



We Belong 22 November 2021

PRESS RELEASE

'10 years of deintegration': We Belong's verdict on impact of Home Office's limited leave to remain policy.

['The Deintegration Generation'](#) highlights how 'tentacles' of hostile environment spread into all aspects of young migrants' lives, including access to higher education.

The report shows that migrant students are being wrongly denied university funding because of failings by government-backed loan provider.

We Belong - the UK-wide campaign organisation run by young migrants - is today [Monday 22 November] publishing evidence of how an immigration policy introduced nearly a decade ago to 'promote integration'* has had the opposite effect on young migrants growing up in the UK.

<https://webelong.org.uk/issue/denigration-generation-we-belong-report>

['The Deintegration Generation'](#) also highlights for the first time how high-achieving young migrants are being blocked from taking up university places, after being wrongly refused student loans.

The report concludes:

'Student Finance England is failing not just young people who are legally entitled to student finance, but also the universities that have offered them places they are then unable to take up.' [page 27]

Following campaigning by We Belong, the Home Office last month (October) announced a significant change to its limited leave to remain (LLR) policy, agreeing to give those who have grown up in the UK a shorter route to citizenship**. We

Belong has [welcomed that change](#), but our research suggests that nearly a decade of limited leave to remain has left a generation of young migrants feeling like 'outsiders' in the country they call home.

The report is further proof that the expense and uncertainty of the 10-year limited leave to remain (LLR) path to permanent status has blighted many lives since it was introduced in 2012, undoing years of integration, and robbing young migrants of their sense of belonging to the UK.

Examples of 'deintegration' in the report include:

- Anu, 24, who was born in the UK, says LLR left her 'struggling to identify as British'. She adds LLR has 'so many tentacles that impact so many areas of my life'; and describes the renewals every 30 months as 'literal reminder that I don't belong here' [page 16].

- Yousif, 22, who has lived here half his life and lost his university place due to his LLR status, says: 'The immigration system does not want you to be a part of British society. They just see you as a liar.' [page 16]

- April, 24, who came to the UK age 8, says: 'You're fighting to stay in a country that you think you belong to, that you want to belong to, that you want to give back to in any way that you can - but that country obviously doesn't want you here.' [page 16]

Young migrants describe life on 10-year LLR path as like: being on a roller coaster; being on a tightrope ('just hoping not to fall'); holding your breath; a game of snakes and ladders, where there are only snakes; 'a rupture of our identity' [page 9].

The young adults interviewed all came to the UK as children, and were granted LLR, based on having strong family ties to this country. They have to renew their immigration status every 30 months, or it will lapse. The cost of each LLR application has increased 331% since 2014, and is now £2,593 (equating to £86 a month). [page 12]

Young migrants who have lived here most of their lives describe the distress they feel at being labelled 'temporary migrants' by government ministers, when seeking to justify imposition of the Immigration Health Surcharge on everyone with LLR; and at being categorised as 'international students' (and therefore ineligible for a government student loan) - again because of their LLR status. [page 17]

We Belong CEO Chrisann Jarrett says:

'We are grateful to the Home Office for listening to We Belong's calls for young people who have built their lives - and want to build their futures - in the UK to be given a five-year path to permanent status. As this report shows so powerfully, since limited leave to remain was introduced nearly 10 years ago, its spiralling costs and constant uncertainty have done untold damage, blighting lives, and causing people

who came here as young children to question their place in this country for the first time.'

In her Welcome to the report [page 3], Chrisann points out that even with a shorter path to settlement, young people will still be at the mercy of 'the professionals and institutions that have been co-opted to enforce the hostile environment'.

In the report, Chrisann writes [page 4]:

'These gatekeepers will continue to misunderstand and be suspicious of limited leave to remain and continue to err in their decision-making. Until this changes, young migrants remain at risk of unfairness and discrimination, and we will still be made to feel like outsiders.'

Student Finance England, which administers government-backed loans for university students, is one gatekeeper singled out for criticism for taking a harsher line than the Home Office towards applicants with LLR, and demanding 'forensic levels' of evidence of long residence.

'In our experience, Student Finance England - a body set up to provide loans and grants so that eligible young people can attend university - often takes a more sceptical and exacting approach towards applicants than the government department in charge of immigration.' [page 29]

Since it was launched in 2019, We Belong has been contacted by dozens and dozens of students, including those from low-income backgrounds, who are left struggling to keep afloat financially for months due to mistakes and delays caused by SFE. Some have been forced to drop out of their studies, as a result.

Examples seen by We Belong include:

- a young woman who had to submit 200 pages of evidence to SFE to show that she has lived in the UK half her life before belatedly being given a loan, six months into her studies [page 26];
- a 17-year-old whose student loan application was rejected because of a 16-day break between his first and second LLR renewals (due to a mistake by his lawyer). While the Home Office accepted he was not at fault and granted his renewed status on a 'continuous basis', SFE said the gap amounted to an 'unlawful break' and refused him a loan [page 27];
- 'JE', who came to the UK age 3 from Jamaica, was repeatedly wrongly refused a loan, leaving him in debt, threatened with eviction, and with deteriorating mental health. His university blocked him from attending lectures as he couldn't pay his tuition fees. Despite support from We Belong and the intervention of his solicitor who confirmed his immigration history to SFE, it took five months before JE received the loan he was entitled to [page 20].

- A 24-year old, who has lived in the UK since age 8, had his application rejected by SFE as he could not prove that he was living in the UK between December 2008 and February 2009. His explanation that his family was being moved repeatedly by the Home Office during this period, so he had been unable to attend school for three months, was rejected. He was forced to leave university and ended up in debt [page 27].

Chrisann Jarrett says:

'We are seeing instances where Student Finance England is being even more demanding and more hostile towards young migrants with limited leave to remain than the Home Office. It is surely common sense that a Home Office letter should be accepted as proof that a student has lived in the UK long enough to qualify for a loan. Evidence that is good enough for the Home Office should surely be good enough for SFE. Instead, LLR applicants are treated with suspicion by SFE, and have to rush around gathering all the evidence they can - from primary school, secondary school, sixth form and former employers - to try to satisfy SFE staff that they have, indeed, been living in the UK.'

We Belong is urging Student Finance England to continue to work with us to urgently address these problems at a systemic level. We are calling on SFE to improve staff training, take a more commonsense, humane and proportionate approach to evidence, and publish more detailed information and guidance for students with LLR [see Notes for Editors, point 5, below].

For more information about The Deintegration Generation, contact Fiona Bawdon (report author, journalist, and We Belong comms consultant): comms@webelong.org.uk

*Statement of intent: Family Migration, Home Office, June 2012

**Home Office: Concession to the family Immigration Rules for granting longer periods of leave and early indefinite leave to remain (21 October 2021)

Notes for editors

1) Students with limited leave to remain are eligible for a student loan, provided they can meet two additional criteria: they have held LLR continuously for three years before the first day of their course; they have lived in the UK at least half their life. <https://www.gov.uk/student-finance/who-qualifies>

2) Copies of The Deintegration Generation, available here: <https://webelong.org.uk/issue/denigration-generation-we-belong-report>

3) Student Finance England has told We Belong verbally that it receives around 8,000 applications from people with limited leave to remain each year.

4) Most of the cohort of young people that We Belong supports live in England, so their point of contact for accessing university funding is Student Finance England.

5) We Belong and Student Finance England/Student Loans Company

summary timeline of contact: We Belong's then co-CEO Dami Makinde first sought to raise our concerns with Student Finance England and the Student Loans Company in 2019, but without success. Since the start of this year, We Belong has been having regular and positive meetings with senior SFE/SLC staff to try to ensure a straight-forward assessment process and fairer treatment for LLR students. During these meetings, We Belong has repeatedly offered to help with frontline staff training; asked for information for applicants with LLR to be added to the official student finance website; and requested that Home Office letters be accepted as evidence of long residence. These meetings have led to We Belong staff being given contacts within SLC to try to escalate cases where LLR applicants are facing problems. This has helped to resolve some individual cases, but long delays and systemic problems remain, which are causing intense distress and difficulty to the young people concerned.