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THE RE-EMERGENCE OF EMIGRATION FROM IRELAND

NEW TRENDS IN AN OLD STORY

By Irial Glynn
with Tomás Kelly and Piaras Mac Éinrí

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Executive Summary

No country in Europe has been as affected by emigration over the past two centuries as Ireland. Beginning with the exodus of 1.25 million people during the Great Irish Famine, large-scale emigration has become a fact of life. Two surges of 20th-century emigration—first in the 1950s, when the country lost nearly 15 percent of its population, and then again in the 1980s—seemed to be reversed by a period of unprecedented economic growth from the early 1990s to 2007, as Ireland welcomed a large number of immigrants. However, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis, the number of people leaving Ireland more than tripled between 2008 and 2012—placing emigration in the public and political spotlight once again.

Today's flows differ significantly from those of the past in that a significant percentage of those leaving are immigrants returning home or migrating elsewhere. In previous decades, the vast majority of emigrants were Irish citizens. Another point of contrast is that, today, most Irish emigrants are well educated. While this in part reflects the improved educational attainment of the country as a whole, new data indicate that university graduates are overrepresented among those leaving—62 percent of recent emigrants of the age 25-34 cohort, versus 47 percent of the same cohort of the population, lending some credence to worries about “brain drain.”

No country in Europe has been as affected by emigration over the past two centuries as Ireland.

Ireland's unprecedented financial downturn in the wake of the global recession—real gross national product (GNP) declined by more than 10 percent, and unemployment and underemployment combined to reach 23 percent of the workforce—provided a significant impetus for people to leave. This was especially true for workers in sectors such as construction, which was decimated by the recession. Underemployment and lack of job satisfaction also spurred many people to leave. Nearly 50 percent of recent emigrants were in fact employed in full-time jobs before leaving (and another 13 percent employed part-time), but some reported being unsatisfied with their long-term career prospects (or those of their spouse) or were employed on temporary contracts and lacked certainty about the future. Some simply found better opportunities abroad; this was especially true for information technology (IT) and health professionals with skills in demand in other countries.

While the United Kingdom is still the single most popular destination for Irish emigrants, the majority of those leaving are going to non-European destinations (namely Australia, the United States, Canada, and New Zealand—alongside emerging destinations in the Gulf States). However, since most of those traveling to destinations outside Europe are on temporary permits, it remains to be seen whether this trend is sustainable.

The burning political question is: how can the state ensure that many of these emigrants will return to Ireland? The booming economic growth of 1995 to 2007—when Ireland was referred to as the “Celtic Tiger”—enticed many 1980s-era emigrants to return. Economic growth, it is clear, is a key factor in attracting emigrants home. But it is unlikely that Ireland will go through another comparable cycle of growth in the near future, considering the long-lasting effects that recessions can have on domestic



economies as hard-hit as Ireland's, not to mention the consequences of persisting bank debt.¹

A more attainable goal is a stable economy characterized by low unemployment and sustained growth. Of course, this will not guarantee that all emigrants will return; more attractive options may exist elsewhere, and some emigrants may have put down roots in their adopted homes. But perhaps Ireland can still benefit from the expertise of its citizens abroad.

In order to benefit from its citizens abroad, the Irish government must first develop a more accurate understanding of who these people are and what motivates them.

A global diaspora is both a potential resource and an important obligation.² The relationship is two-sided. If Ireland is to utilize the skills of Irish abroad, it needs to provide something in return. One way is to allow the Irish abroad to have a voice in domestic political and social debates through certain voting entitlements, which would nurture their connection with (and voice in) their country of origin. But in order to benefit from its citizens abroad, the Irish government must first develop a more accurate understanding of who these people are and what motivates them. Establishing a census of Irish emigrants—capturing the numbers, destinations, and skills of those abroad—could be a first step to building more durable links between Ireland and its overseas citizens.

I. Introduction

In the aftermath of the global financial crisis, Ireland has again experienced emigration flows on a much greater scale than most of its Western European counterparts. While the current exodus may have helped to reduce national unemployment figures, it has also caused the loss of many talented young people whom Ireland paid dearly to educate.

This report analyzes the impact of emigration on Irish society, both in past decades and today. It uses original data from the EMIGRE project (“EMIGration and the propensity to Return;” see Box 1 for more information) to disaggregate outflows of Irish nationals from those of immigrants, and to shed light on who is emigrating, where they are going, and what is motivating their departure—information that was previously inaccessible using data from the Irish Central Statistics Office alone (see Box 1). The report then analyzes the tools policymakers may use to encourage the return of some of their talented diaspora members—and to engage others while they are still abroad in order to mitigate the widely feared specter of “brain drain.”

1 For a detailed examination of the impact that economic crises can have on national economies, see Carmen Reinhart and Kenneth Rogoff, *This Time Is Different: Eight Centuries of Financial Folly* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009). John Bruton, a former Irish prime minister, recently stirred controversy when he suggested that Ireland would face austerity budgets for the next ten years. See Ronan McGreevy, “John Bruton: Ireland faces 10 more years of austerity budgets,” *Irish Times*, May 28, 2014, www.irishtimes.com/business/economy/john-bruton-ireland-faces-10-more-years-of-austerity-budgets-1.1812651.

2 Delphine Ancien, Mark Boyle, and Rob Kitchin, “Exploring Diaspora Strategies: Lessons for Ireland” (NIRSA Working Paper, National University of Ireland Maynooth, Maynooth, June 2009), 4.



Box I. Methodology: Data Challenges and Solutions

In recent years, researchers have had to rely on the Quarterly National Household Surveys (QNHS) of the Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO) for annual migration estimates. Unfortunately, this is not a consistently reliable source, as was demonstrated by the 2011 census, which showed that the CSO QNHS underestimated Ireland's immigrant population by almost 100,000.

In addition, these surveys provide only broad data—masking huge variation within nationalities and age groups. New data generated by the EMIGRE project (described below) tell us, for example, that the vast majority of emigrants (more than 70 percent) are in their twenties. This is obscured by CSO data, which group people ages 25 to 44 in the same cohort despite the fact that this encompasses people at very different life stages. People in their mid-twenties are much more inclined to emigrate because they are at the early stages of their career and many are without children and have no mortgages—unlike many people in their early forties.

There are multiple difficulties trying to establish where Irish emigrants are going. The main problem is that the CSO does not distinguish between Irish nationals and immigrants when providing data on the destinations of those leaving. This means that it is impossible to know the nationality of the estimated 17,900 people who emigrated to the United Kingdom in 2014, for example, using the CSO's statistics alone. Studying immigration data from receiving countries alongside that of CSO helps—for example, almost 16,400 Irish people applied for national insurance numbers to enable them to work in the United Kingdom during the same time period covered by the CSO. However, such comparisons, too, are inconclusive: some Irish who emigrated to the United Kingdom during this period may have already possessed a national insurance number, and some need not have applied for these numbers at all (e.g., children, students, partners, etc.).

The EMIGRE project carried out at University College Cork between October 2012 and September 2013 helps fill some of these gaps. The study adopted a complex but statistically precise strategy to obtain a sample of households in Ireland and among emigrants abroad, which maximized representativeness. This strategy is the critical difference between it and previous studies: the data have a solid statistical foundation and can be generalized to some degree. Furthermore, the project adopted a mixed-methods approach that combined statistics with quotations from emigrants to illustrate people's personal experiences. The results detailed in this report are generated from more than 900 responses to 22 household surveys carried out in 17 counties around Ireland, over 1,000 responses to an online emigrant survey, more than 500 responses to a jobs fair survey, and over 60 in-depth interviews with emigrants abroad.

Historical Overview and Demographic Trends

Approximately 10 million people have emigrated from the island of Ireland since 1800.³ Considering that the island's population—North and South—today stands at 6.4 million, the number of people who have left in the last 200 years is extraordinary. Emigration is an important part of the Irish story. Every generation of Irish people in the last two centuries has had some experience of migration, whether their own or that of family members and friends. The scale of departure skyrocketed from the mid-1840s onwards with the onset of the Great Irish Famine. During that disaster, more than 1 million people died and approximately 1.25 million people fled the island.⁴ As a result of death and emigration, the country's population dropped from a high of almost 8.5 million in the mid-1840s to 6.5 million in 1851.⁵ Millions

3 Enda Delaney, *Irish Emigration since 1921* (Dublin: Economic and Social History Society of Ireland, 2002), 1.

4 William J. Smyth, "The Story of the Great Irish Famine 1845–1852: A Geographical Perspective," in *of the Great Irish Famine*, eds. John Crowley, William J. Smyth, and Mike Murphy (Cork: Cork University Press, 2012), 4–12.

5 Timothy Hatton and Jeffrey Williamson, "After the Famine: Emigration from Ireland, 1850–1913," *The Journal of Economic History* 53, no. 3 (1993): 575–600.



more followed, particularly in the 1850s and 1880s, so that the island's population stood at only 4.4 million in 1911. At a time when most Western European countries' populations increased substantially, Ireland's shrunk. The emigration of so many during the famine led to the establishment of huge Irish communities abroad, particularly in the United States—by then the destination of choice for the vast majority. No other European country contributed as many emigrants per capita to the New World during the so-called age of mass migration (between the mid-19th century and the start of the First World War) as did Ireland.⁶

Even after the southern two-thirds of the island gained independence in 1922, emigration continued—although this time most people went to England rather than America. The introduction of new U.S. immigration restrictions in the 1920s and the worsening state of the American economy after 1929, led to growing emigration to Ireland's former colonial master across the Irish Sea. During World War II, as many as 150,000 Irish traveled to Britain.⁷ Even more were to follow after the war. Emigrants in the 1950s were predominantly unskilled and from rural counties that contained a high proportion of small farms, many in the western part of the country. Commentators have variously referred to the 1950s in Ireland as the decade of “doom and gloom,” the “worst decade since the famine,” and the “lost decade.”⁸ In the 1950s more than 400,000 people (net) emigrated. The recently founded Republic of Ireland's population stood at less than 3 million; to lose almost 15 percent of that population in one decade—many of them very young and left to gain employment abroad—was astonishing. Indeed, Ireland shared the ignominy of being the only country in Europe, apart from East Germany, to see its population decline in the 1950s.⁹ As the state-sponsored Commission on Emigration noted in the mid-1950s, emigration became “a part of the generally accepted pattern of life.”¹⁰

No other European country contributed as many emigrants per capita to the New World during the so-called age of mass migration ... as did Ireland.

Despite departing the country in droves, Irish emigrants still made a substantial contribution to life at home through remittances, which constituted 3.2 percent of national personal income in 1960. For certain areas of the country, particularly on the western seaboard, remittances were an essential part of the economy, making up 10.5 percent, for example, of personal income in a region in the west of Ireland (Mayo) that had experienced huge emigration.¹¹

Emigration decreased substantially during the 1960s, as the Irish economy developed. But after a borrowing and spending spree in the 1970s and a second oil price shock in 1979, enormous economic problems developed in 1980s Ireland. National debt rocketed while the number of people at work remained relatively static, despite huge growth in the labor market spurred by the 1960s baby boom.

6 Cormac Ó Gráda, “Across the Briny Ocean: Some Thoughts on Irish Emigration to America, 1800–1850,” in *Ireland and Scotland, 1600–1850*, eds. Thomas M. Devine and David Dickson (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1983), 118–30.

7 Enda Delaney, *The Irish in Post-War Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17.

8 Cormac Ó Gráda, *A Rocky Road: The Irish Economy since the 1920s* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997); Brian Girvin, “Political Culture, Political Independence and Economic Success in Ireland,” *Irish Political Studies* 12, no. 1 (1997): 48–77; Dermot Keogh, Finbarr O’Shea, and Carmel Quinlan, eds., *The Lost Decade: Ireland in the 1950s* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2004).

9 Mary Daly, *Slow Failure. Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920–1973* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 183.

10 Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems 1948–54, *Reports* (Dublin: Commission on Emigration and Other Population Problems, 1956), 137.

11 Miceal Ross, “Further Data on County Incomes in the Sixties” (ESRI Papers No. 64, Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, 1972), referenced in National Economic and Social Council (NES), *The Economic and Social Implications of Emigration* (Dublin: NES, 1991), 241.



Increased emigration followed increased unemployment. In excess of 200,000 (net) left Ireland in the 1980s; most departed in the latter part of the decade, as Ireland remained in recession while other countries recovered.¹²

In contrast to the 1950s, emigrants in the 1980s came from diverse parts of the country and were much better educated than their predecessors. But this represented the changing face of Ireland rather than any marked change in emigration patterns. Ireland's political classes, seen as unable to tackle the underlying causes of economic crisis, cited emigration as a positive win-win opportunity for emigrants and Ireland—in contrast to the more pessimistic view of emigration that had dominated earlier debates. The most enduring expression of this viewpoint came from then-Foreign Minister Brian Lenihan, Sr., who noted in an interview with *Newsweek* magazine in 1987: "What we have now is a very literate emigrant, who thinks nothing of coming to the United States and going back to Ireland and maybe on to Germany and back to Ireland again . . . We shouldn't be defeatist or pessimistic about it. We should be proud of it. After all, we can't all live on a small island."¹³

Emigration's resurgence is one of the most debated and sensitive social topics in Ireland today.

Ireland experienced an unprecedented period of economic growth from the mid-1990s to 2007. Having reached a peak of more than 70,000 emigrants in 1989, annual emigration decreased substantially thereafter. Prime Minister Bertie Ahern noted in his resignation speech in April 2008 that he was proud to have "brought an end to the days of forced emigration."¹⁴ Indeed, Ireland received an unprecedented amount of immigrants during this period of growth. But in the wake of the collapse of the Irish banking system in 2008 and the subsequent economic crisis, emigration rose substantially. The number of Irish people leaving more than tripled between 2008 and 2012. Emigration's resurgence is one of the most debated and sensitive social topics in Ireland today.

II. Current Emigration Flows: Who Is Leaving and Where Are They Going?

The overall picture of who is leaving is a complex one. CSO estimates that almost 81,000 people left the country in the 12 months between April 2014 and April 2015.¹⁵ This exceeds even the highest rates of emigration in the 1950s and 1980s. Yet, there is a significant difference between what happened then and what is happening today, in terms of the nationality, gender, skill level, and education of those leaving—in addition to the change in total population size in recent decades.

In earlier decades, the vast majority of people who left were Irish citizens. Today, immigrants make up a significant proportion of those leaving. It is important to note—when comparing the scale of today's

12 Damien Courtney estimates that between 1982 and 1993, 472,300 people emigrated from the country and 263,500 entered. See Damien Courtney, "Demographic Structure and Change in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland," in *Irish Society: Sociological Perspectives*, eds. Patrick Clancy, Sheelagh Drudy, Kathleen Lynch, and Liam O'Dowd (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1995), 39–89.

13 Brian Lenihan, interview in *Newsweek*, October 13, 1987.

14 Bertie Ahern, "An Taoiseach's Resignation Speech," April 2, 2008, www.rte.ie/news/special-reports/2008/0402/101535-ahernspeech/.

15 Central Statistics Office (CSO), "Population and Migration 2015," accessed August 26, 2015, www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2015/.

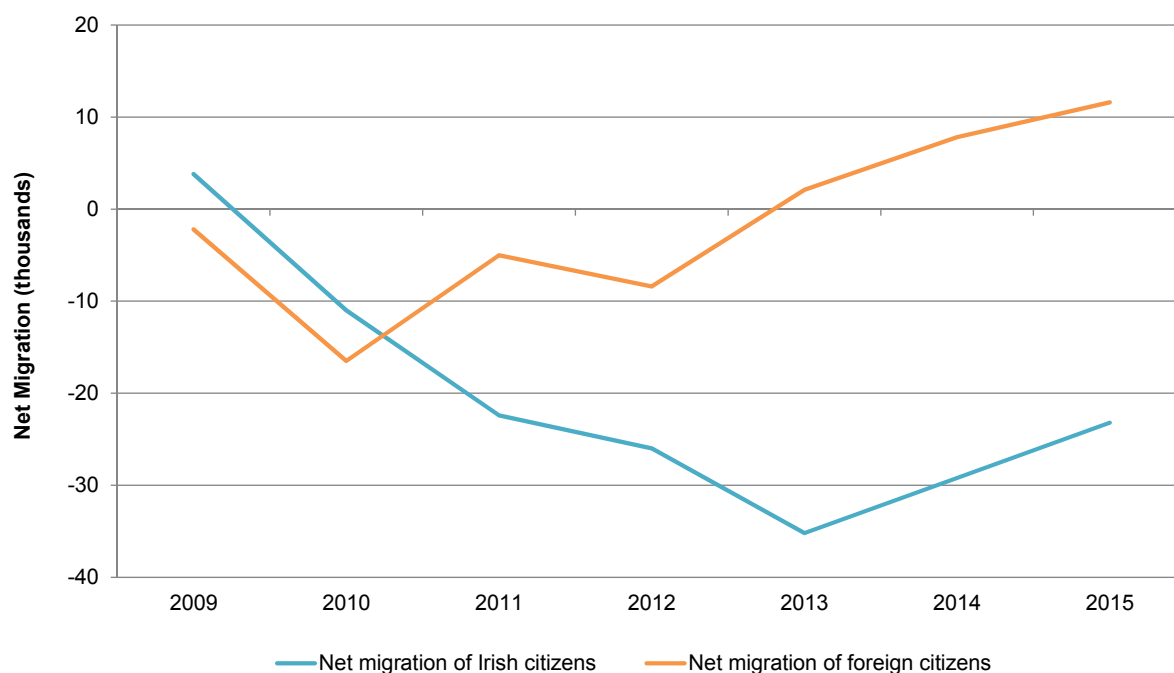
emigration with that of previous decades—that the Republic of Ireland’s population measured in excess of 4.5 million in 2011, compared with less than 3.0 million in the 1950s and 3.5 million in the 1980s.

Between April 2009 and April 2015, more than 295,000 foreign citizens departed from Ireland but approximately 285,000 new immigrants arrived, resulting in a negative net migration rate of just over 10,000 for foreign citizens.¹⁶ During the same period, slightly less than 265,000 Irish citizens left the country while around 120,000 Irish citizens returned to live in Ireland, leaving a net migration rate of -143,000 citizens in these seven years. Thus, recent emigration flows have had a greater impact on the net migration of Irish citizens than on that of foreign citizens (see Figure 1).

In earlier decades, the vast majority of people who left were Irish citizens. Today, immigrants make up a significant proportion of those leaving.

Reflecting the magnitude of this impact, as well as time and budgetary constraints, the EMIGRE study¹⁷ focused on Irish citizens. Moreover, Irish citizens have been at the epicenter of most political and public debate surrounding emigration.

Figure 1. Net Migration from Ireland, by Nationality, 2009-15



Source: Irish Central Statistics Office (CSO), “Population and Migration Estimates, April 2014 and 2015,” Table 2, www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2015/.

16 Calculated from figures provided in *ibid*, Table 2, “Estimated Migration classified by Sex and Nationality, 2010-2015;” CSO, “Population and Migration 2014,” Table 2, “Estimated Migration classified by Sex and Nationality, 2009-2014,” accessed August 27, 2015, www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2014/.

17 Irial Glynn, Tomás Kelly, and Piaras Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity* (Cork: University College Cork, 2013).



A. Profile of Emigrants

I. Skill Profile

The improved educational standards of Ireland in recent decades are reflected in the educational attainment of those departing. Even so, today's emigrants are much more likely to have a higher level of education than their peers who remain. Fears of "brain drain," therefore, are not misplaced. While 47 percent of Irish people ages 25 to 34 hold a tertiary qualification of three years or more, 62 percent of recent Irish emigrants in the same age bracket hold the equivalent qualification, suggesting that university graduates are overrepresented among those leaving.¹⁸ Very few of the emigrants identified in the EMIGRE study did not have at least an upper secondary education or the equivalent. In some cases, emigrants had left school after receiving their junior certificates at approximately age 15, but had then gone on to complete four-year apprenticeships or various courses at a level equivalent to upper secondary education or higher.

These data raise an important issue concerning Irish citizens living in marginal situations. They do not appear to have the skills required to move. This contrasts sharply with the past, when unskilled migrants featured prominently, particularly in the 1950s but also in the 1980s. The 2004 enlargement of the European Union (EU) and the United Kingdom's decision to allow citizens from the new accession states to have full access to its labor market prompted the inflow of large numbers of unskilled (and overskilled) migrants. Unskilled migrants from many newer EU Member States can expect higher wages in the United Kingdom than at home, whereas wages in Ireland are on par with those of the United Kingdom.¹⁹ This might help to explain why unskilled (and also overskilled) Lithuanians and Romanians, for example, are still emigrating in large numbers but unskilled Irish are not.

Today's emigrants are much more likely to have a higher level of education than their peers who remain.

2. Rural versus Urban Origins

The traditional cliché of the rural Irish emigrant no longer holds in this increasingly urban society, but emigration from rural Ireland is still disproportionately higher than from Irish towns and cities. Furthermore, remote rural areas with weak agrifood economies have had to grapple with the effects of the crisis—especially persistently high unemployment—much more than rural areas with easy access to large towns or cities.²⁰ This has inevitably resulted in higher emigration rates from the most remote areas in Ireland.

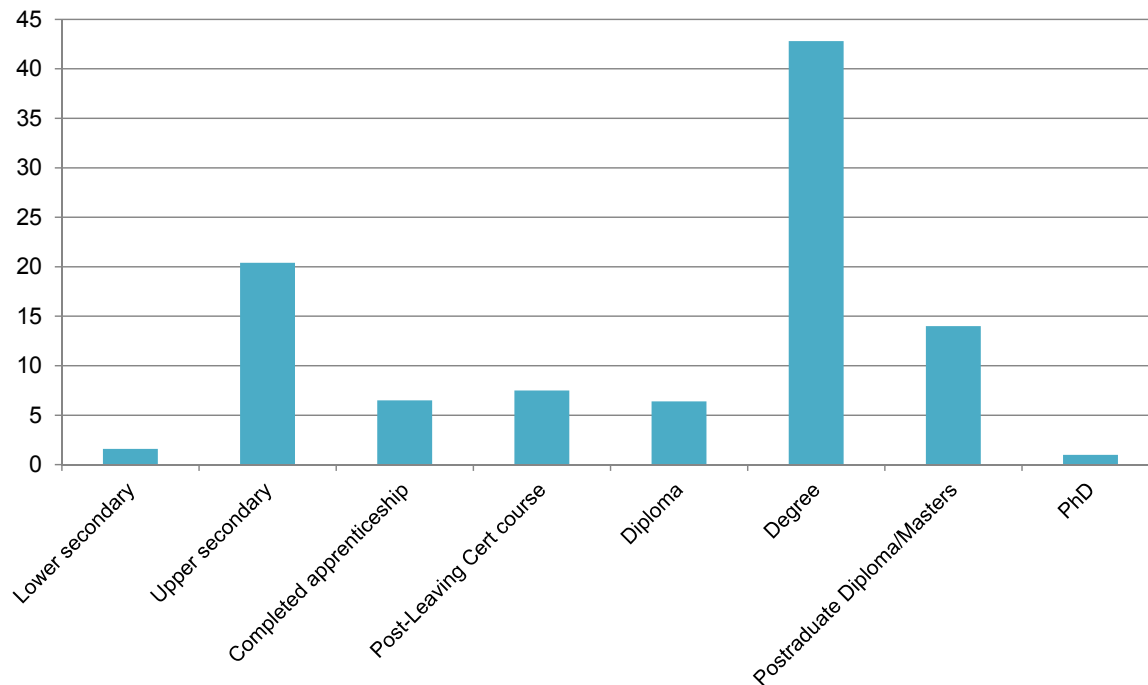
18 Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2013), 15; Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 29.

19 Readers can compare wages across the European Union on Eurostat's "Wages and Labour Costs" information sheet, accessed May 30, 2014, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php/Wages_and_labour_costs.

20 David Meredith, "Rural Ireland: Decades of Change," *TResearch* 8, no. 4 (2013): 36–37, www.researchgate.net/publication/259573283_Rural_Ireland_Decades_of_Change.



Figure 2. Education Levels of Emigrants, 2008-13



Source: Data collected as part of the EMIGRE project; see Irial Glynn, Tomás Kelly, and Piaras Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 35.

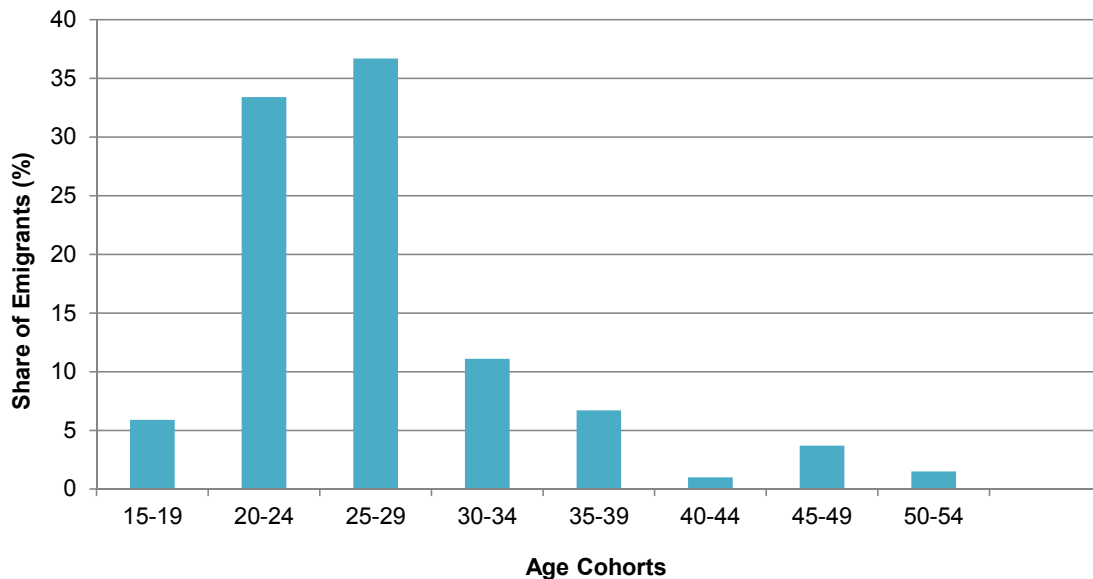
3. Gender and Age Composition

Ireland is somewhat unusual compared to other West European countries in that women have always composed a significant portion of overall emigrants, at times actually exceeding men, as occurred in the late 1940s. CSO data for 2006 show rough gender parity in the numbers of Irish emigrants, with a slight majority of women. A clear spike of emigration among men is visible in the data for 2009, when men emigrated at a rate almost double that of women. It is reasonable to speculate that the collapse of the construction industry and the resultant rise of male unemployment was one of the main drivers. Thereafter, male emigration continued to climb—but so, too, did female emigration. The national ratio over the seven years 2009-15 is 56:44, male to female, demonstrating that men left in slightly larger numbers during this period.

The EMIGRE study found that the vast majority of emigrants, in excess of 70 percent, are in their twenties when they depart. There is a roughly equal divide between the 20-24 and 25-29 age cohorts. More than 15 percent of emigrants are in their thirties, with approximately twice as many in their early thirties (30-34) than their mid- and late thirties (35-39).



Figure 3. Age of Irish Emigrants at Departure (%), 2008-13



Source: Data collected as part of the EMIGRE project.

B. Primary Destinations of Emigrants

From a close analysis of the CSO and receiving states' statistics, it is clear that the United Kingdom has remained the top destination for Irish emigrants since 2009. Australia ranks as the second most popular, followed by the United States, New Zealand, and Canada. However, Canada has increased the amount of working visas granted to Irish citizens in recent years, leading to a rise in the numbers bound for Canada and a notable decline in the Irish targeting Australia. The Gulf States have become more popular, although the annual flows to individual countries remain relatively small as Irish emigrants disperse across the region.²¹ Continental European destinations—such as Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and Germany—continue to attract small numbers of Irish emigrants, although they appear to be down from the 1980s' figures (Brussels is a possible exception).²² This decrease is due to the effects that the eurozone crisis had on states' economies and due to Irish emigrants insufficient knowledge of the local languages.

It is clear that the United Kingdom has remained the top destination for Irish emigrants since 2009.

The estimated number of people going to non-European destinations includes those on initial temporary permits, such as those Irish citizens who enter Australia on one- or two-year working holiday visas or with skilled work permits of a limited duration. However, Irish migrants can change their status over time. For example, many Irish migrants who managed to attain permanent residency in Australia first arrived on a temporary working holiday visa, then obtained a four-year skilled work permit supported by an Australian

21 Ciara Kenny, "Riding out the recession in the Middle East," *Irish Times*, December 14, 2012, www.irishtimes.com/blogs/generationemigration/2012/12/14/riding-out-the-recession-in-the-middle-east/.

22 See, for example, Statistisches Bundesamt, *Bevölkerung und Erwerbstätigkeit* (Wiesbaden: Statistisches Bundesamt, 2013), 18.



employer, and finally gained permanency.²³ There remain many unknowns, including the future state of the Australian economy and the fact that only a minority of Irish migrants to Australia arrive on high-skill (457) visas or via other routes that might easily lead to a longer-term or permanent stay. Many of those on short-term working holiday visas are likely to find themselves unable to remain after the maximum period of 24 months has expired.

C. Motivations for Emigration

The recession has had a major impact on Irish emigration trends. Before the economic downturn, many Irish citizens left for lifestyle reasons. Since 2008, however, more and more people have emigrated for work-related reasons. This is understandable, considering the massive upheaval experienced by Irish society in recent years. As the economists Donal Donovan and Antoine Murphy have argued: “The scale of the economic and financial catastrophe that befell Ireland was virtually unprecedented in post-war industrial country history.”²⁴ Between 2008 and 2011, real Irish GNP declined by more than 10 percent.²⁵ In the first quarter of 2008 unemployment measured 5 percent, and by early 2012 it exceeded 15 percent. Critically, national unemployment rates do not include the considerable number of underemployed people within the Irish population who are working part-time but in search of full-time employment. In April 2013 the International Monetary Fund (IMF) calculated that more than 23 percent of the Irish labor force was either unemployed or underemployed.²⁶ In early 2015, Ireland’s unemployment fell below 10 percent for the first time since 2009. Somewhat predictably, the emigration of Irish citizens has fallen somewhat in 2014 and 2015 but the decrease has not been that notable and the rate of return has remained low.²⁷

I. The Collapse of the Construction Industry

Certain sectors felt the brunt of the recession more profoundly than others. The construction industry, for instance, had accounted for an unsustainable 25 percent of Irish GNP in 2006, but by 2012 it comprised roughly 6 percent of GNP.²⁸ During roughly the same period, house prices fell in value by more than 50 percent. The number of people working in the construction industry dropped from a peak of 380,000 to approximately 150,000.²⁹ As one emigrant who had just lost a job in construction commented to the EMIGRE project: “Everybody had an idea it was going to go, but we didn’t know it was going to go so fast. We all knew it couldn’t be sustainable the way they were building houses and building, building, building, but we didn’t think it would just go flat overnight.”³⁰

Certain sectors felt the brunt of the recession more profoundly than others.

23 In Australia, for example, 5,209 Irish citizens received permanent residency in 2012-13. During the same time period, 11,817 Irish arrived on initial working holiday visas (WHVs) and 10,290 attained skilled visas (457s)—but many of the latter had originally come to Australia on WHVs. See Australian Department of Immigration and Border Protection, “Country Profile: Ireland,” accessed August 27, 2015, www.border.gov.au/about/reports-publications/research-statistics/statistics/live-in-australia/country-profiles/ireland.

24 Donal Donovan and Antoine Murphy, “The Fall of the Celtic Tiger—What Next?” *The Journal.ie*, September 8, 2013. See also Donovan and Murphy, *The Fall of the Celtic Tiger: Ireland and the Euro Debt Crisis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

25 Economic and Social Research Council, “Irish Economy,” accessed April 11, 2014.

26 International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Ireland: Ninth Review under the Extended Arrangement*, IMF Country Report No. 13/93 (Washington, DC: IMF, 2013), 26, www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2013/cr1393.pdf.

27 Ciara Kenny, “More jobs not having expected impact on migration figures,” *Irish Times*, August 27, 2015, www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/generation-emigration/more-jobs-not-having-expected-impact-on-migration-figures-1.2329603.

28 Forfás, *Ireland’s Construction Sector: Outlook and Strategic Plan to 2015* (Dublin: Forfás, 2013), vi.

29 Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland, *The Irish Construction Industry in 2012* (Dublin: Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland, 2012), 6.

30 Male, age 25-29, carpenter, Australia. Quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 39.



The demise of the construction industry had an especially acute effect on men, who held the bulk of jobs in the sector. Male unemployment tripled from early 2008 to the middle of 2010. The crisis also caused a notable downturn in employment in manufacturing and retail, as consumer spending decreased across Ireland and its export markets. People who once worked in these sectors are clearly visible in the overall emigration statistics that EMIGRE has accumulated. More than 17 percent of Irish emigrants worked in construction or a related industry; their numbers include tradesmen, civil engineers, architects, quantity surveyors, among many others. Similarly, 7 percent of emigrants had previously been employed in manufacturing and engineering, while 5 percent worked in the wholesale and retail trade in Ireland.³¹

2. Hiring and Promotion Freezes

In March 2009 the state published details of a recruitment and promotion moratorium in the public service, affecting the civil service, local authorities, noncommercial state bodies, the Garda Síochána, and the Permanent Defense Forces.³² A modified version applied to the health and education sectors. The ensuing Croke Park Agreement between the unions and the state led to a significant number of early retirements and little or no hiring of replacements. It also led to stagnation within many state organizations. As one health employee who had moved to Australia commented: “You could not transfer between jobs because of the moratorium that was in place. Therefore there were no options . . . if somebody left a job, they were not replaced, for the most part. So you were stuck where you were.”³³ The recruitment moratorium also meant that school and university graduates hoping to work as Gardai or teachers, for example, had limited options in Ireland. Similarly, many of those who aimed to work in the health sector—such as nurses, physiotherapists, and occupational therapists—had few employment options following graduation.

Contrary to what many people might expect, 47 percent of recent emigrants were in fact employed in full-time jobs before leaving.

3. Underemployment and Insecure Work

Contrary to what many people might expect, 47 percent of recent emigrants were in fact employed in full-time jobs before leaving. But of the remaining 53 percent, underemployment was a major driving factor, with 13 percent of emigrants working in part-time jobs before their departure. Of the 23 percent of emigrants who were unemployed before departing, many were recent graduates who left to obtain job experience.

It is extremely important to remember that although unemployment and underemployment are significant drivers of emigration, other factors that prompt people to leave need to be acknowledged. Some who possessed full-time jobs prior to departure left because they wanted to travel and to experience other cultures. Many such people held qualifications that other countries covet, such as valuable IT or health-care skills.³⁴ Others were dissatisfied with their career prospects amid economic stagnation. Those with short-term and temporary contracts sought more certainty by emigrating. As one recent Irish emigrant recounted: “I was temporary; I wasn’t permanent, so I never knew when my last day was going to be. I was always in that position, so that was another reason why I decided I needed to make myself permanent in a position somewhere.”³⁵ Others had partners or spouses who could not find jobs—or went to live with spouses residing abroad—adding yet another piece to the already complex puzzle of

31 Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 39.

32 RTÉ, “Public Service Recruitment Moratorium Details,” March 27, 2009, www.rte.ie/news/2009/0327/115669-economy1/.

33 Male, age 35-39, nurse educator, Australia; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 39.

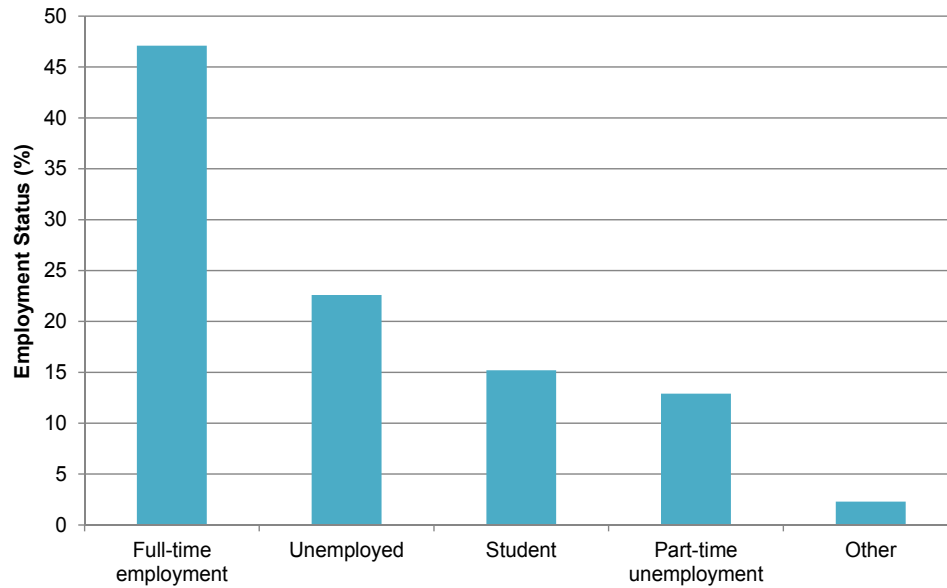
34 This has been the source of some controversy. See, for instance, Dr. Cian McDermott’s letter to the *Irish Times*, June 3, 2014, www.irishtimes.com/opinion/letters/recruiting-staff-for-health-service-1.1817772.

35 Female, age 20-24, student, United Kingdom; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 43.



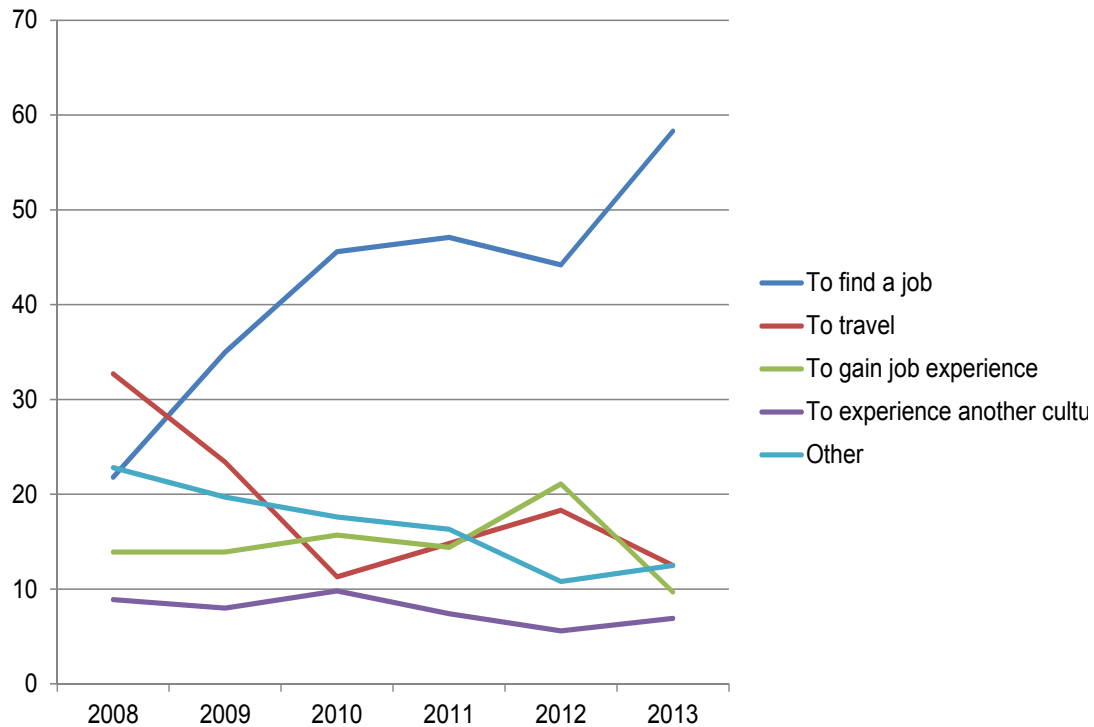
interlinking factors motivating emigration.

Figure 4. Employment Status of Emigrants before Departure, 2008-13 (%)



Source: EMIGRE, quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 40.

Figure 5. Reasons for Departure of Irish Emigrants, 2008-13 (%)



Source: EMIGRE; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 38.



III. How Emigration Is Perceived

The topic of emigration is an emotional one in Ireland. The media and politicians alike often discuss emigration without putting it in context, fueling public uncertainty over the scale of departure. For example, commentators on emigration rarely point out that almost half of those leaving Ireland today are immigrants returning home or moving to a third country.³⁶ Much of the discussion on emigration is couched in historical references. One newspaper article from December 2012, for example, (falsely) noted that emigration had “surged to levels not experienced since the famine.”³⁷ References to the “scourge of emigration” are still frequent in media reporting on the matter.³⁸

Much more fine-grained language is needed that should address, above all, the varied experiences and expectations of Irish migrants.

The media and opposition parties consistently portray emigration as an overwhelmingly negative trend. Politicians in office, by contrast, attempt to describe emigration in much more positive terms. Much of this more balanced and even positive view of emigration does indeed reflect the nuanced realities of contemporary Irish emigration. But there has also been a temptation on the part of Ireland’s political classes to stress a more positive view of emigration for self-serving reasons. This approach has proved hugely controversial. The former Deputy Prime Minister, Mary Coughlan, and the current Finance Minister, Michael Noonan, provoked outrage in recent years when they suggested that people leave to “enjoy themselves” or as part of a “lifestyle choice.”³⁹ Both had to backtrack somewhat after such comments.

The tension between views of emigration as a catastrophe and as a win-win opportunity is regularly featured in political and media discourse. Much more fine-grained language is needed that should address, above all, the varied experiences and expectations of Irish migrants. Moreover, analysts should examine, in an honest and realistic manner, the likelihood of emigrants’ return. In a modern, highly globalized labor economy, there are winners and losers amid the fluid, dynamic, and unpredictable flows and stocks of migrants. None of the dominant discourses in Ireland, whether popular or political, fully capture the complexities—and, indeed, inequalities—inherent in the movement of people in an age of crisis and change.

36 The *Irish Times*’ “Generation Emigration” series is a welcome exception, www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/generation-emigration.

37 Aileen Sheehan, “Emigration ‘at famine levels’ as 200 leave country each day,” *Irish Independent*, December 31, 2012, www.independent.ie/irish-news/emigration-at-famine-levels-as-200-leave-country-each-day-28952883.html. A consultation of data taken from Cormac Ó Gráda, “A Note on Nineteenth-Century Irish Emigration Statistics,” *Population Studies* 29, no. 1 (1975): 143–49, clearly shows that the scale of emigration during the famine was much higher than this. Furthermore, the vast majority of people who left during the famine were Irish, whereas many of those who left recently were immigrants.

38 See, for example, Majella O’Sullivan, “The lost boys of Lixnaw: town laments scourge of emigration,” *Irish Independent*, January 14, 2013, www.independent.ie/irish-news/the-lost-boys-of-lixnaw-town-laments-scourge-of-emigration-28958149.html.

39 *Irish Examiner*, “Coughlan: young people emigrate ‘to enjoy themselves,’” *Irish Examiner*, February 16, 2010, www.irishexaminer.com/ireland/politics/coughlan-young-people-emigrate-to-enjoy-themselves-112270.html#; Fionnan Sheehan, Brendan Keenan, and Louise Hogan, “Family fury as Noonan says young emigrate for lifestyle,” *Irish Independent*, January 20, 2012, www.independent.ie/irish-news/family-fury-as-noonan-says-young-emigrate-for-lifestyle-26813027.html.



Evidence of the Positive and Negative Consequences of Emigration

Recent emigration from Ireland has had both positive and negative consequences for communities and individuals—as well as for the society writ large—though its full ramifications have not yet been felt. In the short term, emigration seems to have benefitted the Irish economy. While 47 percent of emigrants in recent years had full-time jobs prior to leaving, 53 percent did not, and most would presumably have been in search of employment had they not left. Therefore, emigration has likely helped to reduce national unemployment figures. If Irish people had not had access to labor markets outside the European Union in such large numbers, for example, Ireland would not have experienced such a dramatic drop in its unemployment figures between 2013 and 2015. But emigration has real, long-term consequences for Irish society. These include, but are not limited to, issues associated with an increasingly unfavorable age dependency ratio; a reduction in the levels of skilled, educated, and/or young workers; and a reduction of spending in particular sectors of the economy.⁴⁰ Of course, the extent of the impact depends on the size of immigration and the rate of future return of Irish citizens.

The majority of respondents to the EMIGRE household survey carried out across Ireland viewed emigration as having either a “negative” or “very negative” impact on their community.

The emigrant experience appears to generally have been a positive one for those who left in recent years. Emigrants surveyed for the EMIGRE project said they were generally much happier abroad than they had been in Ireland. This is understandable, considering that only 47 percent of emigrants had full-time jobs in Ireland prior to departing, while 84 percent work in full-time jobs abroad. Emigrants gave an average rating of 5.5 out of 10 to their quality of life at home before departure; this increased to 7.9 out of 10 for their quality of life abroad. Emigrants’ satisfaction with their jobs, salaries, and career prospects also improved markedly following their move abroad.⁴¹ On the other hand, poorly planned migration is known to prompt subsequent problems among migrants, so this positive picture does not reflect all experiences.⁴²

Emigration can also have emotional repercussions for those left behind and can act as a catalyst for further emigration. When a parent, child, grandchild, or sibling emigrates, it can have a detrimental impact on family members who stay—in addition to the community at large. The majority of respondents to the EMIGRE household survey carried out across Ireland viewed emigration as having either a “negative” or “very negative” impact on their community (65.5 percent).⁴³ This is not surprising, considering almost half of emigrants were involved in some sort of community activity predeparture. From responses to an open-ended question asking respondents to elaborate on this perceived impact, a series of common themes emerged. The most frequent issues mentioned concerned a loss of the general “vibrancy” and “energy” that is associated with younger residents and a “generation gap;” a decreasing number of people involved in community activities and clubs, as well as an overall reduction in community spirit; and a detrimental impact on local businesses because of decreased spending. A number of people attributed the closure of local pubs, shops, and hotels directly to emigration. As noted earlier, less accessible rural

40 See Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 49–55.

41 *Ibid.*, 65–68.

42 It is difficult to predict the long-term impact of emigration. Many medical and sociological studies have found that migrants suffer higher rates of anxiety and depression, and are at higher risk of psychotic disorders than their peers who stay behind. While recent emigrants appear financially much better off, they sometimes pay an emotional price for leaving. Homesickness is an issue for some. For more information, see Louise Ryan et al., “Depression in Irish Migrants Living in London: Case-Control Study,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 188 (2006): 560–56; Alan Barrett and Irene Mosca, “The Psychic Costs of Migration: Evidence from Irish Return Migrants,” *Journal of Population Economics* 26 (2013): 483–506; Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 70–72.

43 Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 53.



areas felt these ramifications more than other areas. Because of the small size and more close-knit nature of rural communities, the emigration of a community member is more visible than in areas with larger populations. Interestingly, community-based organizations such as the Gaelic Athletic Association and local employers have recently instigated efforts to increase the number of job opportunities available in certain communities to stem emigration and even attract back those who have left since the crisis struck, but it is still too early to assess their effectiveness.⁴⁴

IV. Policy Responses to Emigration

A. Diaspora Engagement

The government appointed its first Minister for Diaspora Affairs, Jimmy Deenihan, in July 2014, and released its first statement of government policy on the diaspora in March 2015.⁴⁵ These recent policies reflect the government's longer-term efforts to become much more involved with its diaspora in recent decades, particularly since 2002.

The onset of the economic crisis encouraged efforts to involve the Irish diaspora in economic business and tourist activity in the country. This led to the establishment of the Global Irish Economic Forum in 2009, the fourth convening of which was held in November 2015. One proposal that emanated from the first forum was the organization of a Global Irish Network, which today comprises more than 350 senior-level Irish and Irish-connected businesspeople based in some 40 countries.⁴⁶ Another idea that emanated from the forum was the creation of the "Gathering," a tourist-led initiative that successfully generated money in the domestic economy by inviting people from the Irish diaspora to visit the country in 2013.

One of the central components of Ireland's diaspora policy centers on providing welfare services to vulnerable Irish citizens living overseas, facilitating further outreach to diaspora communities, and developing better communications strategies.⁴⁷ The government maintained funding for the Emigrant Support Programme—first established in 2004—at 11.6 million euros for 2015, and stated that the program would continue to prioritize welfare services, such as mental health projects. New initiatives included: (a) the first Global Irish Civic Forum to discuss challenges facing diaspora members, (b) the Alumni Challenge Fund to fund Irish institutions' outreach to Irish and non-Irish graduates working overseas, and (c) the Local Diaspora Engagement Fund to help communities connect with their diaspora.⁴⁸ As part of its improved communications strategy, the government also proposed establishing a "Global Irish" hub to provide information on services for emigrants and returnees, and setting up a Global Irish Media Fund to support coverage of the Irish diaspora.

44 Ronan McGreevy, "Rural communities urged to use contacts to bring emigrants home," *Irish Times*, May 9, 2014, www.irishtimes.com/news/social-affairs/rural-communities-urged-to-use-contacts-to-bring-emigrants-home-1.1789622. See also the recent report from the Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas, *Energising Ireland's Rural Economy* (Carlow: Commission for the Economic Development of Rural Areas, 2014), www.agresearch.teagasc.ie/serc/CEDRA/CEDRA_Report.pdf.

45 Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFA), *Global Irish: Ireland's Diaspora Policy, March 2015* (Dublin: DFA, 2015), www.dfa.ie/media/globalirish/global-irish-irelands-diaspora-policy.pdf.

46 Eamon Gilmore, Tanaiste (Deputy Prime Minister) and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, "Welcome," Global Irish Forum website, accessed May 12, 2014, www.globalirishforum.ie.

47 DFA, *Global Irish: Ireland's Diaspora Policy*.

48 Ibid; Department of the Taoiseach, "Minister for Diaspora Affairs, Mr Jimmy Deenihan TD, on announcement of the Local Diaspora Engagement Fund," (news release, May 6, 2015), www.taoiseach.gov.ie/eng/Publications/Publications_2015/Minister_for_Diaspora_Affairs_Mr_Jimmy_Deenihan_TD_on_announcement_of_the_Local_Diaspora_Engagement_Fund.html.



Ireland's recent interest in its diaspora marks a remarkable turnaround from the state's past attitude. Until the 1970s the state had little interest in supporting the Irish diaspora, despite emigrants abroad sending home huge sums of remittances. The first move to assist Irish emigrants came with the setting up of the Committee on Welfare Services Abroad (COWSA) in the 1970s to support vulnerable young Irish emigrants going to the United Kingdom. The Dón Committee superseded COWSA in 1984. Dón acts as the Irish Government's Advisory Committee on Emigrant Welfare in Britain.⁴⁹ Between 1984 and 2002, the Irish state contributed 13 million euros to the Dón Committee, which in turn distributed these funds to various organizations that catered to the Irish community in the United Kingdom. Then, from the late 1990s, the Department of Foreign Affairs began to place much more emphasis on supporting Irish emigrants abroad. In 1998 the Good Friday Agreement led to the incorporation of a new and broader definition of the Irish nation in the Irish Constitution, which includes an acknowledgment that the Irish nation "cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage."⁵⁰

*Ireland's recent interest in its diaspora marks a remarkable
turnaround from the state's past attitude.*

Much of the newfound state interest in the Irish diaspora arose in the wake of the 1999 Harvey Report, commissioned by the Irish Episcopal Commission for Emigrants and the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas. It concluded that the Irish state needed to develop "a coherent and effective policy, funding and service infrastructure for its emigrants abroad."⁵¹ Significantly, it also recommended the establishment of "a time-limited Task Force, coordinated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and involving government departments, state agencies and NGOs, to develop a coherent long-term policy approach to emigration and the needs of emigrants."⁵² Set up in late 2001, the task force on policy regarding emigrants proposed in a 2002 report that the Department of Foreign Affairs should establish a new unit to support the Irish abroad. It also suggested a large increase in official funding for emigrant services.⁵³ As a result of these recommendations, funding for Irish abroad increased substantially thereafter (although not as much as proposed by the task force) and in 2004 the Department of Foreign Affairs established the Emigrant Support Unit, culminating in the appointment of a minister of state in 2014.

B. Return Policies

The state has attempted to attract back Irish emigrants at certain junctures in its history. In the late 1940s, for instance, the newly installed coalition government launched a campaign to bring Irish emigrants living in England back to their homeland, but aborted the effort soon after as the Irish economy worsened.⁵⁴ The state's efforts to tempt back Irish emigrants in the 1990s and early 2000s met with much more success, due to the prosperity and opportunities available during the so-called Celtic Tiger period. In 1996 a state organization, Forbairt, developed a program to bring Irish entrepreneurs back to Ireland to establish businesses. In the late 1990s the state directed the main national employment and training agency, FÁS, to launch a much more extensive and ambitious state scheme to attract skilled migrants home. The Jobs Ireland Programme, which ran from 2000 to 2002, aimed to inform Irish people or people

49 DFA, *Strategic Plan for the Dón Committee* (Dublin: Department of Foreign Affairs, 2007), 9.

50 Article 2, Constitution of Ireland.

51 Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants, *Ireland and the Irish Abroad* (Dublin: Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants, 2002), 11, www.dfa.ie/media/dfa/alldfawebstemedial/ourrolesandpolicies/TaskForceReport.pdf.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 5.

54 Delaney, *The Irish Post-War Britain*, 15.



of Irish descent of employment opportunities in Ireland, with a view to encouraging them to return.⁵⁵ Judging by the number of Irish people who returned to live in Ireland and the increase in immigration from the United Kingdom and the United States during the late 1990s and early 2000s, these policies met with some success.⁵⁶

The 2002 task force report on policy relating to emigrants also focused on return migration—but that of vulnerable and elderly migrants living in the United Kingdom rather than skilled graduate emigrants.⁵⁷ Acknowledged in the report’s discussion of return migration was the work of two charities: the Safe Home program and the Aisling project. Jerry Cowley, the chairman of a voluntary housing association in the Mayo region, set up the Safe Home initiative in 2000 to help older, long-term Irish emigrants attain state-assisted accommodation in Ireland close to where they were raised. Significantly, Safe Home secured an amendment to the state’s housing policy, which enabled older Irish emigrants to be considered for social housing benefits while resident outside the country.⁵⁸ The Aisling project, meanwhile, sought to bring disadvantaged Irish emigrants living in England back to Ireland for short visits. As a result of the recommendations of the task force report, both charities received increased state assistance and support.

C. Voting and Diaspora Rights

Despite these notable improvements in the Irish state’s dealings with its citizens abroad, Irish citizens living outside the jurisdiction of the state cannot vote in general or presidential elections. Emigrants cannot vote in referendums either, as was highlighted during the gay marriage referendum in 2015 when a campaign to bring Irish citizens based abroad “home to vote” garnered much media attention.⁵⁹ Ireland trails behind the rest of Europe—and many countries worldwide—in its attitude toward emigrant voting. Progress on voting rights in Ireland has been slow and, heretofore, ultimately unsuccessful.

In 1991 a Private Members’ Bill was introduced by the then-Labour Party spokesman on emigration that proposed that emigrants would continue to exercise the right to vote for a period of 15 years.⁶⁰ Fine Gael, the main opposition party at the time, followed a different route, with a proposal that an additional three Senate seats should be created in order to give voice to emigrants in that House. Neither succeeded, as the Fianna Fáil-dominated government rejected the proposals. In the mid-1990s the subject of votes for emigrants returned to the political agenda when a later coalition government, consisting principally of Fine Gael and Labour, failed to honor its commitment to implement some form of representation as soon as feasible. The minister responsible had announced, ahead of a keynote speech by President Mary Robinson to the Houses of the Parliament, that three Senate seats for emigrants would be proposed. This did not happen. It was claimed that a practical voting system could not be implemented, even though such systems are the norm in many other countries.

Ireland trails behind the rest of Europe—and many countries worldwide—in its attitude toward emigrant voting.

55 FÁS, “Short History of the Jobs Ireland Programme 2000-2002,” quoted in Katy Hayward and Kevin Howard, “Cherry-picking the Diaspora” in *Immigration and Social Change in the Republic of Ireland*, ed. Bryan Fanning (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 47–62.

56 Hayward and Howard, “Cherry-picking the Diaspora.”

57 Task Force on Policy regarding Emigrants, *Ireland and the Irish Abroad*, 3.

58 Safe Home, “Programme Origins,” accessed May 12, 2014, www.safehomeireland.com/.

59 See, for example, Elena Cresci, “#hometovote: Irish abroad return to vote in gay marriage referendum,” *The Guardian*, May 22, 2015, www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/22/hometovote-irish-abroad-return-vote-twitter-gay-marriage-referendum.

60 *Dáil Debates* 405, no. 9 (March 1991), 5.



The Seventh Report of the All-Party Committee on the Constitution (2002) reported on a submission made by the Irish Emigrant Vote Campaign in early 1999. The report concluded that the right to vote in parliamentary elections should continue to be confined to citizens ordinarily resident in the state, a position that has remained unchanged and was repeated by the then-minister for foreign affairs in reply to a parliamentary question in 2010.⁶¹ The minister mentioned, however, that further consideration would be given to the question of whether emigrants should be given the vote, and under what circumstances, in presidential elections.

In November 2013, 78 percent of the Convention on the Constitution,⁶² which was established by the current Fine Gael/Labour coalition to submit recommendations to the Irish parliament on future amendments to be put forward for public referendum, recommended that Irish citizens resident outside the state should have the right to vote in presidential elections.⁶³ The Irish government has yet to respond to the convention's recommendations, despite the expiry of its own resolution that established a four-month time frame for the government to respond to each recommendation.⁶⁴

The government's recent diaspora policy review acknowledged the "enormous importance" of voting rights to Irish emigrants, though it noted the logistical challenges involved in extending the franchise.

The EMIGRE project addressed the issue of voting rights for Ireland's diaspora in its representative national household survey. The overwhelming majority of the Irish citizens interviewed supported the right of emigrants to vote in presidential (79 percent) and general elections (69 percent) in some form or another.⁶⁵

The government's recent diaspora policy review acknowledged the "enormous importance" of voting rights to Irish emigrants, though it noted the logistical challenges involved in extending the franchise.⁶⁶ As of May 2015, the Ministers for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Diaspora Affairs were conducting an ongoing review of the practical, legal, and policy implications.

61 *Dáil Debates—Written Answers* 699, no. 1 (January 19, 2010).

62 The Convention on the Constitution comprised 66 citizens selected randomly on the basis of gender, age, region, social class, and occupational statistics, and 33 parliamentarians, as well as an independent chairperson. It submitted its final report on March 31, 2014. For more information, see www.constitution.ie.

63 Convention on the Constitution, *Fifth Report of the Convention on the Constitution Amending the Constitution to Give Citizens Resident Outside the State the Right to Vote in Presidential Elections at Irish Embassies, or Otherwise* (Dublin: Convention on the Constitution, 2013), 4, www.constitution.ie/AttachmentDownload.ashx?mid=bf489ec7-9556-e311-8571-005056a32ee4.

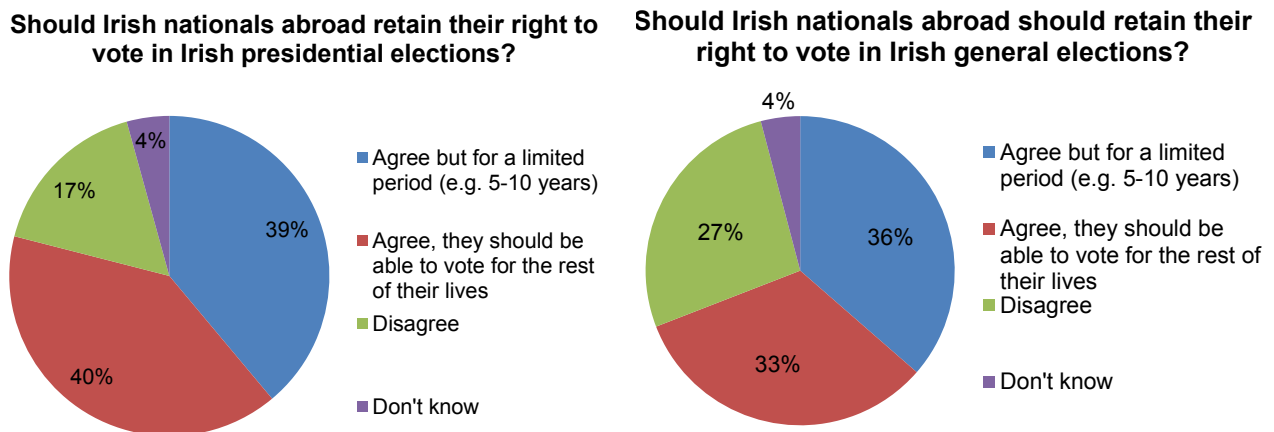
64 See Oliver Moran and Sarah Cantwell, "Why has the government ignored the Irish diaspora—again?" *The Journal.ie*, March 26, 2014 www.thejournal.ie/readme/right-to-vote-irish-emigrants-1382597-Mar2014/.

65 Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 98.

66 DFA, *Global Irish: Ireland's Diaspora Policy*.



Figure 6. Household Surveys in Ireland: Voting Rights for the Diaspora



Source: EMIGRE; quoted in Irial Glynn, Tomás Kelly, and Piaras Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 96.

Ireland's economic situation and the availability of jobs were the two most commonly cited factors that would influence emigrants' decision to return home in the future.

Interestingly, results from the survey of emigrants abroad did not differ greatly from that of representative households. Many emigrants felt passionate about having a voice in the affairs of their homeland. Some felt that they had a right to have a say in elections because political decisions had caused them to emigrate in the first place: "It's the Irish government's fault that I'm stuck out here. We should be afforded some bit of a say in the situation."⁶⁷ Others pointed out Ireland's unique position in the world in not allowing its citizens abroad to vote. As one young emigrant, able to vote in the United Kingdom, observed: "Most other countries just go to the embassy and cast their vote. I don't know why we don't."⁶⁸ A number of emigrants interviewed stated that those who wanted to return home at some stage should have an input because: "If I want to go back, I would like a say in what's going on at home."⁶⁹ A minority did not regard it as a major issue.⁷⁰

D. Reintegration Policies

Ireland's economic situation and the availability of jobs were the two most commonly cited factors that would influence emigrants' decision to return home in the future. It is clear that, for many, the reasons for leaving overlap with reasons not to return: 60.6 percent of those surveyed by EMIGRE stated that Ireland's economic situation was "extremely influential" or "very influential" in their decision to leave, while 72.4 percent stated that the economy would influence their decision to return. Although the economic situation might not have influenced the decision of some people to leave Ireland, it is a

67 Male, age 25-29, civil engineer, Australia; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*.

68 Female, age 20-24, manufacturing engineer, United Kingdom; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*.

69 Female, age 20-24, administrative officer, Canada; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 97.

70 For some, Irish politics did not "hold the interest that it did" previously and for others it was not an issue that struck any chord: "I don't mind not having a vote, I'll be honest." Female, age 30-34, advertising, UK; female, age 50-54, secretary, United States; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*.



reason for them not to return. For 51.4 percent of those who left for travel and culture-related reasons, improvements to the Irish economy would increase their likelihood of returning “a great deal.”⁷¹ Almost 70 percent of the emigrants surveyed by EMIGRE who were abroad on temporary visas hoped to extend their stay before their visas expired. Another 12 percent of Irish emigrants in this situation planned to migrate to another country once their visas expired. Only 10 percent wanted to return to Ireland.

Irish emigrants returning to live in Ireland are required to satisfy the Habitual Residence Condition (HRC) to attain state social benefits. The HRC’s criteria for benefits relate to the length of time emigrants were previously resident in the state, the length and purpose of their absence from the state, the nature and pattern of their employment, their main center of interest—that is, whether an applicant has a close link to Ireland and intends to reside in the country for the foreseeable future.⁷² The guidelines leave much room for discretion; each case is decided on its own merits. Since October 2007, Irish citizens returning from the United Kingdom do not have to satisfy the HRC because Britain is part of a “Common Travel Area” with Ireland.⁷³ Similarly, Irish citizens previously living in another EU country do not, in theory, have to satisfy the HRC in order to receive family benefits or supplementary welfare allowance under EU law.⁷⁴ Returnees previously living outside the European Union for over two years have sometimes encountered problems, but in response to controversy over the issue the government issued a statement in March 2012: “An Irish national returning to live here on a permanent basis should experience no difficulty.”⁷⁵ Specific state policies to attract returnees back or help reintegrate them into the national labor market remain minimal, despite recent pleas from the prime minister and foreign minister to emigrants to return home.⁷⁶

Although the economic situation might not have influenced the decision of some people to leave Ireland, it is a reason for them not to return.

V. Conclusions

Ireland’s economic downturns in the 1950s, the 1980s, and, more recently, following the onset of the global financial crisis each provoked significant emigration. Economic recovery in the decades following earlier crises resulted in decreased emigration and increased return migration. Since recent emigrants from Ireland appear to be more qualified than their peers who have remained, it is presumably in the state’s interest to entice these emigrants to come home in the near future. Their return would especially benefit their families and communities at home—groups that economists regularly ignore.

Many Irish emigrants who have moved outside the European Union are on short-term visas. Judging by

71 See Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*, 102.

72 Citizens Information Board, “Immigrants and People Returning to Ireland Accessing Social Welfare,” *Relate* 37, no. 2 (2010): 2.

73 See section 246 of the *Social Welfare (Consolidation) Act 2005*; quoted in Glynn, Kelly, and Mac Éinrí, *Irish Emigration in an Age of Austerity*.

74 Citizens Information Board, “Immigrants and People Returning to Ireland Accessing Social Welfare,” 3.

75 Minister for Social Protection (Deputy Joan Burton), *Dáil Éireann* 758, no. 1 (March 6, 2012).

76 Vincent Boland, ‘Ireland launches initiative to lure expats home’, *Financial Times*, March 3, 2015; Speech by Minister Charlie Flanagan at the Global Irish Civic Forum Dublin Castle, June 4, 2015, www.dfa.ie/news-and-media/press-releases/press-release-archive/2015/june/opportunities-for-returning-emigrants/. Compare with DFA, *Global Irish: Ireland’s Diaspora Policy*, 46.



the relatively small annual number of Irish emigrants who obtain permanent work visas in locations such as Australia, it is likely that a significant proportion of these emigrants will be unable to remain in the countries in which they currently reside. This may provide an opportunity for the Irish state to attract emigrants home in the near future. But is Ireland ready for this? The Irish unemployment rate has thankfully decreased substantially since 2013 though it still remains close to 10 percent, as of August 2015. The employment rates of the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada—three of Irish emigrants' most popular destinations since 2008—are all below 7 percent at the time of writing.

Since recent emigrants from Ireland appear to be more qualified than their peers who have remained, it is presumably in the state's interest to entice these emigrants to come home in the near future.

In the hope and expectation that the Irish economy continues to recover from its recent setbacks, the Irish state would do well to build links with those Irish citizens who left since the economic crisis flared. A first step would be to obtain an accurate, detailed census of those who have left. If, in the future, the Irish economy requires employees in certain industries, the Irish state can first try to attract those emigrants living abroad with the skills most in need at home (for example, in education, engineering, construction, etc.). The state may also benefit from these emigrants' professional and personal links abroad when attempting to entice foreign companies to set up or expand their businesses in Ireland. It could also use a diaspora census to facilitate the votes of Irish citizens abroad in presidential and general elections, as well as national referendums.



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