

For the common good?

Thousands of non-EU nationals married to EU citizens are facing deportation from Ireland – a situation currently under review in the European courts. One couple spoke exclusively to VIKTOR POSUDNEVSKY about their plight

POLISH MAN Igor Kochajkiewicz (25) never thought that he would marry a girl from a small mountain kingdom in southern Africa, after meeting her thousands of miles away from his home. Yet this is precisely what he did.

But now his happiness with his wife Bubu Ndziba (23) from Lesotho is under threat. As is the case for thousands of non-EU nationals in Ireland living with their non-Irish EU spouses, Bubu has been serviced with a deportation notice by the Department of Justice.

“When I got this letter I broke down,” says Bubu. “It’s the way they did it. Very insensitive; very harsh.”

The letter addressed to Bubu in August last year and seen by *Metro Éireann* says, among other things: “You are a person whose deportation would, in the opinion of the minister, be conducive to the common good.”

It is estimated that around 2,000 similar letters were sent out to other married couples in an effort to combat sham marriages conducted by non-EU nationals to gain entry to or reside in Ireland. Both Bubu and Igor admit that their union is an unusual one, and to some people might sound like a scam – but the pair are adamant their marriage is genuine.

“Of course it’s unusual,” says Igor. “I get it every day at work. People are asking me ‘What? Who’s your wife?’ But we’ve got to open up, do you know what I mean?”

“I grew up with my step father being white, German,” adds Bubu. “My little brother is mixed. But here in this country, if a black and a white person are together, it’s like there’s already something going on. I think it’s more normal to see an Irish girl with a mixed kid and no father, than to see a couple like us who actually chose to get married.”

Bubu comes from a secure family background in Lesotho. She came to Ireland to study and claims she would have left the country long ago if she had not met Igor. Her husband has been in Ireland for three-and-a-half years. He speaks nearly perfect English and has already acquired a Dublin accent. There is self-irony and a great deal of enthusiasm in his voice. “I learned English at school and improved it over here. Thanks to Bu, now I’m speaking English constantly. Fighting with somebody in English is pretty hard, you know.”

His wife, who has been in Ireland for six years, also speaks with an Irish lilt. Despite the uncertainty that she faces and the long period of being in legal limbo, she has an air of cheerfulness and resilience about her.

“One of the worst things is that I can’t work,” she says. “So Igor’s got to be the only one working to pay this rent, which is proving to be hell for him. I can help him as much as I can as a wife, but that’s all I can do.” Igor has a background in journalism and was co-founder of *Polska Gazeta*, the first Polish-language publication in Ireland. However, now he works in construction because of the higher wages.

“We have a lot of hopes and dreams to fulfill. A lot of plans for the future,” he says.

“But we’re kind of being put on hold by something bigger that we can’t overcome on our own. We’re counting the months, days until September.”

The predicament of Igor and Bubu, as well as other cases of non-EU nationals married to non-Irish EU nationals, is currently under review in the European Court of Justice. The court’s ruling will be delivered in August or September – only then can the couple expect some clarity regarding their situation.

“I can’t really dream until I know,” says Bubu. “I’ve got a lot of support from Irish people as well, but there’s nothing they can do.” She admits she gets depressed at times, but she is determined to keep herself going by enlisting in an array of free courses and volunteering in community groups.

The couple is critical of the Irish Government for putting them through these stressful times. “What exactly do they want to do to stop fake marriages?” asks Igor. “Do they want to see how long we last on one wage and with the downturn in the economy would we still be together? What’s the point of all this? If you can get a social worker to visit [the couples in question] and if they’re not living together then fine – scam. There’s easier ways. They don’t have to harm people like that.”

“I was shocked when I found out that there is a Minister for Integration,” says Bubu. “The Minister for Integration doesn’t know about me, and these are some of the things he should know about. As long as people like me are not free like everybody else, there’s always going to be a lack of integration.”

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