



UNDOCUMENTED MIGRANTS

‘In Ireland, it is easy for migrant workers to lose their legal status in the current immigration legislation. People who become “undocumented” can face social exclusion, discrimination and poverty.’

Closing credits, New Beginnings

IDEAS TO EXPLORE WITH YOUR CLASS



In *New Beginnings*, Sanjay is worried that he may not be able to take part in the Festival of Lights performance as his father has lost his job and become undocumented. Sanjay is concerned that his family may be forced to leave their home in Ireland if his father is unable to regularise his situation. Lilian (Abbi's mother) briefly explains to the children what Sanjay is referring to.

Undocumented migrants (also known as irregular migrants) do not have a work permit or an up-to-date residency status. The MRCI (Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland) suggests a number of reasons why a person may be undocumented or become undocumented, often through no fault of their own. Migrants may:

- have a student or holiday visa that has expired
- hold a work permit that has expired and not been renewed
- be married to (and dependent on) a visa holder who is working
- fail to register with the local immigration officer upon arriving in Ireland
- have been trafficked for forced labour in Ireland
- have paid for false documents (often unknown to them) through an agency.

http://www.mrci.ie/policy_work/IrregMigrant_UndocuMigrant.htm

Many people travel to Ireland after securing a work permit from a recruiter. When they arrive in Ireland, the recruiter, who may have charged the worker for the permit, has control over the worker's legal situation. Should the recruiter decide to terminate employment, the worker has to try to secure a new job with a new employer who is willing to apply for a permit.

Recent amendments to legislation state that if non-EEA (European Economic Area) migrants have lived and worked in Ireland for a minimum of five years, they will be granted permission to live and work without having to send in a new application. The changes, announced in August 2009, have been well received in migrant communities as NGOs, migrants, employers and trade unions had worked together to effect this positive change.

For migrant workers, becoming undocumented brings worry, fear of deportation and financial hardship. Stress becomes part of daily life and the emotional strain on migrant families is felt by all members. In *New Beginnings*,

Sanjay is quiet and withdrawn as he is unsure what the future holds for him.

- Initiate a discussion with the children about possible daily tensions and stresses that might be felt by members of a family that is/has recently become undocumented.
- Encourage the children to think about ordinary, everyday tasks and occurrences, eg going to the local shop to buy groceries, driving a car on a short journey/long journey, visiting the local doctor, reporting a robbery etc, and list these on the board/flipchart. Ask the children to think about the possible difficulties/issues that might cause fear or strain for the undocumented or that might arise from each of the chores.
- Listen to an interview from Newstalk radio giving a testimony of an undocumented worker called Elizabeth; and/or read Elizabeth's or Iryna's testimonies aloud from that website: http://www.mrci.ie/policy_work/undocumented.mp3
- You could also listen to a digital storytelling and participatory media DVD conveying migrant workers' experiences of being 'undocumented' in 'Undocumented in Ireland – Our Stories': http://www.fomacs.org/project_detail.php?id=55
- You might now ask the class:
 - to write a selection of diary entries, from Sanjay's perspective, for the period of time he is waiting to hear about his father's situation
 - to create a set of interview questions children would like to ask about the undocumented worker's daily life
 - to write a newspaper article highlighting the difficulties faced by families of undocumented workers.

(Before exploring any sensitive topics such as this, ensure that you are familiar with any background issues that may arise for children in your class.)

More detailed information on this theme can be found at: <http://www.mrci.ie/publications/documents/LifeinTheShadows-ExplorationofIrregularMigrationinIreland.pdf>; http://www.immigrantcouncil.ie/pdf/1208/undocumented_deco8.pdf.