

Creating a more Equal & Inclusive Society – Embracing Diversity

AkiDwa 15th Anniversary



AkiDwa Annual Report 2016

Introduction:

2016 was a significant year; AkiDwA marked its 15th anniversary. To highlight the work of the organisation over the years and to celebrate success and struggles we hosted a full day of a National Conference on 29th September with a title “Equality Then, Now & Future; Creating a More Equal & Inclusive Society – Embracing Diversity”. Despite the structural challenges that continued to affect the organisation in 2016, the board, staffs and president worked tirelessly to ensure the mission and vision of the organisation is upheld and is progressed. There were many other positive aspect of our work which was delivered during the year, AkiDwA and eleven other EU organisations worked together in development of a web -based knowledge platform on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). AkiDwA was invited to join the Monitoring Committee on Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence 2016-2021. The organisation as part of the Migrant Led Coalition (Africa Centre, NCP, Wezesha Forum Polonia and ARN) developed a manifesto and advocated for representation and participation of migrants in all public sphere.

During the year AkiDwA led the National steering on FGM and developed and published Towards a National Action Plan on FGM which was launched in May 2016. AkiDwA participated on Africa day advisory group through the invitation of DFA in preparation of Africa Day 2016 of which the organisation also acquired a stall where awareness of the organisation work was raised during the day.

The young migrant women group continued to meet during the year. They were involved on the 1916 project, “Whispering Changes”. During the year, the organisation continued to receive funding from HSE and JRCT in additional small once off funding were received from national and European sources to progress its work. The detail for this will be covered under the heading of organisation development. However, the organisation continues to struggle to source new multiple years funding for its work. While the organisation has managed to have a manager and partime staff, some activities such as members support and outreach were minimal. However, the organisation was also supported by volunteers and interns who continued to help with research and support of various activities throughout the year.

Background

Akina Dada wa Africa-AkiDwA (Swahili for sisterhood) is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland. Established in 2001, AkiDwA Vision is a just society where there is equal opportunity and equal access to resources in all aspects of society, social, cultural, economic, civic and political.

AkiDwA promotes the equality of migrant women in Irish society, free of gender and racial stereotyping. The organisation applies a holistic approach to integration, promoting a migrant and gender-specific approach to public services as well as encouraging migrant women’s access to mainstream services and initiatives. The organisation employs three key strategies to achieve its objectives, networking, policy work and capacity building. AkiDwA develops migrant women’s capacity for participation and representation in their communities and in decision making structures through training, consultation, focus groups, information provision and research.

VALUES: AkiDwA work, both externally with migrant women, stakeholders and partners and internally with staff, board and members is guided by the following values and principles:

- Respect for personal dignity: A non-judgmental approach which respects the dignity of those whom we engage: staff, volunteers, members, partners and the general public.
- Integrity, honesty, accountability, professionalism and transparency: Our work should be undertaken with a sense of responsibility to each other and to the people and organisations with whom we engage, with transparency in our work and accounts.
- Openness to learning: We believe in remaining open-minded, continuing to learn from others, including diverse stakeholders, while staying passionate and enthusiastic;
- Empowerment, solidarity and partnership: We believe in the direct representative voice of migrant women. We seek to empower people, helping those in dependency to move to independence. We believe in a partnership approach that facilitates solidarity among people and communities.
- Equality, justice and participation: We believe in an equal and just society: We ground our policy advocacy work in the lived experiences of migrant women, whose participation we seek to promote across all levels of our organisation.

PURPOSE/OBJECTIVE: The main objective for AkiDwA is: To engage in the advancement for education and the relief of poverty by setting up a drop-in-centre to relieve hardship for women immigrating, particularly from the continent of Africa into Ireland by providing information, counselling (including therapeutic services for survivors of war, FGM, torture and other forms of disempowerment to women) and social friendly facilities.

This report reflects the organisation's activities undertaken in 2016 as indicated in AkiDwA strategic plan 2015 – 2018. During this period, the activities that were carried out managed to cover all the four key objectives areas the voice, Community, Equality and organisational development. Below is an in-depth narrative of work undertaken during the year.

STRATEGIC GOAL 1: VOICE - To present the voice of migrant women and their families to the political and administrative system, the media and society as a whole.

During the year AkiDwA organised for activities and events inviting representative from statutory and non-statutory. A meeting was also held with the human right commissioner in September to discuss issues and challenges facing migrants. AkiDwA Conference "Equality Then, Now and the Future," which reflected the 15 years of the existence of AkiDwA highlighting achievement and struggles saw the organisation engage with a wider range of people. **David Stanton** – Minister of State for Justice with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration was the key note speaker, on his speech Minister Stanton re affirmed the need to celebrate migrant contribution to Irish society. He emphasized on the need to give equal opportunities to people living in Ireland and to consider Irish immigration background and history. He mentioned that for Direct Provision the Government is working hard to improve it and speeding up the identification process for migrants.

He highlighted Irish society should treat migrants the same way we wanted Irish migrants to be treated abroad and that Migrants should feel valued, free and safe from discrimination.

The Minister pointed the Irish legislation is clear in stating that no one should be discriminated for their gender, race, religion, civil status, sexual orientation and cultural background. AkiDwA was invited by

Cosc Department of Equality and Justice to join the Monitoring Committee on Second National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-based Violence 2016-2021. The organisation continued to convene MIGRANT- LED COALITION – the Coalition launched a manifesto on 10 February 2016 at Trinity College, which attracted a lot of media attention. The group argued that twelve per cent of the Irish population are migrants, of whom over one hundred thousand have the right to vote, and so must be visible in all spheres of Irish life and be represented proportionately in all decision making processes. The group highlighted that the Irish political actors have done little or nothing to reach out to immigrants during elections. Integration has dropped off the radar and from the programmes of all political parties. A diverse republic needs inclusive politics and institutions that reflect the composition of a diverse society, says the group. Government bodies and local authorities therefore need to do much more to engage with Migrant communities. Insisting the incoming Government has the opportunity to make a difference, the group called for equality, especially in relation to access and treatment within the labour market, the provision of health and mental health services which must include culturally diverse systems and staff. The group argued that in Education there is need to develop standardised school admission policies that will help tackle the over-concentration of migrant pupils in migrant-only schools and for a change of syllabus to one that reflects a diverse student body. The group called for the involvement of migrants in all educational committees. The group demanded for legislation on racism, hate-crime, immigration and an end to the direct provision system and deportation.

Led by AkiDwA, the group wrote to An Taoiseach (the Prime Minister of Ireland) in May 2016. In advance of his appointment of senators, the group brought to his attention on the lack of political representation of migrants in Irish politics and urged him to consider the appointment of representatives of new communities to Seanad Éireann with two nominations from AkiDwA (Ashimeduwa Okonkwo and Salome Mbugua), which in turn should represent the complexity and diversity of modern Irish society. The group also sent the same letter to all political parties urging them to support the call by migrant led coalition.

During the year Staff, board members and president attended a number of meeting, event and high table discussion on behalf of the organisation. The organisation also made submission and joined groups that are of interest to the organisation.

- The organisation wrote An article about AkiDwA which was published by IDEA on Development perspectives on Sustainable Development Goals
- AkiDwA was registered on Irish development Education Association (IDEAS)
- AkiDwA registered on Activelink Irish NGOs subscription list
- AkiDwA continues to be involved in the coalition to repeal the 8th amendment and board members and staff attended the meetings organised by the group during the year.
- Participated in Social Inclusion week at Dublin city council from 26th
- AkiDwA continue to be a member of End FGM European Network, ENAR Europe and the European Network of Migrant women.
- The manager attended the launch of the END FGM European Network and a knowledge sharing training seminar in Brussels in January.

STRATEGIC GOAL 2: EQUALITY- To address equality issues critical to the long-term inclusion and advancement of migrant women in Irish society, seeking demonstrable differences to and positive impact on their lives.

AkiDwA received funding from HSE in 2015 and 2016 to deliver activities on FGM. The organisation commissioned a consultant to work with the National Steering Committee (NSC) on FGM on developing a second national action plan. Eight meetings, including a high-level round table discussion, were held with the NSC, NGO's, affected communities and officials from Governments departments, to inform the plan and seek for support. The plan was completed in March 2016 and was launched in **May 2016**. Towards a National Action plan to Combat FGM is in line with the international framework promoted by the Istanbul Convention (Council of Europe). The treaty offers States (both inside and outside the Council of Europe) the framework for a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating such violence. It is the first treaty to recognise that FGM exists in Europe and that it needs to be systematically addressed. It requires state parties to step-up preventive measures by addressing affected communities as well as the general public and relevant professionals Acknowledged as the blueprint for best practice, the Convention offers a unique opportunity for Ireland to provide important protections for the rights of women. Towards National Action plan (2015-2019) reflects this convention and focuses on five key strategic themes: Prevention, Protection, Provision of Service, Prosecution and Promotion of Effort to combat FGM globally. AkiDwA is coordinating meetings with the monitoring committee to examine and monitor progress.

In 2016 AkiDwA, together with twelve other partners from the European Union, worked together in development of a web-based knowledge platform on FGM. The web-based platform has an e-learning course available in 9 languages, with country specific information covering 11 EU member states, as well as 'live knowledge' including webinars and an online discussion forum. The web based knowledge platform will be launched in 2017

In the last year AkiDwA have continued to support the campaign to 'END DIRECT PROVISION'. AkiDwA has held discussions with the current Minister for Justice and Equality on the same subject. The organisation continues to visit and provide support and information to women living in the accommodation centres in Ireland.

In September 2016 AkiDwA collaborated with the coordinator of "OUR TABLE" group, leading the campaign to End Direct Provision. The group had the opportunity to address and meet with the Minister for Justice and Equality (see attached copy of press release).

AkiDwA's involvement with the Working Group on the Protection Process including Direct Provision and Supports for Asylum Seekers, which was established by the Minister for Justice and Equality in October 2014, saw almost all the recommendations from the AkiDwA's research report '*I am only saying it now, experiences of women seeking asylum in Ireland*' form the 173 recommendations that were submitted by the group to the minister in 2015, and AkiDwA's report was referenced in the final report by the group. AkiDwA have been invited to join the standard advisory group by DJE which will oversee the implementation of McMahan report.

The organisation held meeting with the chief commissioner for human rights and equality to discuss equality issues and challenges facing migrant women. The Human right and community office has continued to support the organisation with meeting space during meetings and seminars.

STRATEGIC GOAL 3: COMMUNITY To build the capacity of the community of migrant women and their families, developing their skills, confidence and spirit of independence through training, employment, workplace integration, business and entrepreneurship

The young migrant women group continued to meet during the year in total they held 12 meetings. Some of the group members worked with the Artists to commemorate the 1916 project, "Whispering Changes," Which is due to be launched in 2017.

Seven outreach meetings were held during the year, in Cork, Kerry, Dundalk, Dublin, Mosney Portlaois and Sligo. The purpose of outreach meeting is to engage members and work with them in articulating issues affecting them and as well outline possible intervention.

The organisation identified and recruited 40 Community Health Ambassador to help with raising awareness of AkiDwA work mainly on FGM. The organisation strategy is to have "hubs" around the country with one or two leaders and various other community members as CHA's working with them. Three Meetings were held with CHAs during the year from these meetings and the work at regional levels by CHA the organisation have learned GBV in general and domestic violence continues to be an ongoing concern for our CHAs who reported that among the migrant, communities, the issue is still so much hidden and goes unreported.

STRATEGIC GOAL 4: ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT- To obtain core funding, build project income Database, Staff, fundraising, social media, member's involvement

The board remained active during the year; eight meetings were held a few of these online. AkiDwA Website had many hits from different parts of the world most downloaded documents from our website were on FGM.

The organisation social media tools, twitter and Facebook were active during the year. These were used as a way of raising awareness on the work of the organisation.

There were in total seven staff during the year three employed by the company and two working as volunteers two on internship. The Manager received supervision and support during the year. Staff meetings and supervision were held regularly during the year. Members were involved in all AkiDwA meetings and workshop which include AkiDwA 15 anniversary which had over 100 people attending. Over 25 women received reference letter for various needs such as ongoing application for residency in Ireland, work, college housing or character reference

A total of seven funding application were submitted three of these were successful this includes; Dublin City Council, the End FGM European Network for the UEFGM project through lead partners – Cyprus and the HSE.

AKIDWA BOARD in 2016:

There were seven board members in 2016.

1. Ashimedua Okonkwo: Chairperson
2. Jules Buckley: Treasurer
3. Melatu Okorie: Board Secretary
4. Cindy Njoki
5. Aradhana Ghai: Board Member
6. Grace Wilentz
7. Valery Mollay

Grace Wilentz, Valery Mollay and Cindy Njoki resigned in September 2016.

AKIDWA STAFF:

Seven staff/Intern served the organisation during the year,

1. Claudia Hoareau: Manager – Fulltime January - May
2. Deirdre Murray: Manager – Fulltime November – December
3. Caroline Munyi: Migrant Women Health Officer January -August
4. David McDonnell: Financial administrator- Part Time
5. Mercy Amaka Okonkwo: Development Officer- Fulltime
6. Antoinette Kelly: Office Administration – One Day per Week (CE Scheme),
7. Winiswa Nxele: health intern

AkiDwa 2016 Financial statement

Akina Dada WA Africa Company Limited by Guarantee
(A company limited by guarantee, without a share capital)

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE ACCOUNT

For the year ended 31 December 2016

| | Notes | 2016 € | 2015 € |
|----------------------|-------|-----------|-----------|
| Income | 4 | 126,192 | 165,148 |
| Expenditure | | (119,321) | (97,314) |
| Surplus for the year | | 6,871 | 67,834 |

The company has no recognised gains or losses other than the surplus for the year. The results for the year have been calculated on the historical cost basis. The company's income and expenses all relate to continuing operations.

Approved by the board on 27 September 2017 and signed on its behalf by:

Ashimedua Okonkwo
Director

Jules Buckley
Director

Akina Dada Wa Africa Company Limited By Guarantee
(A company limited by guarantee, without a share capital)

BALANCE SHEET

As at 31 December 2016

| | Notes | 2016 € | 2015 € |
|---|-------|----------------|----------------|
| Current Assets | | | |
| Debtors | 7 | 3,500 | 3,500 |
| Cash at bank and in hand | | <u>148,249</u> | <u>141,353</u> |
| | | 151,749 | 144,853 |
| Creditors: Amounts falling due within one year | 8 | (3,300) | (3,275) |
| Net Current Assets | | <u>148,449</u> | 141,578 |
| Total Assets less Current Liabilities | | 148,449 | 141,578 |
| Reserves | | | |
| Income and expenditure account | 10 | 148,449 | 141,578 |
| Members' Funds | 11 | 148,449 | 141,578 |

Approved by the board on 27 September 2017 and signed on its behalf by:

Ashimedua Okonkwo
Director

Jules Buckley
Director

Opening speech by Salome Mbugua, Founder and president of AkiDwA at the organisation 15th Anniversary at Wynns Hotel on 29th September 2016

Honourable minister David Stanton, distinguished guest and my fellow colleague's good morning. Thanking you for taking your time to be here with us as we celebrate our fifteenth anniversary. Allow me to introduce myself as BIFFO-beautiful intelligent female from Offaly, My links with Ireland goes back long way in Kenya, I was Baptised by an Irish priest member of holy ghost fathers at an early age, Father Pat O'Tool from Mayo, I always say through baptism he gave me the spirit to do good and I continue to use that spirit to do the very best right here in Ireland.

When I came with the vision of AkiDwA I was in college, expecting my second daughter and working with young boys at the heart of Dublin city. It was through my work with these boys(actually they use to call me our African mother) that led to the advancement of AkiDwA vision, I had taken one of the young boys to Marter Hospital where I met Sister Edel from Sisters of Mercy who directed me to Catherine McCauley Centre. I made appointment with sister Joan who was the director at the time, Sr Joan did help us quite a lot opening a bank account was difficult for us and also getting a space to hold our meetings. In our first meeting with Joan I promised to mobilise more women to come along with me in the next meeting. The McCauley centre had intension of opening a project for migrant women, AkiDwA focus at the time was African women only. I had tried holding meeting for both African men and women prior to this, in 1999 I organised for a meeting in a pub in temple bar, however we all ended up getting excited and did not manage to get proper discussions going. The meeting at Catherine McCauley centre on august 20th 2001 brought eleven of us together, four Irish women invited by Sr Joan and seven African women that I had invited, all of us seven African women had three common experiences- isolation, discrimination and experience of racism both verbal and physical to some of us. In that meeting we agreed to get out there and share our experience and also let the world know we are ready to challenge and work towards addressing the problems we were experiencing.

In November 2001 we agreed to hold an African cultural night to announce our intensions of forming an African women's network that would work on isolation and challenge racism. The cultural night was quite successful, we held it at the Irish Film Centre, over 150 people attended the night, we charged a small fee at the door but provided people with a taste of free food and great African music, one of our woman was the DJ, we broke all the stereotypes and myth of women been spoke persons or DJs, we were fully in control, we announced the establishment of the network, one of the journalist who had

attended the event wrote an article which appeared on the paper, this was the beginning of our long but exciting journey.

Issue of inequality were quite apparent at the time (early 2000), there were many women living in uncertainty, they had no residency, deportations were apparent, many people were living in fear. AkiDwA continued to establish structure; we received small funding from combat poverty to do a need analysis for our target group. To challenge racism and discrimination we organised training of trainers by targeting African churches, there were several of these in Dublin city centre, one of the most popular one was behind Moore Street with people coming to worship on Sunday from all-overs Ireland majority from Navan, Dundalk and wider Dublin region, I personally provided and delivered training on understanding racism and its effect to the society to over 10 women who in turn visited schools and attended meetings and gathering to talk about racism, women were struggling big time with this issues in particular as their children also continued to experience same in school or housing estate. In 2002 AkiDwA received small funding from Dublin City council and DFA to develop and implement project and training for African women. AkiDwA delivered capacity building training to women around the country reaching out to many African women in various Counties, Cork, Clare, Galway, Meath, Dublin, Longford, majority of these women had no residency and were living at the margin of the society. In 2003 while I was delivering training in Eden Derry, county Offaly to a group of Migrant women I received a call from three women who were members of AkiDwA, they had received deportation letters and had been given 15 days to respond, similar letters had been sent to many of women members of AkiDwA, they were in fear and great panic.... I remember that day I cried, I did not deliver the training; I took my phone and started calling every person that I knew that could help. Finally Dr Ronit Lentin formally from Trinity college and myself organised an urgent meeting in Dublin city centre, over twenty people with different status and expertise most of them Irish indigenous attended the meeting- Coalition Against Deportation of Irish Citizens(CADIC) was formed. Over 17,000 people faced deportation; we held demonstration, vigils and press conference. My first appearance to the DAIL committee on women equality and Justice where I first met Minister David Stanton was this time in 2004 when I presented to the committee on behalf of AkiDwA on why these women should not be deported; it was a strong presentation that followed with questions, giving me a great experience at the Dail and that have shaped my activism in particular. By December 2014 the Minister for justice created the Irish born citizen unit and parent were granted opportunity to apply for residency, finally over 16000 people were granted right to reside in Ireland even though with conditions . In parallel we continued to encourage women to better themselves by undertaking training or looking for work, with Community

foundation and Spirasi we implemented Employment for Parent of Irish Citizen (EPIC) project fully funded by the department of justice to support parent who had received residency based on Irish born citizen criteria. Many migrant women even though highly qualified at the time faced challenge of their foreign academic qualifications not recognised in Ireland and accessing Job for people who have been outside mainstream proved difficult. AkiDwA continued to highlight this as a challenge.

Our work continued to be recognised and we were approached to help input into policy by HSE social inclusion, we have to date informed and helped to draw policies, this include HSE intercultural health strategy, Sexual and GBV for staff and resident in accommodation centres by Reception and integration Agency and the very latest FGM ACT 2012 that we advocated and worked for twelve years.

Now than ever before most of our members have settled in Ireland, they have been granted citizenship, some are working and others have established business or social entrepreneurship activities, encouraging integration. Majority of the migrants in Ireland in particular our members have undertaken training and gained Irish qualifications, they hold Diploma, Degree, Masters degrees and PHD, others own properties.

In moving forward we want to work in solidarity with others in building an integrated society, one in which all people are valued treated with respect and dignity, and enjoy equal opportunities and protections. If this is to happen Ireland must recognise and adapt into the changing demographics; our country is no longer a monoculture society. *According to 2011 census, migrants represent 12 % of Irish population, all from 199 different nations;* this fact has to be reflected in all public spheres, social, economic and political. Many migrants today even though qualified are unable to access labour market, they face discrimination, representation of migrants in politics or high level of decision making is lacking. We must value the diversity in Ireland today and all of us have the responsibility to make Ireland inclusive.

This morning in advance of this conference I was interviewed by one of the radio presenters who posed a question on how I would like to see Ireland at 30, in other words in fifteen years time, my response to him was simple, my vision for an inclusive Ireland where the reflection of diversity of people will be apparent right from when you enter Dublin airport, when you go to any department, organisation or agency, media, in our Dail and all public spare, that the reflection of diversity of people in Ireland will be a reality in all these places.

Minister I want to assure you our support from AkiDwA, many NGOs here today and Individuals have great ideas of making Ireland integrated and inclusive; we are ready to work with you. The migrant led coalition already had a meeting with Emily Logan, Commissioner for Human Rights Equality and we are also in discussion with Dublin City Council who has also financially supported this conference today. I in particular want to thank you Minister Stanton for your interest and support with our work, DCC have been supporting AkiDwA since founding times and we sincerely would like to thank them for their continuous support including the support of AkiDwA operating office, thank you to staff, intern, volunteers and board of AkiDwA. I see many people who have been with us since the very beginning in this room including Deidre Healy from Kimmage Manor-the woman who helped us with setting rules and establishing formalities right in 2001, Ronit Lentin, Ann Maloney and all others who are not here.

We all have the opportunity to make Ireland great. - INCLUSIVE. And in solidarity it is possible.

Equality Then, Now & Future: Creating a more Equal & Inclusive Society

29th of September 2016

Speech by Mr. David Stanton, T.D., Minister of State at the Department of Justice and Equality with responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues,

I would like to welcome you to today's event to engage in a very important issue.

Before I begin I would like to take the opportunity to thank Salome Mbugua for the invitation to open today's conference.

It is always a pleasure for me as Minister of State with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration and Integration, to launch events such as this. However, today is particularly special, celebrating the 15th anniversary of AkiDwA, a significant milestone in the history of any organisation.

AkiDwA deserves recognition for its promotion of the equality of migrant women in Irish society. Whether it is through its advocacy activities, its capacity building, or its policy work, AkiDwA has been there to provide support to those who need it and to help them participate fully in everyday life.

However, we are gathered here to do more than recognise the activities of AkiDwA. We are here to celebrate the positive contribution of migrants to life in Ireland, and also to discuss measures and strategies to better promote an inclusive Ireland.

As you are aware, this year is the centenary celebration of the 1916 Rising, arguably the most seminal event that defined the course of recent Irish history. It was an event which defined this country, and it happened at a time of great change, both domestically and internationally.

The signatories of the 1916 Proclamation set out a vision for a new state, a state in which all citizens would be treated with dignity and respect. The text of the Proclamation itself refers to religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities for all citizens. These concepts are as relevant today as they were 100 years ago.

We have an opportunity now of further reflecting upon the ideals espoused by the leaders of the 1916 Rising, to ensure that the ideals set out at that time, remain relevant in today's society. Intolerance, racism and inequality have no part in a modern society and we must work to ensure that such beliefs do not find traction in today's world.

Today's event provides an opportunity to work together to ensure that all of our citizens are treated in a manner befitting a first-world country. Our collaborative efforts can lead to the identification of problems and impediments to progression and inclusion, but more importantly, our combined labours can mobilise resources for change and ensure a better society for all.

I believe that it is only right that we celebrate all the positive contributions which migrants have made to this State. We need only look to such diverse areas as music, food, the arts, culture and science to see how our nation has benefited from the contributions of people who have come from overseas. We would be a much poorer nation today if we did not have the inputs of migrants in the past.

We must also remember that we are a nation which has a long history of emigration. Our own citizens have travelled abroad in search of work, in search of opportunities and in search of a better life for themselves. It is only right that we should now treat those who come to our shores in the manner which we would expect our own citizens to be treated on foreign shores.

However, we must always look to the future and how we might, as custodians of today's society, leave it in a better state for generations to come.

It is in this context that I am particularly interested in how we might identify the issues that are problematic today, and put in place measures to address those difficulties.

As part of the process of the State working to improve the environment for successful integration, I expect that our new Migrant Integration Strategy will be published this autumn. This Cross-Departmental strategy seeks to build upon the initiatives which have already been put in place and seeks to further develop a climate within which the positive efforts of all those interested in integration can grow and flourish.

There can be no place in a modern society for intolerance, discrimination, inequality or exclusion. All residents in this country should feel valued, safe and free from discrimination of any form. People should feel comfortable that their beliefs, be they religious, political or social, will be tolerated and understood and that the State will act to uphold and vindicate their rights.

We need only look to our Constitution to see in Article 40.3.1 where it states clearly that:

"The State guarantees in its laws to respect, and, as far as practicable, by its laws to defend and vindicate the personal rights of the citizen."

This is a solemn undertaking which we take very seriously. It is preceded by Article 40.1, which states:

"All citizens shall, as human persons, be held equal before the law".

The courts have applied this to all persons, regardless of their citizenship. Indeed, as you already aware, we have comprehensive and robust equality legislation in place. Discrimination is prohibited on a wide range of grounds - gender, civil status, family status, age, race, religion, disability, sexual orientation and membership of the Traveller community.

Our legislation is designed to promote equality and prohibit discrimination, be it direct, indirect or by association. It is also designed to prohibit victimisation, and allow positive measures to ensure full equality across the nine grounds.

This equality legislation is constantly kept under review and amended as necessary.

We must not, however, become complacent.

We have been very fortunate in that we have avoided the extreme racial tensions that have emerged in recent times elsewhere in Europe. We do not have a nationalistic, anti-migrant party, and there is little appetite for intolerance in public discourse. However, I am mindful that we cannot assume that our work in protecting all of our citizens has finished – we must work to guard against complacency and intolerance seeping into the fabric of society.

Government has worked, and is working, to ensure that our system of public administration adapts to meet the changing needs that face it. We have adopted a mainstreaming approach to ensure that migrants access the same services as Irish people do.

Our services have adapted to reflect the new cultural diversity of their client base and a number of key departments and agencies have developed specific strategies to ensure that their services respond to Ireland's changed demographic in a competent and inclusive manner. However, where problems remain we need to identify them so that appropriate actions can be taken.

In supporting equality of opportunity and access to services, the Government also has a role in mobilising resources to support actions at the community level. Local initiatives, many of them led by community organisations, can make a very positive difference to the day-to-day realities of migrants in our communities. We want to support this type of effort.

Last week I opened a Call for Proposals for migrant integration and gender equality projects to be funded by the European Union through the Department of Justice and Equality. There is up to €7.8 million available over the next four years for projects aimed at supporting the integration of migrants and improving their access to the labour market? A further €5.5m is available for projects to assist women to return to the workforce and to support women's entrepreneurship.

The Call is open until the beginning of next month. I would encourage organisations with an interest in these areas to consider making an application for funding.

Returning to today's event, I look forward to the results of this conference because our discussions will allow us to again review what needs to be done to ensure equality for all members of our community regardless of their origin.

All members of society deserve to be treated with equality and their beliefs respected.

I wish you all the best of luck in your deliberations and I encourage you to engage in a forthright, honest and comprehensive dialogue so that the end result will be as useful as possible. Thank you.

“We must all work together to make Ireland more Inclusive”

Today, Thursday 29th September 2016 AkiDwA in collaboration with Migrant for Ireland Coalition will hold a national conference at the Wynn’s Hotel, 39 Abbey Street lower, Dublin 1 from 10.am-5pm. The conference entitled **‘Equality Then, Now and the Future – Creating a more Equal & Inclusive Society’** will focus on the New Ireland taking into account the changes in demographic and the reality of diversity in the 21st century. The aim of the conference is to celebrate the contribution made by migrants in Ireland as we commemorate the 1916 rising while discussing the measures and strategies that need to be put into place in the promotion of a more inclusive Ireland as the organization marks its 15th anniversary.

The speakers at the conference include TD David Stanton, Minister of State for Justice with special responsibility for Equality, Immigration, and Integration, who will present the opening address and Sr. Lena Deevy, founder of the Irish International Immigrant Centre -Boston. In addition, there will be a key note session of presentations members of Migrant for Ireland coalition who will present their work, and highlighting success and challenges but also proposing strategies to ensure an inclusive Ireland. The conference will also hear from a panel of politicians and other groups working on equality which include the Coalition to Repeal the Eighth Amendment, Age Action Ireland and Children Right Alliance. Mr. Brendan Carr, Lord Mayor of Dublin, will present the afternoon address.

Speaking in advance of the conference, Salome Mbugua founder and president of AkiDwA said “We have all worked hard to make Ireland integrated in the last fifteen years but we are yet to see the reflection of the diversity of people in Ireland in all public spheres”.

According to 2011 census, migrants represent 12 % of Irish population, all from 199 different nations; 268,180 were in the labour force in different fields, skill levels, and positions and account for 15.1 per cent of the total number of workers at the time. This represents the influence and input that Migrants have on Ireland’s culture and economy.

We must work in solidarity with all groups, organisations, politicians and individuals to ensure Ireland becomes Inclusive.

AkiDwA work in the last fifteen years has been on promoting the voices and empowerment of migrant women. The organisation in the next coming years will continue to work with others towards promoting an inclusive Ireland where everyone is treated with respect and dignity and has access to resources.

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Notes to the Editor:

Akina Dada wa Africa, (AkiDwA), Swahili for sisterhood, is a national network of migrant women living in Ireland Established in 2001 by a group of African women to address issues of gender discrimination, Female genital mutilation, racism and domestic violence. The non-governmental organisation is a representative body for migrant women living in Ireland, irrespective of their national or ethnic

background, religious beliefs, socio-economic position or legal residency status. AkiDwA membership is diverse, with over 3750 individual members, of various residency statuses in Ireland, from over 36 countries of origin. AkiDwA advocates with, and on behalf of, migrant women.

The organisation has achieved a lot over the years on policy development with different government departments and agencies and on delivery of projects and activities with and for migrant women.

AkiDwA vision is a just society where there is equal opportunity and equal access to resources in all aspects of society: social, cultural, economic, civic and political. AkiDwA mission is to promote equality and justice for migrant women living in Ireland

See more on our website www.akidwa.ie