‘New Irish Families’ Newsletter 4: Poverty and Deprivation among migrant families (February 2015)

Welcome to the fourth, and final, newsletter in our series. In this edition we focus on the issue of poverty and deprivation among the families captured in the Growing Up in Ireland infant cohort study. This issue is particularly important given that many of those who migrated to Ireland during the economic boom years were employed in industries most damaged by the subsequent recession, such as construction and service industries.

Previous research has shown that first generation immigrants often find it difficult to translate educational and vocational skills achieved in their home country, to correspondent levels of labour market success in their new country. While there is evidence that their children can achieve better labour market outcomes their ability to do so remains dependent on the social and economic capital of the parents, the ethnic group they belong to and the circumstances of the host society. Therefore, the socio-economic position of migrant families has both a current and long-lasting impact on the well-being of migrant families and their off-spring.

However, it should be noted that migrants living in Ireland are a heterogeneous group, with some more advantaged in the labour market than others, particularly those from English speaking countries outside of Europe and those from Western Europe.

Before describing the situation of the families from the Growing Up in Ireland infant cohort with regard to poverty, work, and social welfare, we first take the opportunity of again describing differences in educational and socio-economic capital between the nationality groups.

**Socio-economic status of the families**

In the second Newsletter in our series, we showed that households from the EU-13 Member States were over-represented in the higher social classes, while those from EU Accession States were mostly found in the skilled, semi-, and un-skilled classes.

With regard to levels of education, migrant mothers were more likely than their Irish peers to have a third level qualification, although Primary Caregivers from Africa had lower overall levels of educational attainment. When examined in tandem however, we found that there was a mismatch between education level and social class which suggests that many individuals from EU Accession states in particular, are employed (if at all) in lower status jobs than might be expected given their level of education.

Finally, in terms of the incomes of the families, households with one or more parents from an EU Accession State were the least likely group to be in the highest income quintile with more than one-third (36.2%) in the lowest quintile. Conversely, households with at least one parent from an EU-13 Member State tended to have higher equivalised household incomes than other groups.

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In light of this information, it is important that we look in greater detail at the economic situation of the families with a view to better understanding the impact of their socio-economic status on their living standards, and importantly to see if some migrant groups, are more disadvantaged in this regard, relative to others.

**Basic Deprivation Scale**

Growth Up in Ireland provided the opportunity to compare the living standards of the families by means of a measure of the levels of deprivation experienced by each household. The specific indicator used was the Basic Deprivation Scale\(^5\). This multi-item indicator recorded information on the ability of the families to afford items across eleven domains which included food; heating; clothing; furniture; and being able to afford to engage in family and social life. Households were then defined as deprived when they were considered marginalised on two aspects – income and basic deprivation. Based on this criteria, 38.3% of households were considered to experience basic deprivation.

As shown in Figure 1, Irish households (36.3%) and those with at least one parent from the U.K. (37.7%) or EU-13 (36.9%) member states had a similar profile, with a little over one-third reporting being deprived. On the other hand, the largest proportion of families defined as deprived were those with one or both parents from Africa (58.6%) and EU Accession States (49.3%).

Figure 1. Percentage of households classified as deprived on two or more items

Making ends meet

An alternative method of assessing the comparative levels of poverty among the families was provided by information on the degree of ease or difficulty by which the household was able to make ends meet on their weekly or monthly income (Figure 2, below). Mirroring the earlier results, households with one or both parents from Africa reported the most difficulty in making ends meet with almost three-quarters of these households reporting at least some difficulty (70.8%). Similarly, more than half of household from EU Accession States (55.4%) also reported at least some difficulty making ends meet. Again, households with at least one parent from an EU-13 country were the most advantaged group with one-third (35%) reporting any difficulty making ends meet on a weekly or monthly basis.

Figure 2. Percentage of households who expressed difficulty in making ends meet

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**Labour market participation**

Before examining the level of social welfare usage among the families, we must first describe the situation of the mothers with regard to their participation in the labour market. Prior to giving birth to the Study Child, 55% of mothers were in full-time employment with a further 22.2% employed on a part-time basis. Mothers from EU-13 countries (63.5%) and the Accession States (61.3%) were the most likely to have been employed full-time prior to the birth of their child. By the time the Study Child was nine-months-old, a sizeable proportion of mothers had withdrawn from the labour market. While we expect that some mothers chose not to return to work, others may have been prevented from doing so for a number of reasons, not least the high cost of non-parental childcare which is most keenly felt by single parent, and lower income families, as well as households without practical support from extended family and other informal networks.

The percentage of mothers employed full-time had reduced from 55%, prior to giving birth, to 30.2% by the time their child was nine-months-old, a reduction of 45.1% in the full-time employment rate. The employment status of the mothers at nine-months is presented in Figure 3 below. The largest decrease in full-time employment was among mothers from EU Accession States, whose full-time employment rate decreased from 61.3% to 20.4%, a reduction of 66.7%. In contrast to the other groups, full-time employment among Asian mothers increased during this period from 49.3% to 58.1%.

**Social Welfare usage**

In this final section, we turn our attention to aspects of social welfare usage among the families. Firstly, we show the percentage of families in receipt of any of the available social welfare payments (Figure 4). Overall, 21% of households received at least one form of social welfare payment. While the proportion of families receiving a payment was broadly similar across the nationality groups, households with at least one parent from an EU Accession state (30%) or an African country (28%) were more likely to be in receipt of at least one payment, while those from an EU-13 country were less likely with 14% of this group doing so.

**Figure 4. Percentage of households in receipt of any social welfare payment**
These figures reflect the broader socio-economic status of the nationality groups, with some groups more likely to be in oftentimes precarious and/or low paid employment.

Moving on to some specific payments, we found that 8% of all households were in receipt of rent or mortgage supplement. As shown in Figure 5, a higher proportion of families, whom we have shown previously to have lower incomes on average and a higher propensity to be headed by a single parent, receive support in meeting the costs of their rent or mortgage payments. Given that this information was collected in early 2008, when the full effect of Ireland entering the economic downturn was yet to be felt, it is likely that the number of households across all nationality groups receiving this support will have increased in the interim period.

Figure 5. Percentage of households in receipt of rent or mortgage supplement

Finally, Figure 6 shows the percentage of households in which at least one member was in receipt of jobseekers benefit. Overall, 5.8% of the families included someone in receipt of jobseekers benefit. The highest proportion (10.3%) was found among households with at least one parent from an EU Accession state. Household from the U.K. followed next with 7.4% in receipt of this payment. The percentages across the other groups were broadly similar with less than six percent of each receiving jobseeker benefit.

Figure 6. Percentage of households in receipt of jobseekers benefit

Project news

As this is our final newsletter, we wish to take the opportunity to again express our gratitude to both the Growing Up in Ireland research study team, and crucially, all of the families who took the time to contribute to such a valuable resource. We also thank the Irish Research Council, for funding the ‘New Irish Families’ project.

In the coming months, results of the qualitative part of the ‘New Irish Families’ project will be published in Volume 2 of the Children’s Research Digest, published by the Children’s Research Network for Ireland and Northern Ireland. A full report containing these results will also be published soon and made available on the MERC website (www.tcd.ie/merc).

Finally, thank you! We greatly appreciate your having taken an interest in our work and wish you and your colleagues a fruitful and productive future.

Dr Antje Röder (PI); Dr Mark Ward; and Dr Carmen Frese. Email: NewIrish@tcd.ie