

## RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

### “Citizenship Refusals have a damaging impact on lives - Nasc”

By Robert Carry

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**THOSE WISHING** to secure citizenship in Ireland have to contend with a stringent application process, while refusals – sometimes handed down after a lengthy waiting period – are not uncommon.

Moreover, the reasons cited for such refusals are often particularly hard to swallow for those turned down. “Some of the reasons given seem very trivial,” says Claire McCarthy, policy and campaigning officer at the Cork-based Nasc Immigrant Support Centre.

McCarthy has come across a number of cases where people are turned down for spurious reasons. One of the worst involved that of ‘Mohamed’, who arrived as an asylum seeker in Ireland from Afghanistan and was later granted refugee status.

“His application for citizenship was refused on the basis that he has two traffic offences, which he did not mention in his application,” says McCarthy. “He has paid fines in both cases but non-disclosure of even the most minor offence is fatal.” Another extreme case was that of ‘Simon’, a refugee from Liberia. “His application was refused because he was deemed not to be of good character, because he had come to the attention of gardaí,” recalls Claire.

In Simon’s case, his offences were both traffic-related: a speeding ticket, for which he paid the fine, and the ‘crime’ of ‘wholly entering a yellow box’.

The Department of Justice’s motivations in turning down applications on what can seem like flimsy pretexts are sometimes hard to comprehend. “These people tend to be long-term residents in Ireland,” says McCarthy, “and citizenship isn’t something that is going to affect that. They’re still going to be living and working here.” She feels that refusal of this kind can have a damaging impact on applicants. “To my mind, if someone is refused because they are not of good moral character, then it gives the impression that they are not considered a good citizen.

“This is only going to exclude them more and makes it less likely that someone will have a sense of civic responsibility.” She continues: “They will end up even more alienated from the State, and so the process will have the opposite effect to the one intended. Worse still is that there is no direct recourse for appeal. “If you have reasonable grounds for appeal, you can start the application process off again, but it takes about two years to get a response. That is your only option.”

McCarthy believes there is a range of reasons why people apply for citizenship. “They want to feel secure – Ireland is their home now and they want that reflected in their passport. They want to be able to travel knowing that they can come back to the country that is their home.”

The advantages of giving citizenship to someone resident in Ireland for a long period are, for McCarthy, quite obvious. “I think it has a psychological effect on people – it gives them a sense of security and I think they then feel more tied into the community around them,” she says. “Keeping people on the edge of society really goes against all the principles of integration that are in government policy.”

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