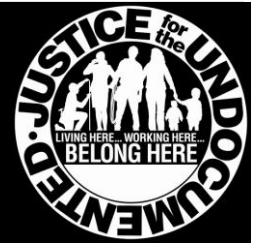


JUSTICE FOR THE UNDOCUMENTED



Living here. Working here. Belong here.

CAMPAIGN SUMMARY

There are an estimated 30,000 migrants including children and families living undocumented in Ireland. Most have been in Ireland for several years working and paying taxes, and have become deeply rooted within Irish communities. People who are undocumented live under tremendous stress and fear, are more vulnerable to exploitation and are excluded from basic services. Most are cut off from their families similar to the Irish undocumented in the United States. Much of this issue has come about as a result the previous government's failure to establish coherent immigration structures and policies. Ireland has the opportunity to provide a fair and responsible solution to this situation by introducing an Earned Regularisation Scheme which would benefit undocumented migrants, their families and Irish society.

Background

The last ten years of government have seen a culture of denial, poor governance and a failure to address immigration matters fairly and effectively. The poorly thought-out and ad-hoc nature of the immigration system in Ireland contributed to thousands becoming undocumented. An estimated 30,000 migrants, including families and children, are now living undocumented in Ireland. This is having an extremely detrimental impact on their lives and on Irish society.

Living Undocumented in Ireland

MRCI has been working with undocumented migrants and their families since 2001. Most have been in Ireland for many years. They have become members of communities across the country, working, paying taxes and trying to make a better life for themselves and their families. However, they live in the shadows under tremendous stress and fear of deportation. They are much more vulnerable to exploitation and mistreatment due to their irregular immigration status. Faced with few options and alternatives, many are forced to stay in exploitative situations, fearing the risks of coming forward and losing whatever small income or means they may have.

They face significant problems in accessing basic and essential services, such as health and education. They remain effectively cut off from visiting their extended families just like the Irish undocumented in the US. They fear the authorities, in particular the Gardaí, and are reluctant to report crimes such as domestic violence, theft and racist incidents.

Earned Regularisation Scheme

It is critical that Ireland address the situation of the undocumented by providing a fair and responsible solution that recognises and balances the issues and concerns of undocumented migrants and the Irish state. The MRCI believes this can be best achieved by introducing an Earned Regularisation Scheme. Such a scheme would give undocumented people and their families living in Ireland a window of opportunity to come forward and earn their way to a permanent residency status. Upon registering for the scheme and paying a fine, eligible applicants would be granted a temporary residency status. Then individuals would work their way to earning a permanent residency status by meeting specific criteria such as working, paying taxes and contributing to the community, over a limited time period.

Earned regularisation is not an amnesty. It is earned over time as opposed to being rewarded automatically. It is a pragmatic solution which considers both the rights and responsibilities of undocumented migrants, and the Irish state. International migration experts consider earned regularisation as the most progressive model to respond to the undocumented crisis. It addresses many of the concerns of those who see regularisation schemes as pull factors of increased irregular migration, or as rewarding those living in an undocumented situation. In fact, opinion polls have shown a majority of the Irish public to be in favour of regularisation.

Elsa Story

Elsa is from the Philippines and came to Ireland in 2005 on a tourist visa. She was told that she would be able to get a work permit once she was in here. She worked as a career in a nursing home. A work permit was never applied for. In 2007 she became pregnant and was unfairly dismissed at this time. She is a one parent family and works part-time to support herself and her young child.

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Benefits of an Earned Regularisation Scheme

An Earned Regularisation Scheme would yield significant benefits for undocumented migrants, their families and Irish society. It would:

- Provide hope and a chance for undocumented individuals, families and children to escape the constant fear, stress, poverty and isolation associated with living undocumented;
- Generate an estimated €75-100 million in much needed revenue for the Irish state in additional tax and contributions by undocumented workers and their employers;
- Enhance governance of immigration, improve overall public security, law enforcement and compliance;
- Give credibility to efforts by the Irish Government for a solution to regularising Irish citizens living undocumented in the United States.

Political Support for the Undocumented Irish

The undocumented Irish in the US has been an issue in politics for over 20 years. There has consistently been cross party support to legalise and assist undocumented Irish families, children and workers in the US. In 2007, a Fine Gael motion to support this issue received all-party support in Dáil Éireann. Additionally, many TDs currently sitting in the Dáil have travelled to the US to advocate for fair and humane treatment for Irish people living undocumented in the US.

“Tens of thousands of undocumented Irish citizens have over the decades settled in the United States, obtained employment and remained undocumented illegal migrants for many years. Members of the Houses of the Oireachtas from all parties, including myself, and Ministers have regularly visited Washington to persuade legislators and a succession of American Presidents to provide an amnesty for the undocumented Irish on basic humanitarian grounds. To avoid charges of hypocrisy and to give credibility to any such representations we may make in the future in Washington, should we not also show the same level of consideration and humanity to our undocumented immigrants as we expect be shown to the undocumented Irish in the United States?”

-Alan Shatter, TD (6 October 2010)

“My life is here, I have been living and working here for seven years, my daughter is top of her class in school she is very talented. You know, all her friends are here. She feels she is Irish. I consider Ireland my home but we are stuck, we cannot move ahead with our lives. I am very fearful and worried for my daughter’s future”.

-Laila from Malaysia

This situation and the situation of undocumented migrants in Ireland is the same. There is no reason why the Irish Government should not extend the same level of understanding and effort to resolve the situation of those who are undocumented in Ireland. Developing and implementing this type of scheme would be a ground breaking step by the Irish State. It would show leadership and vision in the area of regularisation and reiterate the Irish government’s commitment to the issue of being undocumented. To do otherwise is a gross contradiction and hypocritical.

Justice for the Undocumented Campaign Group

“We are not looking for a hand out, but for fair consideration to be given to our situation. Many people are living on the edges, and our group is determined to build support for our campaign so that it will make a difference not only in my life but in the lives of thousands of people.”

– Jayson, member of campaign group

This group is made up of undocumented migrants who have come together to work for change. The campaign group is concerned with the rights of all undocumented migrants in Ireland. The desperate situation and the welfare of undocumented families and children is a key concern for the group. They are committed to working collectively to rectify their legal status in the State, through building broad-based support for earned regularisation and working closely with the State to realise this. Bringing this group out of the shadows and into the legal framework will help realise the collective responsibility of the both the State and undocumented migrants. It is important to note that opinion polls have shown a majority of the Irish public to be in favour of regularisation

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