

## RESIDENCY AND CITIZENSHIP

“Immigrants priced out”

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By Catherine Reilly

**MANY IMMIGRANTS** entitled to long-term residency feel they’ve been ‘priced out’ of the mechanism, according to a migrant rights’ group.

A spokesperson for the Migrant Rights Centre Ireland (MRCI) told *Metro Éireann* that the €500 long term residency fee brought in last summer is “unaffordable” for many immigrants, and criticised the “lack of consultation” on its introduction.

Previously, no fee had existed for long-term residency applications. Navan based Rajat Bhatnagar, a hotel manager originally from Delhi, India, submitted his long-term residency application in February 2008.

He is yet to receive a decision, but told *Metro Éireann* a friend received a letter from the Department of Justice requesting that €500 be paid within 28 days.

“My first thought was ‘€500 in 28 days?’” said Bhatnagar. “Five hundred quid is a lot of money for a lot of people. The only thing you can do is plan ahead and have your money ready, but that is difficult for many people. “A lot of the population don’t have jobs, and for people in such situations I don’t know how they’re going to do it. People are struggling with rent and other things.”

According to the Department of Justice, the prescribed €500 fee for long-term residency is “payable within 28 days of an applicant being approved”, and if not paid within 28 days of the “issue” of the approval letter, the application will be “deemed abandoned” and the applicant “will have to re-apply”

Meanwhile, accessing social welfare is not a commonly cited reason for residency refusals, in contrast to refusals for citizenship, according to the MRCI. The rights group also revealed that the stipulation that applicants be of “good character” – a reference described as “vague” – is frequently cited by the Department of Justice when refusing residency applications.

“In addition there is no specific application form for long-term residency so it is not clear that any Garda record should be disclosed and explained, including copies of any legal proceedings, fines paid, etc, or that offences can be a cause of refusal,” commented the spokesperson.

However, while citizenship applications have no appeals’ mechanism, long-term residency applications can be reviewed and additional information submitted.

Currently around 7,000 people are awaiting decisions on their long-term residency applications, which take around 16 months to process, say the Department of Justice.

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