment of the commitment in the Programme for Partnership Government. I will shortly announce details of a consultation process on the Strategy. I look forward to hearing the trades union voice as part of that process. It is a different reality now for many lesbian and gay workers. The Employment Equality Acts provide strong protections for them against discrimination in the workplace. However, we know that more needs to be done to tackle the legacy of the past and to combat bullying and harassment in wider society. We also need to know if lesbian and gay workers are getting equal opportunities for career advancement.

Employment rates continue to be unacceptably low for people with disabilities. Enabling higher numbers of persons with disabilities to enter the workplace is crucial to enable them to participate fully in Irish society. On 14 July last, Minister Finian McGrath T.D. launched the National Disability Inclusion Strategy which includes a range of actions designed to improve the lives of persons with disabilities. The Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities, chaired by Fergus Finlay, is focusing particularly on improving

employment opportunities for people with disabilities. One of the key actions will be to raise the target of people with disabilities in the public service from 3% to 6%. People with disabilities who are not currently in the public service need to be given an opportunity to get public sector jobs. I would urge you to communicate within trade union networks and within your contacts with civil society the increased opportunities that there will be for people with disabilities in the public sector. Working together, we will also arrive at a better sense of the reasonable accommodations needed to enable people with disabilities to get and retain public sector jobs.

Much is being done by the Government to make workplace equality a reality for current employees and for those who, up to now, have been unable to access employment. Trades unions have an important part to play in this process. We know that the next years will not be easy. We will face crucial challenges such as Brexit. Nonetheless, I will be working actively to ensure that the suite of equality strategies that we have now in place play their part to make workplace equality a reality for all.

Thank you very much.