

## Migrant Education Access

Children of non EU migrants deserve equality of access to third level education

### Migrant education access – a summary

Children of non EU migrants, born outside of Ireland, face significant barriers of access to third level education in the form of excessively high tuition fees. These are young people living here for a minimum of 3 years, (many of whom have completed their primary and secondary level education in this country) who have **made Ireland their home** and have **put down roots**. The current situation represents a missed opportunity for young people to make a **valuable contribution to the Irish economy**. **Finding a solution** to this problem will **enable this generation of young people** to participate in and contribute to Irish society.

### The current context - Inwards migration and the next generation

Ireland has experienced a sustained period of inwards migration over the past decade which has resulted in thousands of migrant families making Ireland their permanent home. The number of Irish residents who were born outside Ireland accounted for 17 per cent of the population in our most recent census data<sup>1</sup>. Young people make up a growing number of this diverse population, with one in seven children in Ireland now coming from a migrant background and an estimated 22,681 children born outside the EU registered in Irish secondary schools<sup>2</sup>. Access to education, a basic human right, lies at the heart of the integration process. Due to a lack of clear and comprehensive legislation many children of non EU migrants face barriers in the form of excessive student fees in accessing third level education. This remains an equality of access issue for migrant families who have made Ireland their home, have paid taxes and put down roots.

### Migrant Education Access; understanding the issue

A typical degree programme in any of Ireland's third level institutes can cost migrant parents three times more than that paid by Irish students. Residency stamps issued by the Irish immigration system to children of non EU migrants when they turn 16 are inappropriate and do not reflect the realities of young migrants who have come to Ireland to join their parents. Residency stamps such as 2, 2a and 3 cause problems in securing long term residency and citizenship for children of non EU migrants born outside of Ireland. The impact of this for many young migrants, who have grown up in Ireland, is that they are denied access to financial assistance and the free fee scheme upon entry to third level. In the absence

of a standardised residency test Irish third level institutes apply an 'EU fees' category which is often twice and three times typical fee levels. The window of opportunity for a young migrant to secure citizenship is too narrow and if they have not been naturalised by the time they reach third level they generally face EU or international student fees.

### Carla's Story

Carla is a first year student studying midwifery in University College Cork. Despite the fact that Carla grew up in Ireland and is here over ten years she was deemed ineligible for the free fees initiative due to her residency status. As a Brazilian national growing up in Ireland, Carla was not required to register with immigration until she was 16 years old at which point she was issued with a stamp 2a. Like hundreds of other children of non EU migrants this stamp does not count towards earning citizenship or long term residency. Her parent's residency status is not automatically transferrable to Carla or her siblings. Over the past 12 years Carla and her family have made Ireland their home. Currently Carla's parents are struggling financially to meet the costs of the 'EU level' fees set by UCC. At €6,783 for first year these fees are proving impossible to pay and are almost three times those an Irish born student would typically pay. It is unclear if Carla will be able to progress to second year, her future in Ireland is uncertain.



Young people involved in MEA meet the President and the first lady at summer garden party celebrating being young and Irish July 2012

Furthermore young people who have secured citizenship during their time in third level are often unable to 'reverse' their fee status and have no choice but to continue to pay these high tuition fees for the remainder of their third level education. The continued discrimination against these young people who are now

<sup>1</sup> CSO 2011 reports [www.cso.ie](http://www.cso.ie)

<sup>2</sup> Department of Education data as at February 2011

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Irish citizens is particularly worrying and is in direct contradiction of article 40.1 of the constitution and the principle of equality.

Lack of access to third level education is being experiencing by a growing number of young people who have made Ireland their home; young migrants who have spent more time in the Irish education system than in their home country and to many parents who have paid taxes and contributed to the Irish economy. In essence we have an immigration system that never considered their arrival in Ireland and a third level education system that is virtually inaccessible to them.

#### Elena's story

Elena, originally born in Russia, was seven years of age when she came to Ireland with her parents, 12 years ago this September. Upon completion of her leaving cert Elena successfully secured a place in medicinal chemistry in Trinity Collage Dublin (TCD). Over the past two years Elena's parents have been paying yearly fees amounting to three times the amount her Irish born peers have to pay. Elena applied for Irish citizenship and was naturalised in June of this year. Despite now holding an Irish passport she has been informed by TCD that they are unable to reverse her fee status and deem her eligible for the free fees initiative. As an Irish citizen Elena is supposedly entitled to enjoy the same rights and privileges of other Irish citizens. It would appear however she will face tuition fees three times the amount she would have had to pay had she being born in Ireland for the remainder of her time in Trinity. Her parents, long term resident and citizens, have to continue to find the finances to pay these excessive fees despite their own contribution as tax payers in Ireland over the past 12 years.



Luz Montejo and Tatiana Bezborodova involved in MEA celebrate getting their certificates of naturalisation at a citizenship ceremony in the Dublin Convention Centre, June 2012

#### Offering solutions

Talented young people like Carla and Elena have much to contribute to Ireland's future economic recovery and prosperity. To deny her, and others in similar circumstances, this basic right and opportunity for real progression, represents a loss to Irish society and may even add to the State's economic burden in the future.

MRCI is currently working with over 140 families in this situation through our Migrant Education Access (MEA) campaign. We feel that young people who have come to Ireland to join their families and are here a minimum of 3 years should enjoy equality of access to third level education. We believe a solution exists within our education system which requires an immediate re-examination of the criteria of access to financial assistance for higher education and the application of a standard residency test in third level institutions. In the longer term, passage of a comprehensive Immigration, Residence and Protection Bill is needed to guarantee rights and pathways of permanent residency and citizenship to young migrants in this situation.



MEA participate in National Youth Council of Ireland EU conference "Were Here, Hear Us Now" in Dublin, July 2012



Migrant Education Access campaign is an initiative of the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI). MEA is working with young people, parents and supporters in a collective effort to ensure equality of access to third level for young migrants who have made Ireland their home.

Website [www.mrci.ie](http://www.mrci.ie)

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