An important demographic development in Ireland has gone almost unnoticed in public debate and the academic literature. Almost one-in-four children born in Ireland were to a mother who was not born in the country. This not only changes the composition of the Irish population quite dramatically in the younger age cohorts, but also raises questions about the experiences of these children and their families. Extensive research from other countries in Europe and elsewhere highlights that young migrant families and their second generation children face particular challenges that need to be addressed so that they become full members of the societies they are growing up in.

About the project

Recognising this important demographic shift, the project ‘New Irish Families - Investigating the development of immigrant parents and their children in Ireland’ - funded by the Irish Research Council - aims to describe the increasingly diverse profile of young Irish families and explore the challenges these families face in terms of their socio-economic status, social integration, childcare and return to work, economic well-being and access to social supports. By focusing on areas that are crucial for parents with young children, the research aims to contribute to more effective public policy for this emerging and growing second generation.

To achieve this, the study uses a mixed method design, drawing on both existing survey data and newly collected qualitative data from interviews with migrant families. The main data source apart from Perinatal and Census statistics is the nationally representative, Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) – The National Longitudinal Study of Children data, which contains detailed information on a substantial cohort of infants with foreign born parents. This data presents a unique opportunity to study a representative sample of the newest generation of Irish citizens and the contexts in which they are growing up. A detailed analysis of various data sources is currently ongoing, and we present some of the initial findings here to provide some insights into the main trends that are occurring as well as the diversity of the families in the study.

Background: Recent migration trends

After a long history of emigration, Ireland experienced growing inward migration from the 1990s onwards. Initially, this consisted to a large extent of returning Irish emigrants, who were attracted back by better job prospects in a growing economy. A smaller number were U.K. and other European citizens and migrants from outside Europe. This latter group primarily consisted of people on work permits and a growing number of asylum seekers.

Figure 1: Migration into Ireland since 2000

As Figure 1 illustrates, numbers increased dramatically in 2004, when Ireland was one of only three countries to allow migrants from

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1 Source: Perinatal statistics
3 Source: CSO Population and Migration Estimates
the Accession states immediate access to the labour market. This, coupled with a booming economy attracted a large number of citizens from these countries to Ireland, particularly from Poland, Lithuania and Latvia.

A further important aspect of this phenomenon is the age distribution of immigrant to the country, with younger age groups, particularly those aged 25-44 years, over-represented. As the Census categories are relatively broad, further data available for example for Poles from 2009/2010 shows that the largest age group was between 25 and 29 years old, followed by 30 to 35 year-olds.

A new second generation

A large number of the relatively young and often single migrants who arrived over the last decade are now increasingly found in family units. As a consequence, almost one quarter of births recorded in Ireland in 2012 are to a non-Irish born mother (Figure 2). Almost half of this group are from the new EU member states (11.5 % of all births), which is a dramatic increase from less than one per cent in 2004.

Figure 2: Percentage of births to Irish and non-Irish born mothers

This makes the cohort of second generation children – i.e. children born in Ireland to parents who migrated – a substantial and growing one. To date, the focus of much research has been on ‘newcomer’ children who migrated together with their parents and entered the education system at various levels, simply because Irish born children of migrants were such a small group until recently. Increasingly, our attention needs to focus on the experiences of children who themselves were born in Ireland, but whose parents come from a great variety of backgrounds.

Migrant families in ‘Growing Up in Ireland’

We now turn towards some initial findings from the Growing Up in Ireland study, which allows us to focus in on young families in particular. In this context, it is important to consider that the study children whose families are included in the study were born between December 2007 and June 2008, so that the data is representative of this particular cohort.

Figure 3: Composition of two parent families

Figure 3 shows the proportions of different types of families by migrant status of the parents for two parent families. Almost one third of children (30.9%) have at least one migrant parent, and amongst these a greater proportion are ‘mixed’ with one Irish and one

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5 Source: Perinatal Statistics 2012

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migrant parent than there are two migrant parents. Amongst single parents, 79.4 per cent are Irish with the remainder non-Irish, although we do not have information in this case on the other parent. The extent to which mixed or two migrant parents prevail differs widely between groups, however, as Figure 4 illustrates. The groups with the highest proportion of Irish partners were U.K. and EU 13⁸ born mothers (78.3% and 72.5%), while Africans, Accession State members and Asians have the highest proportion of same nationality partner (81.7%, 80.9% and 78.2%). Interestingly, more foreign born women are in partnerships with Irish men than the other way round in this cohort of young parents. There are likely to be marked differences across a range of outcomes, such as language and social integration, for children who have one Irish parent, which will be investigated further in the project.

Figure 4: Origin of mothers’ partner

Citizenship of parents and children

Irish citizenship provides for unrestricted access to the labour market and has been shown to impact positively on integration. Migrants living in Ireland can become naturalised Irish citizens once they meet a number of criteria that include having lived in Ireland for a designated number of years. Among the GUI cohort, 84.7% of Primary Caregivers were Irish Citizens. As shown in Figure 5, the highest rates of Irish citizenship was reported among U.K. migrants 72.2% and the other group which includes North America and Australia. This reflects the ability of migrants from these countries to attain citizenship by virtue of their Irish ancestry. The lowest rate of Irish citizenship was reported by Primary Caregivers from EU Accession States (4.9%).

Figure 5: Irish citizenship of Primary Caregivers

Children born in Ireland after 1st January 2005 to foreign national parents are not automatically entitled to Irish citizenship and the conferment of citizenship to second generation migrant children is far from straightforward. For example, under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 2004, foreign born parents of children born on the island of Ireland must provide evidence that they have been resident in the country for three of the four years prior to the birth of their child.

Figure 6: Percentage of Irish citizen infants born to migrant parents

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⁸ EU 13 refers to EU 15 countries, excluding the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom
This has resulted in the situation whereby a large number of the infants did not have Irish citizenship, despite being born in Ireland. While having one Irish parent entitles children to automatic citizenship, being born to two parents from other nationalities means that citizenship is not an automatic right. Figure 6 below shows the percentage of children in this situation who had Irish citizenship. It shows that a large proportion of children born to parents from EU Accession states (42.4%), Asia (24.4%), and Africa (14.3%) did not have Irish citizenship. The corresponding figure for the EU 13 group was 21.6%.

Diversity in language and religion

A consequence of the increase in second generation children in Ireland is a changing profile in terms of language and religion. While many migrants speak English in the home, this differs by origin groups. Accession member migrants are the least likely to speak English at home, with 55.9 per cent speaking another language (Figure 7), followed by Asians (31.4%) and EU 13 migrants (17.7%). Unsurprisingly, this depends hugely on whether both parents are from another country, with 39.9 per cent of such parents speaking another language at home.

Considering that this cohort of children is now entering primary schools, their religious profile is also of great importance given the denominational nature of the Irish education system. Roman Catholicism is the most common religion among all groups except for African, among whom 47.7 per cent belonged to another Christian denomination. While 90.1 per cent of Irish mothers were Roman Catholic, there was greater variety among migrant mothers. Excluding Irish mothers, the most common religion reported was again, Roman Catholic (58.1%), followed by other Christian (13.8%), and no religion (12.5%). A further 5.8 per cent were Muslim and 3.5 per cent Protestant. A similar pattern was observed among the children, as their religion is strongly predicted by their mothers’ denomination.

Looking forward

This first newsletter shows how Irish society is undergoing a profound transformation as a legacy of migration during the boom years. To ensure that an increasingly diverse range of young families are well supported and that their children grow up with equal life chances regardless of their parents’ origin it is crucial to create a profile of their family circumstances and monitor their progress. A more detailed report based on our analyses of existing statistics and especially the ‘Growing Up in Ireland’ data will be published soon. We will continue to study especially the childcare arrangements and return to work amongst different family types, and analyse their socio-economic wellbeing. This will be supported by interviews with a range of migrant families to find out their stories and the challenges they perceive.

For further information on this project and to access future publications please contact the project team at NewIrish@tcd.ie