



The Right to Education and Its Denial for IPAs in Ireland

Education is a cornerstone of any society that aspires to equality, inclusion, and growth. Yet, for International Protection Applicants (IPAs) in Ireland, access to education remains fraught with systemic barriers that contradict these aspirations. The right to education, though enshrined in international human rights frameworks, is not fully realized for IPAs due to restrictive policies, limited resources, and the precarious nature of their living conditions.

In 2018, Ireland introduced the right to work for IPAs, allowing them to participate in the workforce under certain conditions. While this was a significant step forward, access to education—equally critical for integration and empowerment—remains highly restricted. Although IPAs can attend school up to secondary level and some may qualify for further education through schemes like the International Protection Student Scheme (IPSS), the eligibility criteria and systemic challenges exclude many who are eager to learn and contribute.

This failure to provide equitable access to education raises important questions: What kind of society are we building when we deny young people and adults the tools to succeed? Are we preparing for a future where today's IPAs are integrated, empowered, and able to contribute as tomorrow's citizens? Or are we perpetuating a system that marginalizes and disenfranchises them, leaving a legacy of exclusion and wasted potential?

These questions are not just theoretical. The children and young adults in IPAS centres today may become Ireland's citizens of tomorrow. Their ability to thrive—and by extension, the future of Irish society—depends on the opportunities we provide now. Education is not simply a right for them; it is a pathway to becoming active, engaged members of their communities. Denying them this right undermines the shared values of inclusion and equality and risks entrenching cycles of marginalization that harm society as a whole.

Barriers to Education for IPAs: A Missed Opportunity

Ireland's current approach to education for IPAs is not only a violation of their rights but also a missed opportunity to build a more equitable and prosperous society. The denial of educational opportunities fails to account for the long-term societal benefits of empowering IPAs to reach their full potential. Access to education allows individuals to develop skills, contribute to the economy, and foster a sense of belonging and purpose.

Yet, systemic barriers, such as the restrictive eligibility criteria of the IPSS, the instability of life in IPAS centres, and the lack of alternative funding mechanisms, create an environment where education is often out of reach. These barriers perpetuate exclusion and alienation, leaving IPAs trapped in a cycle of dependency and frustration.

By failing to invest in the education of IPAs, Ireland risks not only failing them as individuals but also weakening its future as a diverse and inclusive society. What kind of Ireland are we building when we turn away those who are eager to learn and contribute? What message are we sending to the next generation when we allow their potential to go untapped?

Systemic Barriers to Education



IPAs encounter numerous structural challenges that limit their ability to access education, from restrictive policies to logistical and financial hurdles. These barriers are multifaceted and deeply ingrained, making education an unattainable goal for many.

The International Protection Student Scheme (IPSS) was introduced as a targeted initiative to support International Protection Applicants (IPAs) in accessing further and higher education. While it is a step in the right direction, the eligibility criteria within the scheme present significant barriers, particularly for young people who arrive in Ireland during the later years of secondary school.

To qualify for the IPSS, applicants must meet a range of criteria, including the requirement to have been enrolled in the Irish education system for at least three years. This condition, though well-intentioned, disproportionately excludes students who arrive in Ireland in their final years of secondary education—typically in fifth or sixth year. Despite excelling academically and completing their Leaving Certificate, these students are unable to access the scheme simply because they have not spent enough time in the system.

This requirement fails to recognize the unique challenges faced by late-arriving students, many of whom demonstrate extraordinary resilience in adapting to a new curriculum and environment. The policy not only undermines their hard work but also creates a barrier at a critical juncture in their education, leaving them unable to progress to higher education alongside their peers.

Additionally, the IPSS imposes strict documentation requirements, such as proof of valid residency status and evidence of time spent in the Irish education system. For IPAs navigating the instability of life in Direct Provision, obtaining and submitting these documents can be an overwhelming challenge. Many lack access to the necessary administrative support to meet these requirements, further compounding the inequity.

By excluding late-arriving students and imposing rigid administrative hurdles, the IPSS unintentionally creates systemic obstacles that prevent IPAs from accessing the very opportunities it was designed to provide. These barriers not only deny young people their right to education but also perpetuate cycles of marginalization and missed potential.

Living Conditions and Instability in IPAS Centres

For International Protection Applicants (IPAs), life in International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS) centres is fraught with instability and challenges that directly undermine access to education. These centres, intended to provide temporary accommodation, often become long-term living spaces characterized by overcrowding, lack of privacy, and inadequate facilities. These conditions create significant barriers to learning and personal development.

IPAS centres are frequently overcrowded, with multiple families or individuals sharing rooms and communal spaces. This lack of privacy makes it nearly impossible for residents to focus on studying or coursework. Noise levels are constant, and there are rarely designated study areas or quiet spaces for learners to retreat to. Even the most motivated students find it challenging to concentrate in such conditions.

In today's world, reliable internet is a basic necessity for education. Yet, many IPAS centres either lack internet access altogether or provide unreliable connections. This severely hampers students' ability to participate in online classes, submit assignments, or access educational resources. For those



in further or higher education, the inability to connect with lecturers or peers adds another layer of isolation.

The Precarious Nature of Accommodation

Beyond these physical limitations, the instability of IPAS accommodation poses an even greater challenge. Residents can be moved from one county to another with little or no notice, often disrupting their education entirely. This unpredictability is particularly devastating for students attending school or college, as sudden relocation can result in being placed far from their institution, losing access to their current courses, or being forced to start over in a completely new area.

For example, students relocated mid-term may struggle to commute to their original school or university, particularly if their new accommodation is in a remote area. Some students are unable to continue their education at all because their new location lacks access to the same programs or courses they were enrolled in. This constant threat of upheaval creates a sense of insecurity and prevents students from fully engaging with their studies.

The location of IPAS centres further compounds these issues. Many centres are situated in remote areas, far from urban centres where educational institutions are typically located. For students attending school or college, this means long and expensive commutes. Public transportation options are often limited, and the cost of travel is not covered by existing support systems. With the weekly allowance for IPAs being insufficient to cover such expenses, education becomes a logistical and financial impossibility for many.

The precarious and unstable nature of IPAS accommodation has significant emotional and psychological consequences. Constantly living with the fear of being relocated disrupts students' ability to plan for the future and focus on their goals. The lack of stability fosters a sense of impermanence, further alienating IPAs from the wider community and deepening feelings of exclusion.

The Cumulative Impact

These combined challenges—overcrowding, lack of resources, geographical isolation, and the ever-present risk of relocation—create an environment where education is not just difficult but often unachievable. Even those who manage to access education must contend with barriers that make sustained participation an uphill battle. Without targeted interventions to address these systemic issues, IPAs are left in a cycle of marginalization, where their potential remains untapped and their aspirations unrealized.

While sanctuary scholarships offered by some universities provide opportunities for a few, they are extremely limited and highly competitive. Beyond the SUSI and IPSS schemes, there are few financial support mechanisms for IPAs to cover tuition fees, materials, or associated costs. This financial exclusion places higher education out of reach for most.

Although IPAs have limited rights to work, their status often disqualifies them from accessing full-time education programs. Many courses, such as apprenticeships and work-based learning opportunities, require full-time attendance, which is incompatible with the part-time work IPAs rely on for basic survival. This dual exclusion traps IPAs in a cycle of dependency and limited prospects.



The Human Cost of Barriers to Education

Education is not just about gaining qualifications; it is a cornerstone of personal growth, empowerment, and societal contribution. When access to education is denied, the impact ripples across multiple areas of life.

For young people, the inability to pursue higher education leads to wasted potential. Many students who excel in secondary school find themselves unable to advance further due to systemic barriers. This creates a profound sense of frustration and hopelessness, especially for those who have worked hard to achieve their goals.

For adults, being unable to upskill or reskill perpetuates a sense of isolation. Education provides not only skills but also a sense of purpose and belonging. Without it, IPAs are left feeling excluded from society, reinforcing feelings of alienation and worthlessness.

The denial of educational opportunities affects mental well-being. Without pathways for self-improvement, IPAs often experience diminished self-worth and increased stress. The absence of educational opportunities also undermines their ability to achieve autonomy, competence, and relatedness—core elements needed for personal and social well-being.

A Broader Human Rights Issue

Under international human rights frameworks, access to education is a fundamental right. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** and the **International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights** obligate states to provide equitable and inclusive education for all, regardless of immigration status. Ireland's current approach to IPAs' access to education falls short of these obligations, particularly when systemic barriers exclude many from meaningful opportunities.

The **European Social Charter**, which Ireland has ratified, emphasizes equal opportunities in education. Addressing these barriers is not just a matter of compliance—it is an ethical imperative to ensure that all residents, regardless of status, have the chance to thrive.

The Path Forward: Unlocking Potential

To break down these barriers and create a more inclusive education system, Ireland must take decisive action:

1. **Simplify the SUSI and IPSS Processes:** Streamline application procedures to reduce administrative hurdles and documentation requirements.
2. **Expand Funding Mechanisms:** Increase the availability of scholarships and financial aid specifically for IPAs.
3. **Provide Study-Friendly Living Conditions:** Ensure IPAs centres are equipped with dedicated study spaces, reliable internet access, and other essential resources.
4. **Subsidize Transportation:** Introduce travel allowances for IPAs commuting to educational institutions.
5. **Broaden Access to Work-Based Learning:** Allow IPAs to participate in apprenticeships and other educational opportunities that integrate work and study.



6. **Reduce Residency Requirements:** Revise eligibility criteria to better reflect the realities of IPAs' lives in Direct Provision.

Conclusion: Education as a Right, Not a Privilege

Addressing the barriers to education for International Protection Applicants (IPAs) is not just a matter of meeting basic rights—it's about fostering a society that values inclusion and recognizes the untapped potential of all its members. Equitable access to education offers a pathway to empowerment, integration, and meaningful contribution, benefitting both IPAs and the broader Irish community. For International Protection Applicants, education represents more than a pathway to skills and qualifications—it is a lifeline to autonomy, empowerment, and belonging.

While this discussion highlights significant obstacles, it is important to note that these are only a fraction of the challenges faced by IPAs. Systemic issues such as healthcare access, mental well-being, and societal discrimination create additional hurdles that cannot be ignored. Education alone will not resolve these challenges, but it is a foundational step, equipping IPAs with the tools to overcome barriers and build better futures for themselves and their communities.

Ireland has a choice to make. Will it continue to uphold policies that exclude and marginalize, or will it embrace the opportunity to foster a society where everyone—regardless of their background—has the chance to thrive?

The responsibility does not lie solely with policymakers. As members of society, educators, advocates, and citizens, we all have a role to play. You can take action today by:

1. Advocating for more inclusive education policies that reduce residency and documentation barriers.
2. Supporting organizations working directly with IPAs, such as through donations, volunteering, or amplifying their efforts.
3. Challenging stereotypes and fostering conversations about the value and contributions of IPAs in our communities.

By prioritizing education and addressing the systemic inequities faced by IPAs, Ireland can set a global standard for inclusion and lay the foundation for a stronger, more compassionate future. Let's work together to ensure that no one is left behind.

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About MASI - the Movement of Asylum Seekers in Ireland is a grassroots organisation based in Ireland. We are people who are or have been in the asylum and direct provision system in Ireland, working and advocating together for justice, freedom and dignity for refugees, asylum seekers and migrants. Our focus is on the Right to Education and the Right to Work for all people seeking asylum, on the complete abolition of direct provision and an end to deportations.

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