

RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship FAQ

By Robert Carry

Metro Éireann, 21 – 27 January 2010

Who can apply for citizenship through naturalisation? Immigrants who fulfil a number of criteria, including having had one year's continuous 'reckon-able residence' in Ireland (Republic) before applying, and a total reckonable residence amounting to four years during the preceding eight years.

What is 'reckonable residency'? In basic terms, it relates to periods of residency that are fully documented. Also, be aware that time spent in the refugee application system does not count towards reckonable residency, nor do periods on student visas.

What other conditions must be met? In most cases, you should be at least eighteen years old, be pre- pared to make a declaration of fidelity to the nation and loyalty to the State, and be of good character, among other stipulations.

What exactly does 'good character' mean? The Department of Justice has not issued concise information on what constitutes 'good character', but advises that An Garda Síochána will be asked to furnish a report on your background. Any criminal record or ongoing proceedings will be taken into consideration, and details of any proceedings, criminal or civil, in the State or elsewhere, should be disclosed on the application form, says the department.

Can I attain Irish citizenship through marriage? Yes, if you are married to an Irish citizen and living on the island of Ireland, you may meet special conditions for naturalisation based on that marriage.

You must be married to your Irish citizen spouse for a period of not less than three years, and have had immediately one year's continuous residence in the island of Ireland prior to applying.

Also, during the four years immediately preceding that period, you must have a total residence on the island of Ireland amounting to two years.

My spouse and I are not Irish, but our baby was born here. Is the child entitled to Irish citizenship?

Children born to non-Irish nationals are no longer automatically entitled to Irish citizenship by birth.

However, if one of the child's parents has been resident on the island of Ireland for a period of not less than three years, the child is entitled to Irish citizen- ship.

How does one apply for Irish citizenship? You can request the relevant forms from the Department of Justice, or download them from www.inis.gov.ie, which is the website of the Irish Naturalisation and Immigration Service (INIS), under the aegis of

the Department of Justice.

What type of supporting documentation is required? You'll need a variety of documents, including evidence of your identity and nationality and documents relating to your status and the duration of your stay in the State.

Do I have to take any tests on Irish culture, or have my English language abilities gauged? Not at present, though Government politicians have raised such suggestions in recent years.

How much does it cost to apply? Most applicants pay €950. However, applications on behalf of minors and widowers of Irish citizens costs €200. Recognised refugees do not have to pay any fee.

How long does the process of naturalisation take?
Applications are taking around two years to process.

Who exactly decides whether I become an Irish citizen or not? Legislatively speaking, it is the Minister for Justice. In practice, it will be officials at the Department of Justice.

If I apply for Irish citizenship, will I have to surrender my existing citizenship?
As far as Irish law is concerned, people can hold Irish citizenship at the same time as citizenship of another State.
Some other countries, however, have citizenship laws which do not permit the holding of another citizenship alongside their own (Denmark and Japan are good examples).

Can someone renounce Irish citizenship? Yes, if an Irish citizen is or is about to become a citizen of another country, he or she may renounce Irish citizenship, if ordinarily resident outside the State, by lodging a declaration of alienage with the Minister for Justice.

Are there any exceptions to this? Yes – if Ireland is at war you'll need the minister's explicit consent.

Nigerians are the top applicants for citizenship, followed by Filipinos, Indians, Pakistanis and South Africans. Filipinos are the top group applying for long-term residency

2 The average number of years citizenship applicants must wait for a decision on whether they can become 'Irish'

9 The percentage of valid citizenship applications refused in Ireland in 2008

7,000 immigrants are currently waiting to hear if they'll get long-term residency

18,500 people across Ireland are currently awaiting decisions on their citizenship applications

Sixteen The number of months applicants for long-term residency are generally waiting for decisions on applications

Source: Department of Justice Press Office

This article was produced in association with the Forum on Migration and Communications (FOMACS)