



Business rep urges Government to assist ethnic entrepreneurs

THE HEAD of the Small Firms Association has called on the Government to commit mainstream funding from the beginning of 2008 to provide targeted training supports to ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

PATRICIA Callan, who is also the chairperson of the Emerge Development Partnership, which assists immigrant businesspeople, commented: "Non-nationals now make up over 10 per cent of our population and our workforce at 420,000 and 200,000 people respectively, and clearly represent an untapped pool of entrepreneurial talent in Ireland." She added: "Most of these are in the 24-44 years age bracket, which is the age at which most people set up in business. With only 28 per cent of Irish nationals now falling within this age bracket, non-nationals will clearly become increasingly important in contributing to our pool of potential entrepreneurs.

"Moreover, it is clear that in moving from their native countries to Ireland, they have already demonstrated their entrepreneurial qualities: a readiness to step out of a familiar environment and into a new culture and system, a preparedness to face risk and uncertainty and a strong motivation to generate income and secure a good quality of life. Indeed, we know from our own history, how entrepreneurial Irish people were when they moved abroad!"

Over the past 3 years, a pilot programme - Emerge - has been funded by the EU EQUAL Community Initiative through the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, and has been successful in promoting ethnic minority entrepreneurship in Ireland. The programme has directly assisted 207 participants

who have attended training at pre-enterprise, start-up and growth levels. Training was delivered in Blanchardstown, Cork, Galway and Tallaght with a master-class for growth delivered in Athlone. So far, 68 (33 per cent) of the participants have set-up new businesses, such as specialist food stores, a cleaning company, an intercultural training provider, childcare facility, auto part exports, bridal design store, and magazine publishing, with many others currently developing their business plans.

Callan stated that "the need for Emerge is clear: there is currently no specifically designed mainstream programme that targets the particular problems encountered by ethnic minority entrepreneurs, i.e. that takes into account the problems presented by cultural differences, racism, language problems and social exclusion.

"Over the past three years, Emerge has addressed these issues and has successfully strived to overcome their specific barriers by working with financial and government institutions. What is now required is a commitment by Government, in line with the recommendation in the Small Business Forum Report, to commit to providing funding from the beginning of 2008 to roll out the training modules and best practice to potential ethnic minority entrepreneurs.

She also called on the Government to review the regulations governing non-Irish nation-

als in setting up a business in Ireland, as currently 'business permission' is required, which can be highly restrictive.

"Currently, any non-EEA national wishing to establish a business in Ireland must seek the permission of the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform to do so. Any individual pursuing this option must, among other requirements, transfer capital of 300,000 euro to the State and commit to employing at least two EEA nationals.

"We would contest that such requirements present an excessively onerous barrier that prevents many migrants from engaging in entrepreneurial activity in Ireland. The capital requirement, for example, is massively in excess of the typical level of investment in a small-business start-up in this country.

"Similarly, the requirement to employ two EEA nationals is excessive when one considers that many indigenous start-ups will operate as single-person businesses for many years before taking on employees.

"These restrictions are clearly denying Ireland a great source of entrepreneurial talent. We believe that the key factor in deciding whether to award business permission should be the quality and likely viability of the applicant's proposed venture and that appropriate mechanisms should be put in place to assess such plans."

Publication: Metro Eireann

Date: Thursday, September 6, 2007

Page: 23

Extract: 2 of 2

Circulation: 0

Author:

Headline: Business rep urges Government to assist ethnic entrepreneurs

