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Authors	Ní Laoire, Caitríona;Bushin, Naomi;Carpena-Méndez, Fina;White, Allen
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tell me about
yourself

migrant children's experiences
of moving to and living in ireland

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By
Caitríona Ní Laoire, Naomi Bushin,
Fina Carpena-Méndez and Allen White

Final Report of the Marie Curie Excellence Team project

Migrant Children:
Children's and young people's experiences
of immigration and integration in Irish society

University College Cork

2009

contents

the
research team

Dr. Caitríona Ní Laoire (Team Leader)
Caitríona was Team Leader on the Migrant Children project and conducted the research for Strand D (Children in Returning Irish Families). Her background is in migration studies and human geography. Her research interests lie in the areas of Irish migration and diaspora, child and youth migration, return migration, migrant life narratives, rurality and gendered identities. Email: c.nilaoire@ucc.ie

Dr. Naomi Bushin
Naomi had particular responsibility for Strand B of the project (From Central and Eastern Europe to Ireland). She graduated from Swansea University, Wales, with a PhD in Geography (2006). Her research interests include children's experiences of family migration, children's participation in migration decision-making, migrant children's social networks and experiences of schooling. Email: n.bushin@ucc.ie

Dr. Fina Carpena-Méndez
Fina conducted the research for Strand C of the project (Latin American Migrant Children in Ireland). She completed a PhD in Anthropology (2006) at University of California Berkeley. Her research interests lie at the border between childhood and youth studies and globalization and transmigration processes.
Email: finacarpena@gmail.com

Dr. Allen White
Allen had particular responsibility for Strand A of the project (African/Irish Children and Young People in Ireland). He worked previously at Nottingham Trent University and University of Wales Lampeter. His research interests include international migration, citizenship, race and childhood studies. Email: allen.white@ucc.ie

the
research advisory panel

Bill Abom, Migrant Rights Centre of Ireland
Stanley Brandes, Social Cultural Anthropology, University of California Berkeley
Joy Cantwell and Catherine Leahy, YMCA, Cork
Alastair Christie, Department of Applied Social Studies, UCC
Malcolm Eremionkhale, African Cultural Awareness, Waterford
David Kra, Nasc, The Irish Immigrant Support Centre
Denis Linehan, Department of Geography, UCC
Brigette Mintern, Principal Social Worker, Liberty St. House, HSE Southern Area
Piaras Mac Éinrí, Department of Geography, UCC
Frieda McGovern, Educate Together
Angela Veale, Department of Applied Psychology, UCC

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acknowledgments

tell me about **yourself**

executive summary

Research aims – 'Tell me about yourself'

During the past ten years, much attention has been directed to immigration and integration issues in Ireland, but, with some notable exceptions to date, very little focusing on children or young people. In this context, the need for research and initiatives which allow migrant children's own voices to be heard is extremely important. Our research project, *Migrant Children*, aimed to address these gaps and to provide children's and young people's perspectives on issues relating to recent immigration to Ireland. The project was centred on an investigation of children's and young people's experiences of immigration and integration in Irish society. The aim was to explore the social worlds of migrant children and youth in Ireland from their own perspectives.

Four Research Strands

The research was conducted through four projects or strands.

Strand A: African/Irish Children and Young People in Ireland

Strand B: From Central and Eastern Europe to Ireland: Children's Experiences of Migration

Strand C: Latin American Migrant Children in Ireland

Strand D: Coming Home? Children in Returning Irish Families

four research strands

Profile of Migrant Children in Ireland

Recent census data (Census 2006) sheds light on the diverse nature of the child migrant population in Ireland, highlighting its importance numerically as well as challenging some common assumptions.

- Just over 10% of children in Ireland were born in other countries. The majority of these were born in other European countries, primarily Britain. Some of these are children in returning Irish families.
- Children make up almost 20% of all migrants living in Ireland (as defined by country of birth).
- Almost half of all children who have lived outside Ireland lived in the UK before moving to Ireland.
- 7.4% of children in the state do not have Irish nationality.
- Children comprise over 18% of the non-Irish population, but they comprise 40% of the Irish-other and 30% of the 'not stated', 35% of the 'no nationality' and almost 30% of the 'multi-nationality' categories.
- The household type 'couples with children' is one of the most common household types among non-Irish nationals.

Population statistics can also invisibilise and homogenise migrant children. Certain child migrant groups are particularly invisible, such as Latin American migrants (who are subsumed in the 'other' categories) and children in returning Irish families (who confound the categories of 'Irish' and 'migrant').

Synthesis of Findings

Home and Family

Many children (and parents) emphasise the importance of family support in easing the transition to living in Ireland. Migrating without family support (especially of immediate family members) can be very difficult, although connections with extended family members and others from the same country of origin are not always helpful to migrant families. Many migrant children experience family fragmentation as they move, for various reasons relating to migration policies, practices and processes. Thus the migrant family and home can be marked by the absence of family members. The degree to which migrant children are able to see family members who live in other countries is shaped by financial resources as well as immigration/citizenship status. Children living in families that are claiming asylum face a further series of barriers to 'normal' family life because of the nature of the Direct Provision system.

School

Schools are key locations for migrant children's well-being and interactions with other children, and many report positive experiences. However, the current inadequacy of guidelines for schools and teachers means that strategies for dealing with diverse school populations can vary considerably from school to school. In this context, our research reveals some of the ways in which migrant children can become marginalised within the system. School can be the first site in which children encounter feelings of 'being different,' whether from peers, school practices or the curriculum. Children develop different strategies for coping with this, from asserting their sameness to developing migrant or national friendship groupings. Sometimes, school practices can work to emphasise national or cultural differences.

Friendships and Peer Networks

Missing old friends in their countries of origin, maintaining contact with these friends and making new friends are seen by all migrant children as extremely important. Leisure, playtime and shared interests (including language, music, fashion, sport) provide important points of connection with other young people. Many new friendships are made through being in school, while shared public spaces such as local green areas, leisure activities (and shared accommodation in the case of children living in Direct Provision) also provide opportunities, although not all children have equal access to such opportunities.

Migrant children can experience difficulties in being accepted into Irish society by being made to feel different and experiencing exclusion in peer group contexts, which can sometimes be manifest as bullying or social isolation. These feelings of difference can be temporary for some migrant children, in part because of the 'work' they put into asserting their sameness, or acceptable difference, from other (often non-migrant) peers. For other young people, these feelings of difference and exclusion are more long-lasting, can contribute to isolation and be emotionally very difficult.

tell me about **yourself**

Community

Migrant children place importance on being part of local communities and places. Communities provide the sites, individuals, institutions and infrastructures that are central to children's lives and that allow them to connect with others. However, migrant children may also experience rejection in these local sites and institutions and feel excluded from majority community peer groups. Children can act as 'connectors' for some families and parents within wider Irish society, although this contrasts with the disconnection and segregation that many children and families in the asylum system experience. On the contrary, for children in returning Irish families, parents and relatives can act as the 'connectors', opening doors for them.

Public Spaces, Leisure and Playtime

Migrant children have varying degrees of access to spaces and facilities for leisure and recreation. Informal leisure activities are important to many, while formal activities feature strongly among some groups, with sport being particularly important among boys while girls have a wider range of leisure activities. However the predominance of particular sports, their association with narrow cultural definitions of 'Irishness', their gendered nature, and the associated financial costs of commercialised leisure activities can exclude many migrant children from participation. These children's access to spaces for social interaction is further limited by the lack of available public infrastructure.

National Identities

Many migrant children do not refer to themselves as simply 'Irish' or as simply 'not Irish'. While many migrant children may not have Irish citizenship, they can develop strong attachments to local places and communities and these loyalties can be challenged through experiences that provoke them to question where they belong. Although nationality is not necessarily important to all migrant children, they are frequently placed in contradictory situations and face the dilemma of having to choose one nationality or another.

Key Insights

- There is no one 'migrant child' experience. Contrary to dominant assumptions about the issues that migrant children face, the experience of being a migrant child or young person is contingent on many factors such as one's own and one's family's citizenship status, migration stream and trajectory, ethnicity, family circumstances and social class, as well as gender, age and local circumstances.

- Migrant children's rights and opportunities are shaped in part by the migration pathway through which they enter Ireland and by their citizenship status. Their status as migrants can take precedence over their status as children.

- The dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in which migrant children are involved are deeply embedded in the structures, institutions and values of Irish society. To an extent, children reproduce adult discourses of belonging and exclusion in their interactions with each other. Furthermore, the mechanisms by which families and children 'get on' in Irish society frequently work to marginalise some migrant families and children.

- Migrant children are affected by the same issues as all children. However, in many ways, these issues can affect migrant children disproportionately. Therefore, it is not sufficient to view 'migrant children's issues' as a distinct problem; rather, it is necessary to view them in their wider context and to address the pressing issues which affect all children.

- 'Being a migrant' is only one aspect of migrant children's identities. It is also evident that migrant children and youth express their identities in ways which often diverge from the labels that are imposed upon them (usually by adults). Migrant children's identity negotiations can challenge dominant assumptions about ethnic and national identities.

- Like all children, migrant children emphasise both their sameness and their differences in peer group contexts and thus challenge societal assumptions about hierarchies of sameness and difference. In this context, policy concerns which are based only upon migrant children's differences from Irish children can be imbalanced.

- Children develop complex strategies for coping with migration, often through necessity and not without effort and action (sometimes considerable) on their own part, and sometimes in difficult circumstances.

- Children's and young people's rights to migration and family life can be undermined by policies and practices of migration which involve short and long-term family separations.

- Children's lives and opportunities are profoundly affected by their migrant parents', or their own, material circumstances, which are in turn shaped by the policies and practices surrounding migration to Ireland.

- Attempting to listen to children's voices can reveal different and sometimes unexpected perspectives on migration and integration. There is an urgent need therefore for children's perspectives to be acknowledged in these areas.

tell me about **yourself**

section 1

about the project

Why do research with migrant children?
Research aims – 'Tell me about yourself'
Research design

about the project

Why do research with migrant children?

During the past ten years, much attention has been directed to immigration and integration issues in Ireland, but, with some notable exceptions to date, there has been little research which focuses on children or young people who have migrated to Ireland. However, children and young people have been at the heart of some of the key public debates and concerns surrounding migration in Ireland, such as the 2004 citizenship referendum debate, as well as media debates around issues such as lack of school places and cutbacks in provision of English language tuition. Despite this, however, and reflecting general trends in migration and integration policy, the perspectives and experiences of children and young people are all too often overlooked. In this context, the need for research and initiatives which allow migrant children's own voices to be heard is extremely important. Our research project, Migrant Children, aimed to address these gaps and to provide a children's and young people's perspective on issues relating to recent immigration to Ireland.

Research aims – 'Tell me about yourself'

The project was centred on an investigation of children's and young people's experiences of immigration and integration in Irish society. The aim was to explore the social worlds of migrant children and youth in Ireland from their own perspectives. Therefore, we placed children at the centre of the research and sought to provide alternative perspectives on migration, integration, inclusion and exclusion in Irish society. The research also recognised that children's and young people's own experiences of migration, and of living in Ireland, are shaped by the wider context of their families, households, institutions and schools, as well as the immigration systems within which children and young people move to Ireland. Children's experiences are profoundly shaped by their own or their parents' rights and status as migrants. We explored the ways in which children in different migrant populations negotiate the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion involving family, peers, and others, in different social and spatial contexts, including urban and rural, and public, private and institutional spaces. We also explored the ways in which they construct and negotiate their own identities in these contexts.

Specifically, the research addressed the following questions:

- How do migrant children and young people experience and produce their **social worlds?**
- What is the extent and nature of **social integration** among migrant children and young people in Ireland?
- How are **parenthood, childhood and family life** experienced by migrants in contemporary Ireland?
- How are **intergenerational dynamics** negotiated within migrant families?
- How do migrant children and young people construct their **identities and belongings?**
- How do migrant children and their parents negotiate the **dynamics of social inclusion and exclusion** at the local level?
- How do different **immigration policies and systems** shape the lives of migrant children?

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[1] See Appendix A for further reading

Research Design

Four Research Strands

The research was conducted through four projects or strands. This approach allowed in-depth exploration of children's lives in four different migrant populations in Ireland. Our comparative perspective represents a departure from much existing research on migrant children, which tends to follow one of two patterns: either to focus on children in one particular migration pathway or ethnic group, or to assume a homogenous 'migrant child' experience. Instead, this project recognises the diversity of migrant childhoods and acknowledges the power contained within immigration and citizenship policies, global migratory processes and dominant constructions of race and ethnicity to shape children's and young people's lives in contrasting ways.

Strand A:	African/Irish Children and Young People in Ireland (conducted by Dr. Allen White)	
Strand B:	From Central and Eastern Europe to Ireland: Children's Experiences of Migration (conducted by Dr. Naomi Bushin)	
Strand C:	Latin American Migrant Children in Ireland (conducted by Dr. Fina Carpena-Méndez)	
Strand D:	Coming Home? Children in Returning Irish Families (conducted by Dr. Caitríona Ní Laoire)	

The strands include children from the main migrant streams (asylum-seekers [Strands A and B], EU and EEA labour migrants [Strand B], non-EU labour migrants [Strands B and C], and returning Irish migrants [Strand D]) that have constituted in-migration into Ireland over the last 15 years. In addition to this they include children from countries that have had a lengthy history as a destination for Irish migrants (Strand D), and have historical links to specific Irish missionary traditions (Strands C and A), as well as those with little or no historical connection to Ireland (Strand B). By including children who have taken part in return migration moves (Strand D) as well as children of short-term/temporary migrants (Strands B and C) and more long-term migrants (all strands), the project attempts to capture the dynamic and fluid nature of contemporary migration processes rather than assuming that all migrants have undertaken once-off migrations from one country of origin to Ireland. Finally the strands also include children from communities that have been consistently racialised in debates about immigration to Ireland (Strand A), children from communities that are considered to 'pass' as similar to Irish (Strand B), children who are considered to be unproblematically 'Irish' (Strand D) and children who are almost invisible within debates about migration and identity in Ireland (Strand C).

tell me about **yourself**

Methodology

Our methodology was driven by a desire to allow the voices of children and young people to speak through the research, by using children-centred methods. While each strand of the research developed its own specific methodological approach, the project as a whole was grounded in a common theoretical perspective on children and childhood, which recognised that children are active socio-cultural producers in their own rights. Thus, the research was children-centred and children-inclusive, recognising children's agency. This approach involved spending time with children and young people who have moved to Ireland, building up relations of trust and getting to know them. We talked with them about their lives and their migration experiences, incorporating both ethnographic methods and a range of participative techniques such as artwork, mapping, photography, play-and-talk and participant observation. The idea was that these methods allowed the children and young people to actively participate in the research, by allowing them to communicate in ways with which they were comfortable, and to choose the activities which suited them best. Rather than concentrating on children's migrant status or ethnic/national identity exclusively, we attempted to allow other aspects of their lives and identities that were important to them to emerge through these encounters.

In all, research was conducted with 194 migrant children (84 boys and 110 girls; aged 3-18) across Ireland, between 2006 and 2009 . Most of the children who participated were first generation migrants, that is, they had migrated to Ireland from other countries, although the sample also included some of their siblings who had been born in Ireland. The participants lived in a range of geographical locations across the Republic of Ireland, including cities, suburbs, small towns and rural areas. While the majority of participants lived in the south west region and in the Dublin region, a number also lived in a range of locations in the west and north-west. They had moved from a wide range of international locations, including over 30 different countries. The research was conducted in children's homes, schools, youth clubs, cafés and an asylum accommodation centre. We recognise that because of adults' assumptions of their capabilities, children occupy marginal social roles and may not always be able to participate in making decisions that affect their lives. Therefore adults – parents, teachers, and play-workers – were also included in the research. We complied at all times with the principles of the project's ethical protocol, which included provisions regarding informed consent, parental and child consent, voluntary participation and privacy. All names and identifying details in this report have been changed to protect participants' anonymity. The participants' pseudonyms were usually chosen by participants themselves.

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[2] Following accepted legal definitions of 'childhood', we use the term 'migrant children' throughout the document to refer to children and young people within the entire 3-18 years age spectrum of our participants, although we recognise that 'young people' may be a more appropriate term for those aged 13-18.

Countries where participants migrated from:

Albania
Argentina
Brazil
Bulgaria
Burundi
Chile
Columbia
Congo
Croatia
Czech Republic
England
Eritrea
Georgia
Hong Kong
Hungary
Kenya
Latvia
Lithuania
Nigeria
Poland
Romania
Serbia
Slovakia
Slovenia
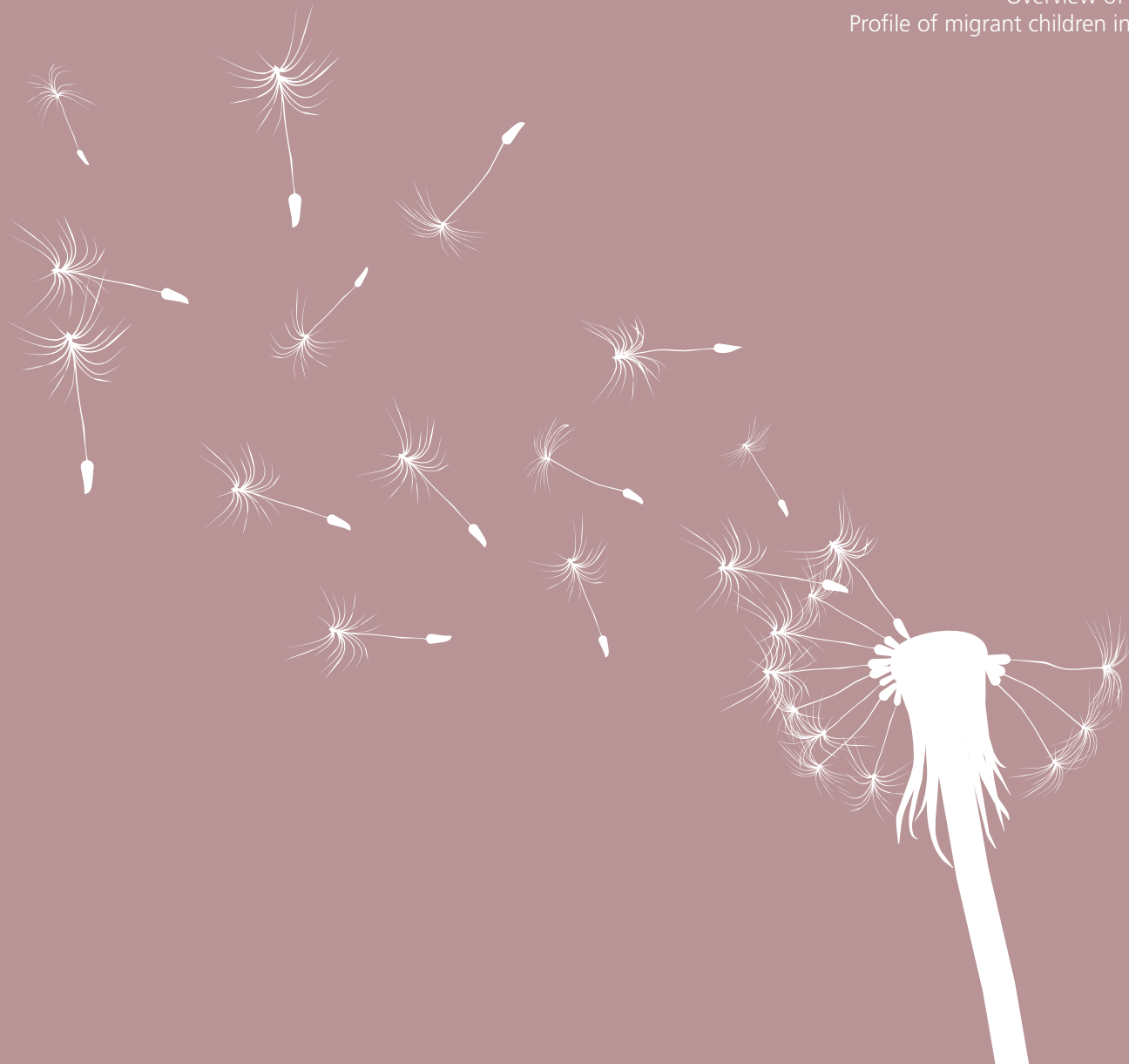Somalia
South Africa
Ukraine
USA
Zimbabwe

For reasons of anonymity, some countries from which participants moved have been omitted from this list.

section 2

context and background

Overview of context
Profile of migrant children in Ireland

context and background

Overview of Context

Children move to Ireland as part of many different migration streams – they move with families and on their own, as part of labour migrant families, returning Irish families and within the asylum process. Some stay in Ireland for a short time, others settle for the long-term. They form part of the phenomenon of a rapid increase in in-migration to Ireland from the late 1990s onwards. Although the recent economic downturn has been accompanied by a reduction in immigration and an increase in emigration, including onward migration of some of those who had immigrated during the 2000s[3], many migrants have stayed in Ireland, and the migration phenomenon, far from disappearing, could instead be said to be characterised by its fluidity and dynamism. In-migration has been a source of anxiety and moral panic in Irish society and has been closely regulated by the state in a number of ways. Child migrants, as well as adult migrants, are the objects of such anxieties and government regulation, although children's roles as migrants tend to be downplayed and overlooked. This reflects children's and young people's positions in society more broadly, given the adult-centric nature of society and the tendency for children and youth to be 'spoken for' and marginalised in decision-making processes. While considerable progress has been made in moving towards compliance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in Ireland, much more remains to be done[4].

Migrant children are situated in particular ways in this context. There is growing concern among migrant rights and children's rights groups regarding Ireland's failure to fully comply with the UN Convention in relation to migrant children, such as in relation to the poor provision of non- or multi-denominational primary school facilities and the poor treatment of children in the asylum system[5]. On the one hand, highly contested public debates around citizenship and belonging have often tended to coalesce around the figure of the migrant child or young person. So for example, public concerns with questions of Irishness and belonging have tended to focus on issues such as citizenship for Irish-born children of non-Irish parents[6], the question of lack of provision of school places in localities of high in-migration and provision of language tuition for children of migrants. On the other hand, young migrants' own perspectives are rarely acknowledged in these debates.

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3   Because the economic recession is so recent there is very little reliable data about flows of migrants entering and leaving Ireland. The most up-to-date, reliable snapshot comes from the Central Statistics Office's 2008 Population and Migration Estimates. These show a sharp decline in the numbers entering the state (to 83,800) and an increase in the numbers leaving (to 43, 500), resulting in a net in¬flow of 38,500 in 2008. Writing in the Irish Times, Mac Cormaic suggests that many of these migrants were foreign nationals (Irish Times 27/12/2008). The ESRI's most recent Quarterly Economic Commentary (published 29th April 2009) estimates a net annual outflow over 2009-10 of 30,000. Barrett expects most of these to be foreign nationals ('Migrants in a recession, *ERSI Policy Conference: The Labour Market in a Recession* 30th April, 2009 Dublin). Ultimately the picture will remain confused until the publication of the CSO 2009 population and migration estimates (due late September 2009).
4   UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2006) *Concluding Observations of Ireland's Second Report under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*
5   Children's Rights Alliance (2006) *From Rhetoric to Rights: Second Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child*; Kilkelly, U. (2007) *Barriers to the Realisation of Children's Rights in Ireland,* Report Commissioned by the Ombudsman for Children
6   See: White, A., Gilmartin, M. (2008) Critical geographies of citizenship and belonging in Ireland, *Women's Studies International Forum* 31: 390-399
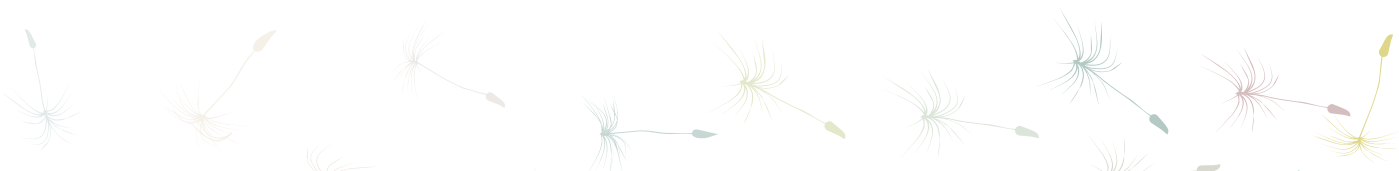
Migrant children and youth have tended to be viewed in terms of their vulnerability and difference. So, for example, much attention is focused on language differences, the problems that arise from these in the school context and on English language tuition as a solution to this[7], or on the more general challenges of diversity in schools[8]. Increasingly, government attention is being directed to meeting the educational needs of migrant children. Guidelines for intercultural teaching have been produced at primary and postprimary levels[9], and provision is made for English language tuition through schools. However, it is generally accepted that there is a need for more concrete guidelines, more in-service training of teachers and more resources for schools in relation to meeting the needs of migrant children[10].

Implicit in much media and public debate is the notion that migrant children are inherently different in many ways to 'Irish' children, which is reinforced by an emphasis on language differences and on children in particularly vulnerable situations (such as trafficking and deportation). Current policy approaches therefore tend to focus on meeting migrant children's and young people's basic needs[11] and on formal English language tuition through the school system[12]. This means that migrant children's wider needs are absent in many key policy areas which impact on their lives. For example, the recent government policy statement on integration, *Migration Nation*, does not mention children or young people at all (although education is referred to). The presence of migrant children has profound implications at national and local levels for an entire range of services and infrastructures, not confined to education and social care. In this context, there is a need to recognise children's and young people's own perspectives, to mainstream children's rights in key policy areas and to acknowledge children's and young people's rights both as migrants and as children.

Profile of Migrant Children in Ireland

The absence of comprehensive research, data and analysis on migrant children in Ireland, together with the narrow focus of much media and public debates involving migrant children, suggest that certain assumptions are made about who migrant children are and what roles they play in Irish society. For example, it seems to be commonly assumed that migrants are mostly adults, that labour migrants do not have children with them in Ireland, that migrant children form one homogeneous group with similar characteristics and that migrant children are defined by their perceived cultural, ethnic and national distance from the 'Irish' population. The reality is much more complex than this, as is shown by existing census data and the empirical data collected as part of this project. In reality, there are many different ways of defining and measuring children's backgrounds and identities; there is no one definition of a 'migrant child' or definitive 'migrant child experience'. Children form a significant proportion of migrant populations in Ireland and most migrant children who move to Ireland come from other European countries, with a large proportion coming from Britain.

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[7]   Smyth, E., Darmody, M., McGinnity, F., Byrne, D. (2009) *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students,* Economic and Social Research Institute Research Series No. 8

[8]   McGorman, E., Sugrue, C. (2007) *Intercultural Education: Primary Challenges in Dublin 15,* A report funded by the Social Inclusion Unit of the Department of Education and Science

[9]   National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2006) *Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School,* Dublin: NCCA; NCCA (2005) *Intercultural Education in the Primary School*, Dublin: NCCA

[10] Smyth et al., op. cit.

[11] Christie, A. (2002) The integration of children seeking asylum in Ireland: what role for the social work profession? *European Journal of Social Work* 5(2):187-198

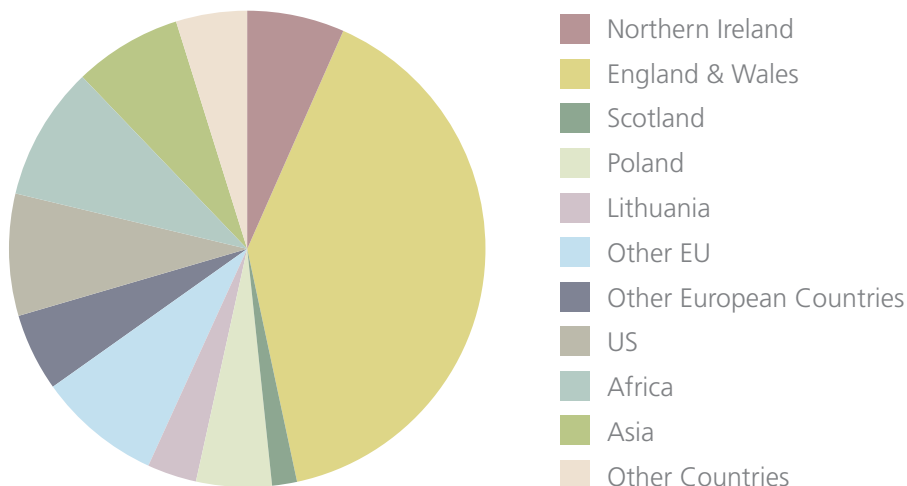[12] Office of Minister for Integration (2008) *Migration Nation: Statement on Integration Strategy and Diversity Management,* http://www.integration.ie/website/omi/omiwebv6.nsf/page/omi-publications
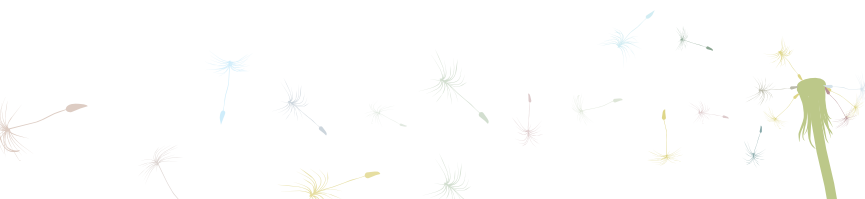
Children born outside Ireland

Just over **10%** of children in Ireland in 2006 were born in other countries. The majority of these were born in other European countries, primarily Britain. Some of these are children in returning Irish families.

According to Census 2006 figures, 10.2% (117,600) of all 0-19 year olds living in Ireland were born outside Ireland[13].

As can be seen in Chart 1, of these, the largest numbers were born in the UK, including 46,900 born in England and Wales. These are followed by 9,900 born in the US, 5,900 children born in Poland and 3,800 born in Lithuania. Data for all African, other EU and Asian countries are not broken down by country, but show that 10,000 children were born in African countries, 9800 in other EU countries and 9000 in Asian countries. Despite the prominence of images of African or Asian children in popular representations of migrant children, the majority of migrant children (as defined by country of birth) living in Ireland were born in other European countries.

Chart 1: Children (0-19) born outside Ireland, by birthplace

- Northern Ireland
- England & Wales
- Scotland
- Poland
- Lithuania
- Other EU
- Other European Countries
- US
- Africa
- Asia
- Other Countries

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13 We use figures for 0-19 year olds here although we recognise that 18 and 19 year olds cannot technically be considered 'children'. However, we wish to go beyond the 0-15 year cohort, as our research targeted 0-18 year olds. It should be recognised therefore that the figures given here for the 0-19 year cohort are slightly larger than they would be for the 0-18 year cohort, for which figures are not easily available. This may slightly inflate the figures for those from EU Accession States in particular.

Chart 2: Children (0-19) as proportion of migrant populations by country of birth
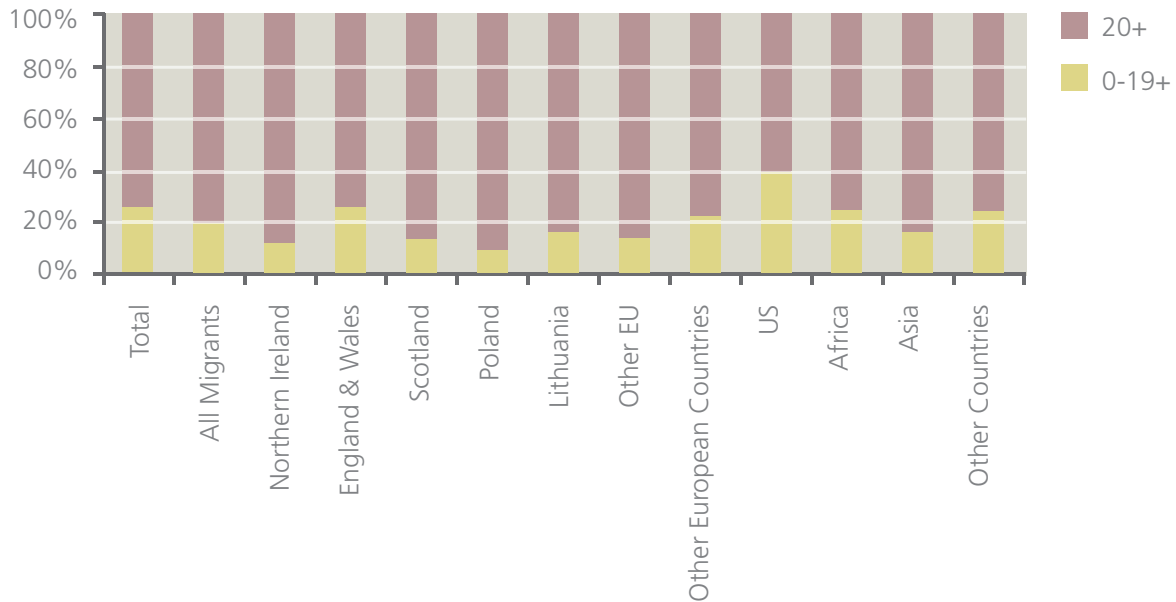
How significant are children as a proportion of the total migrant population in Ireland? Just under 15% of the total population was born outside Ireland. Census data show that just over 19% of the total 'born outside Ireland' population is aged 0-19 years. As can be seen in Chart 2, this is less than the proportion of 0-19 year olds in the population as whole (27.5%), as might be expected. However, it is still a highly significant component of the migrant population, contrary to popular opinion. This proportion varies according to country of birth, as seen in Chart 2. It is highest among US-born migrants and lowest among Polish-born migrants.

Children make up almost 20% of all migrants living in Ireland (as defined by country of birth).

It must be remembered that the country of birth measure alone does not provide a complete indication of numbers of children in migrant families. Many children in migrant groups of course have been born in Ireland.
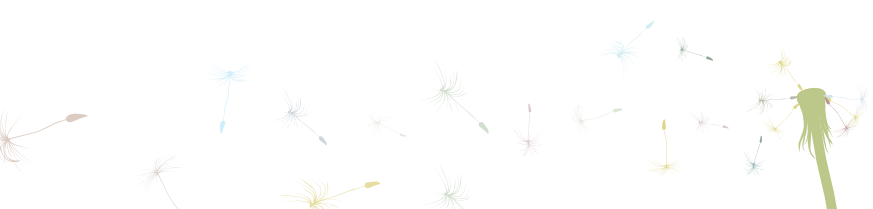
Children who have lived outside Ireland

Almost **half** of all children who have lived outside Ireland lived in the UK before moving to Ireland.

Another useful and related measure of children's migration is the number of persons aged 1-19 living in Ireland and who have ever lived abroad (for at least one year). The census data show that 91,536, or 8% of all 1-19 year olds, have lived abroad. Almost half of these (40,534) lived in the UK, while 13,900 lived in other EU countries and 8,900 lived in the US. The figure for the UK is high as it is likely to include British-born children of British migrants in Ireland (the largest group of migrants), British-born children of Irish return migrants as well as children born elsewhere who came to Ireland via the UK.

Chart 3: Children and young people who lived outside Ireland for one year or more

Country of previous residence
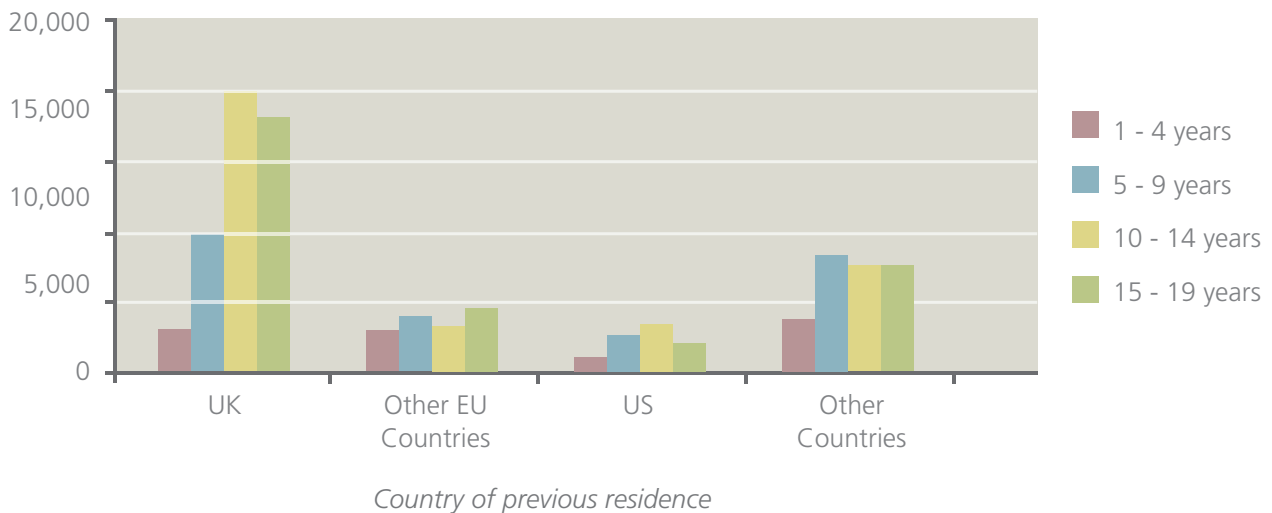
Children and nationality

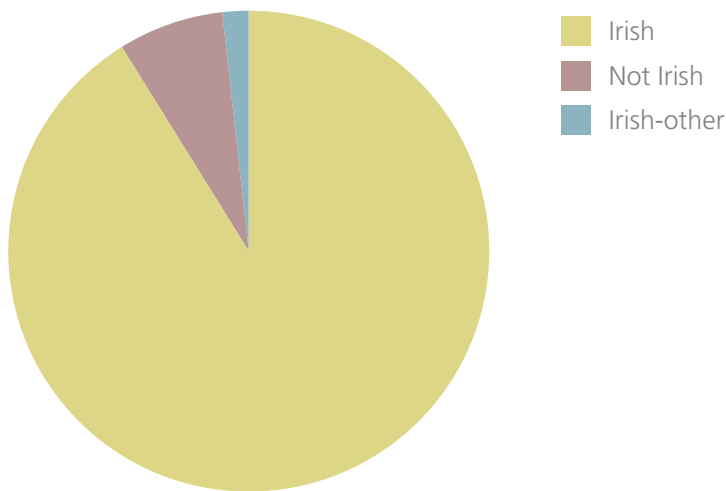# 7.4% of children in the state do not have Irish nationality.

Despite growing panics around numbers of 'non-national' children in Irish schools, the overall percentage in the population is relatively low. Over 7% of children in the state do not have Irish nationality, while a further 1.6% are ascribed the label 'Irish-other'. So the number of children without Irish nationality is smaller than the number of children who have lived abroad or who were born abroad. This suggests that some of the children who were born abroad or lived abroad are children of Irish return migrants, or are children who have adopted Irish nationality. Excluding all Irish and Irish-other children, the most common nationality is British (22,157 children), followed by EU15-25 (13,828 children). Africa provides the next largest group (9,788). An interesting group is the 'not stated' which accounts for 13,000 children.

Chart 4: Children (0-19) by Nationality

- Irish
- Not Irish
- Irish-other

Chart 5: Children (0-19) by nationality, excluding Irish

- Irish-other
- UK
- EU15 excluding Ireland and UK
- EU15 to EU25 Accession States
- Other European Nationality
- US
- Africa
- Asia
- Other Nationalities
- Multi Nationality
- No Nationality
- Not Stated
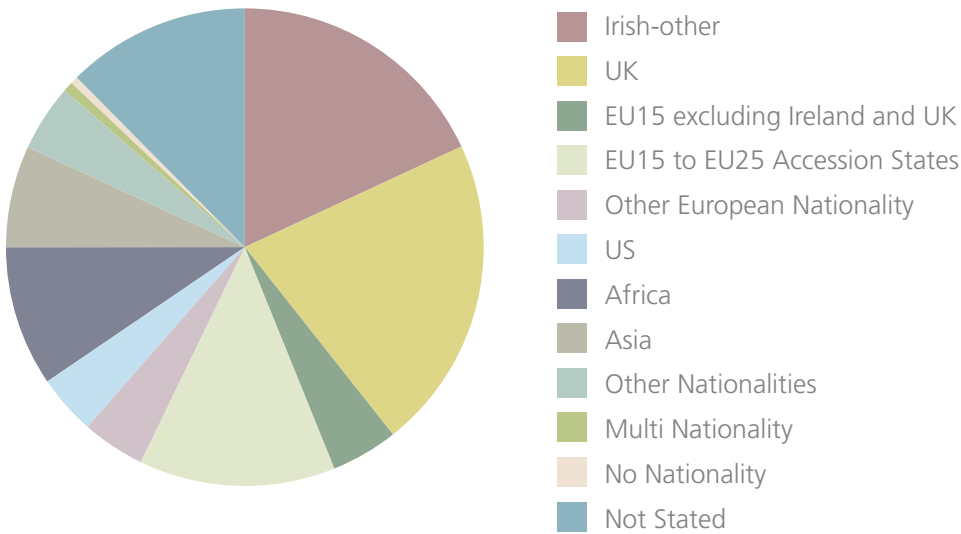
How significant numerically are children in the total non-Irish population? While 11% of the total population of the state has a nationality other than Irish, just over 18% of this non-Irish population is aged below 19. Chart 6 shows the breakdown by nationality, revealing that the proportions of children are well above average in the US and African populations, and also that children make up 40% of the Irish-other category, 30% of the 'not stated, 35% of the 'no nationality' and almost 30% of the 'multi-nationality' categories. This suggests that children may be more likely than adults to reject rigid national labels. It must be remembered also that in most cases, children's nationalities are defined in census returns by their parents and not by themselves, and so census data may not adequately reflect how they perceive their own national identities.

Children comprise over **18%** of the non-Irish population, but they comprise **40%** of the Irish-other and **35%** of the 'no nationality' groups.
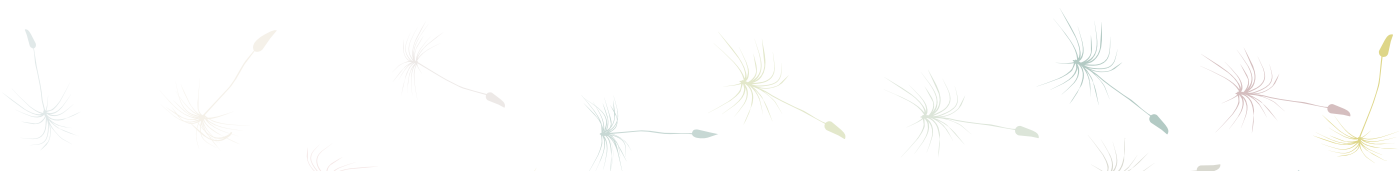
Chart 6: Children (0-19) as proportion of not-Irish populations, by nationality
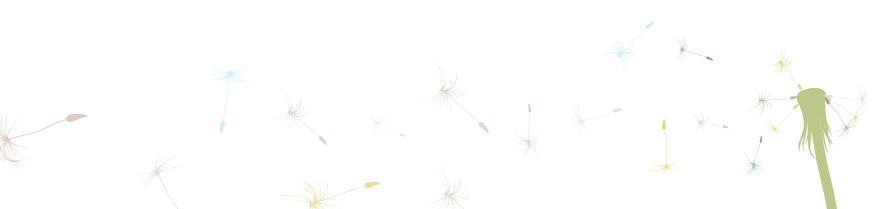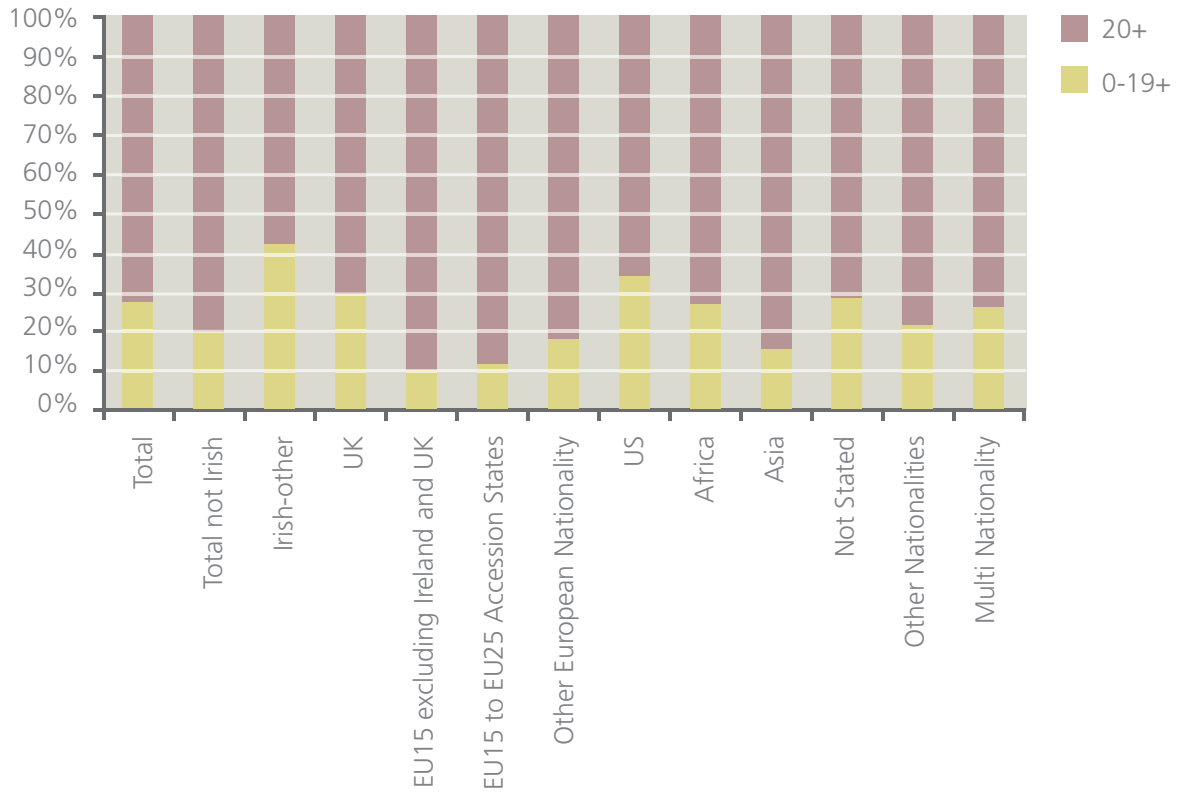
Children in migrant households

The household type 'couples with children' is one of the most common household types among non-Irish nationals.

The 'Non Irish Nationals' report by the CSO[14], based on Census 2006 data, shows that the household type 'couples with children' is a significant one among non-Irish-headed households. For example, it is the second most common household type among households headed by a person from an EU Accession State (the most common being 'non-family households') and is the most common household type among households headed by a British person or by someone from 'rest of world.' (Among the latter two, 'lone parent with children' is also a significant household type).

Chart 7: Household types by nationality of head of household
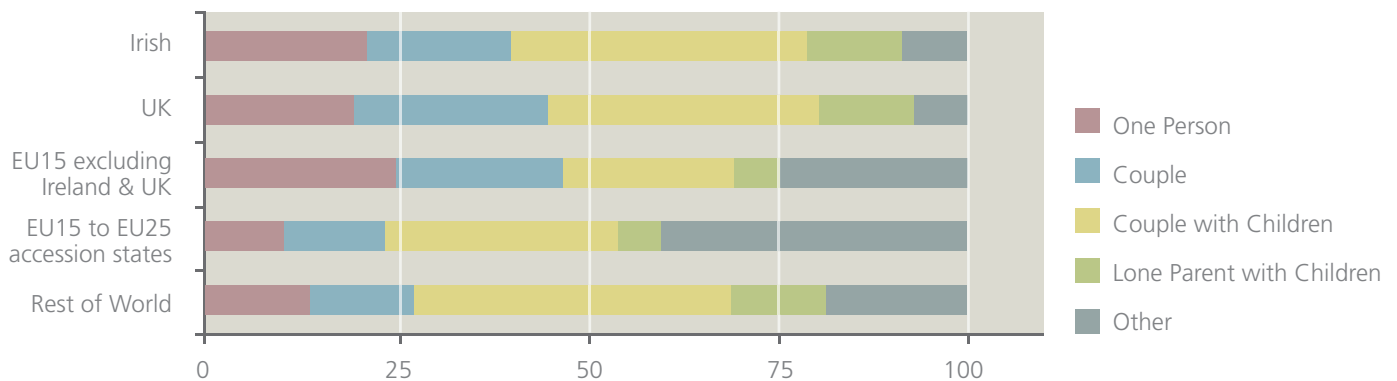
Source: CSO (2008)

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[14]   Central Statistics Office (2008) *Census 2006: Non-Irish Nationals Living in Ireland,* Dublin: Stationery Office

summary

Recent census data sheds light on the diverse nature of the child migrant population in Ireland, highlighting its importance numerically as well as challenging some common assumptions.

- Just over 10% of children in Ireland were born in other countries. The majority of these were born in other European countries, primarily Britain. Some of these are children in returning Irish families.

- Children make up almost 20% of all migrants living in Ireland (as defined by country of birth).

- Almost half of all children who have lived outside Ireland lived in the UK before moving to Ireland.

- 7.4% of children in the state do not have Irish nationality.

- Children comprise over 18% of the non-Irish population, but they comprise 40% of the Irish-other and 30% of the 'not stated', 35% of the 'no nationality' and almost 30% of the 'multi-nationality' categories.

- The household type 'couples with children' is one of the most common household types among some 'non-Irish national' groups.

Population statistics can also invisibilise and homogenise migrant children. Certain child migrant groups are particularly invisible, such as Latin American migrants (who are subsumed in the 'other' categories) and children in returning Irish families (who confound the categories of 'Irish' and 'migrant').

The following section presents the main findings of the research conducted in each of the four strands, while the final section presents a synthesis of the key findings and insights from across all four strands.

section 3

reports

strand **A**

african/irish children and young people in ireland

Allen White

introduction

African communities in Ireland have emerged through quite specific migration streams, principally (but not exclusively) the asylum system. This report explores the effects of the asylum system on the lives of African/Irish[15] children as well as looking into the lives of other children and young people who were not in the asylum system[16].

Research Aims

The key aims of this research were:

- To explore the impacts of the Irish asylum and immigration system[17] on the everyday experiences of African/Irish children who are in the 'Direct Provision and dispersal' system (see Appendix B)
- To explore the interactions and peer friendships between and among 'African/Irish' and 'Irish' children, the extent and spread of these interactions, and the spaces associated with these interactions
- To explore the extent of African/Irish children's peer networks and friendships and the social spaces (including schools, youth clubs and groups) that are part of these networks
- To explore how African/Irish children and young peoples' experiences of growing up in Ireland are inflected and shaped by their experiences as migrants and as members of a racialised minority community.

Methodology

A total of 44 African/Irish children (below 18) - 23 boys and 21 girls – participated in this research. Research took place in a variety of contexts in the greater Dublin area and Cork county and city (in homes, schools, youth clubs, homework groups, and an asylum accommodation centre). A total of 14 children were in the asylum system during fieldwork (as part of family groups and as unaccompanied minors); most of the rest (except one family group of three) were refugees (i.e. had been in the asylum system themselves) or had been reunited with family members who were refugees. A minority had been born in Ireland. Child-centred research methods (including photography, free drawing, play-and-talk, ethnographic observations, map drawing) were used in this research as well as standard qualitative research methods (including face-to-face individual and group interviews). Extensive in-depth fieldwork was carried out over eight months in an asylum-accommodation centre with 10 of the children. Repeat interviews were held with 16 other children and young people. Once-off interviews were carried out with 18 children and with eight key adults (including parents and carers). All research encounters were carried out in English. The names of all individuals, places and organisations have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants. Whenever possible participants were asked to choose pseudonyms; many children (usually boys) chose names of their favourite sports stars – e.g. Thierry (after Thierry Henry).

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[15] National identity (such as Nigerian, Zimbabwean, etc) is important to some African migrants in Ireland. At the same time it is not necessarily or always an important part of the experiences of children and young people in African communities in Ireland. Some young people describe themselves as simultaneously African (Nigerian or Zimbabwean or Ghanian etc.) and Irish. Others migrated from African countries at a very early age and have never returned; others were born in Ireland and have Irish and EU citizenship. Thus the term African/Irish is used here as shorthand for 'African or Irish or African-Irish' and attempts to reflect the complexity of these realities. It includes children who have migrated from African countries, children born outside Africa to parents from African countries and children born to African parents in Ireland.

[16] I would like to acknowledge the support and assistance of Yemi Ojo and the IACI (Integration of African Children in Ireland) during this project.

[17] Not all of the children who are in the asylum system in Ireland are of African origin. Children from Eastern Europe are also in the asylum system in Ireland. Thus some of the fieldwork for Strand A was aligned with some of the fieldwork of Strand B.
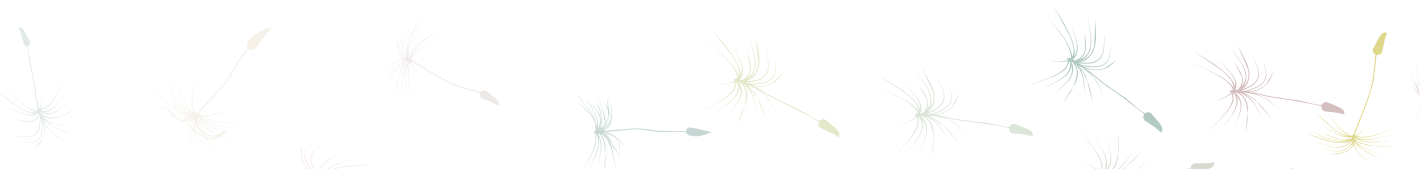
Key Findings

It is important to remember that the children who participated in this research saw themselves as children first and not necessarily as 'migrants'. In other words their gender, age, social class and other aspects of their lives mattered more to them than the facts of their migration history. That said, in particular ways the children's migrant status did play an important role in shaping their experiences and this was especially the case for children in the asylum system. However in certain ways children's experiences of migration differed significantly from adults.

The effects of missing 'home' and families
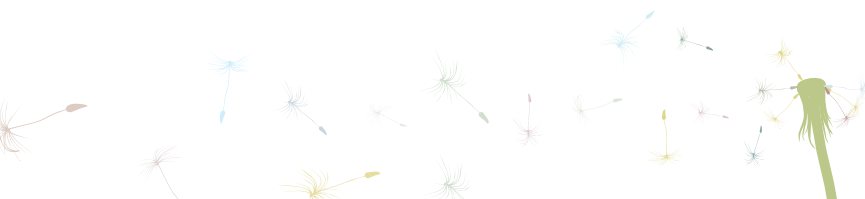
Key finding #1:

'The migrant family' includes people who live in different countries. Being part of a transnational family network was important to many of the children. However their ability to see and visit family members was shaped by their immigration status.

Children define themselves by their membership of a family group. The children who took part in this research had many family members in other countries and depending on their immigration status they could or could not visit or see these family relations.

Many of the children in this research spoke about the absence of their families – siblings, grandparents, parents, entire families and kin groups. For children in the asylum system these feelings of loss and absence were painful, often related to traumatic experiences of exile and asylum. The extent to which they were in regular contact with extended family members varied in different families. For example while John (age 7) spoke about missing his sisters in his country of origin and Kirsten (age 7) about missing her sister, Kirsten also spoke of being in regular contact with cousins in other European countries and in Dublin.

Many African/Irish children who were not in the asylum system spoke of similar experiences. These children talked about their cousins and other relations who lived locally and in other countries (in the European Union, in the United States of America, in west or southern Africa). In some cases they had visited these other countries (which was impossible for children in the asylum system).

Parents, in most cases, maintained transnational links with family members. Transnational connections with family members were not limited to special occasions (birthdays, traditional holidays and celebrations).

Living contradictory lives

Key finding #2:

African/Irish children's lives can be paradoxical and contradictory. The Direct Provision (DP) asylum policy segregates children while simultaneously placing them in local schools. Local places and communities are very important settings to children not in the asylum system. However these local places are also the sites where they are racialised by white majority community peers.

The system of Direct Provision (DP) and dispersal in Ireland segregates asylum seekers from local host populations and communities. These segregated experiences play a significant role shaping the peer friendships and interactions of children in the asylum system. The children in 'Glengarry' (a DP centre for families) lived in isolation from the local community. The leader of 'Sunshine' – a weekly parent-and-toddler morning group and weekly after-school club for older children in Glengarry which was staffed by childcare professionals – described the accommodation centre as a bubble. Fieldwork supported this view of the children in Glengarry as disconnected from local communities and places. For example, other children (not related to residents, staff or ex-residents) rarely visited Glengarry. Some children knew little about the local area (like road or street names). In group activities, such as drawing or building models of Glengarry, children did not include any details about the local area. The most significant peer relationships for most children were with other children (often siblings) in Glengarry.

Schools are a key location for children living in the asylum system. Local schools provide them the opportunity to develop peer friendships with children not in the asylum system. Some children in Glengarry talked about visiting their school-friends' houses and going to birthday parties, but said that they couldn't invite their friends back to where they lived. Schools provided valuable shared frames of reference (e.g. about homework, classroom subjects, individual teachers, events in the school calendar) that the children used as part of their interactions with each other and adults.

Living lives that are segregated from local communities yet attending local schools forces children in the asylum system into contradictory positions as simultaneously part and not part of Irish society. Children respond to these contradictions in different ways. Some children produced counter-narratives to stories of isolation and segregation in DP centres. For example Kirsten (age 7) drew her home, her friend's home (in a different part of Glengarry), the local shop, her school, the local church and the local 'Lidl' supermarket (Figure 1), talking all the while about attending parties of her friends from school, going on school trips and events that had taken place in school.
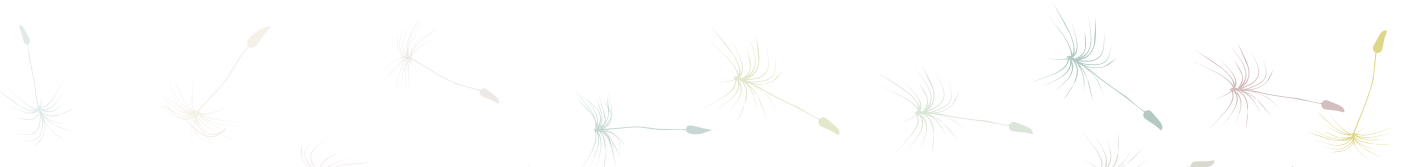
Figure 1: Kirsten's map – 'Ireland'

Schools were also key locations for many of the African/Irish children who were not in the asylum system. Schools were key sites within which these children could develop peer friendships, as well as share frames of reference that were valuable in negotiating these peer friendships. African/Irish children not in the asylum system produced much more detailed descriptions of local neighbourhoods than did their asylum-seeking peers. They talked at length about local places and sites, in particular their homes, their friends' homes and local facilities (see Figure 2 for example) (including places like public libraries and playgrounds). Some children included institutions like churches (see Figure 3) or organisations like sports clubs. Going to these places was part of their weekly routines. Local places and local communities acted as important settings within which the children lived their everyday lives.

Figure 2: 'My lovely estate' - taken by Errow, 12.

These localities were the site for many of the children's experiences of exclusion on racial grounds by white, majority community peer groups. For example Errow after talking about his active participation in local sports clubs and events cited his explicitly racialised nickname, given to him by his team-mates. Many of the African/Irish children gave clues about similar experiences of exclusion (see 'Experiences of racism' below).

African/Irish children living outside the asylum system produce narratives about their everyday lives that are 'embedded' within local spaces, places and infrastructures. However the 'fact' of their ethnic difference means their sense of belonging and attachment are questioned and challenged through experiences of exclusion by majority community Irish peers. These issues open a window on the contradictory positions that African/Irish children are required to negotiate in Irish society. This is not simply as a result of a particular migration regulatory regime; it is also as a result of a political and social discourse that draws borders around understandings of 'Irishness' by routine references to 'non-national' children or 'Irish-born' (and by implication not 'Irish' enough) children.
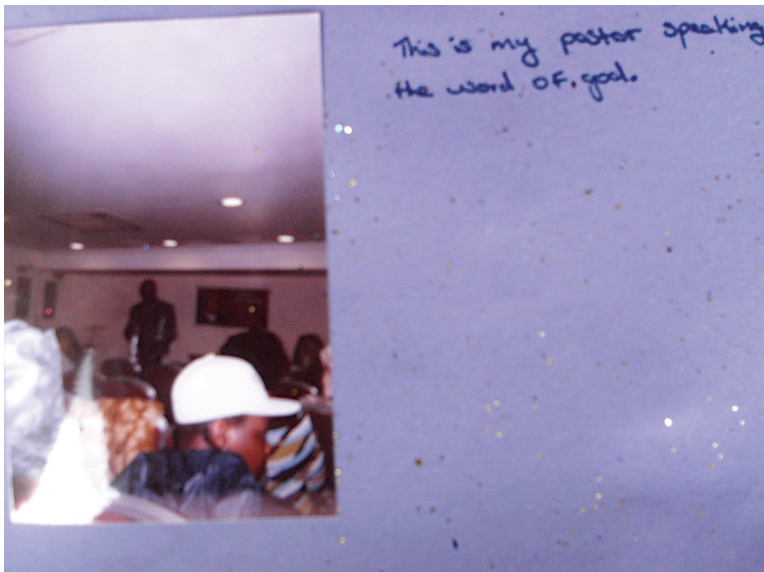

Figure 3: 'This is my pastor speaking the word of God' (Beyonce, 6)

Children's specific experiences of poverty and downward social mobility

Key finding #3:

Children have quite specific experiences of poverty. In DP centres these can be mitigated by providing dedicated child-friendly resources and spaces. Children and young people can experience downward social mobility in different ways to their parents.

Children experience poverty and downward social mobility in ways that can be specific and different to adults. The lack of resources for families in DP (see Appendix B) means that many families have almost no disposable income to spend on toys and materials for children. The competition amongst children in Glengarry for particular toys (and also on occasion for research materials like disposable cameras, paper and pens) suggested that some children had very few personal possessions.

These child-specific experiences of poverty in DP centres can be compounded by the lack of child-dedicated resources and spaces. The provision of structured and professional childcare services can help relieve some of these experiences. In Glengarry the 'Sunshine' club had a dedicated room and play space which it was able to expand and refurbish. This was not always the case, as the leader of 'Sunshine' explained:

> *It was pretty dire trying to go in [to Glengarry every week] and set things up…I think the children didn't feel like they had a space, you know they were hiding in the back room, the older children and the younger children they really had nowhere and that must have been a bad feeling for them… (Leader).*

The child-friendly and dedicated space that the 'Sunshine' club used was a success and it worked to enhance the experiences of the children living in Glengarry. This was obvious from the excitement and exuberance with which the children took part in the after-school activities. For example, Kirsten (age 7), when asked if she liked the 'Sunshine' club, simply answered: *when it is Wednesday* [the day the Sunshine club takes place], *I am happy.*

Many African migrants to Ireland experience deskilling and downward social mobility[18]. In Thierry's case his mother commented explicitly about the drop in status and family income as a result of the move to Ireland, saying that in the country of origin *we* [herself and her husband] *had good jobs and everything so the money wasn't a big thing as much as like* [now]... However some migrant children and young people experienced this downward social mobility in different ways to their parents. Some young people's migration involved moving from private fee-paying boarding school in their country of origin to free public schools in Ireland. For both Ruth (16) and Thierry (19), this was a positive experience.

> *I went to boarding school in Nigeria, I go to day school here, but day school is better because [in boarding school] there's a lot more discipline (Ruth, 16).*

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[18]   Coakley, L. and Healy, C. (2007) *Looking forward, Looking back: Experiences of Irish Citizen Child Families,* Dublin: Integrating Ireland
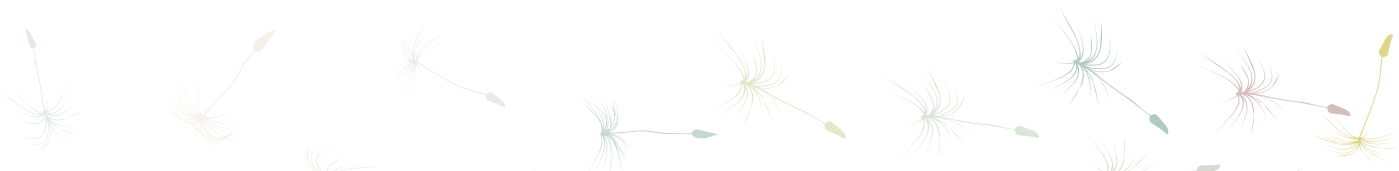
Effects of Direct Provision on family life

Key finding #4:

DP imposes all kinds of restrictions on children's day to day lives. Life in DP centres is communal, with eating and social facilities shared between families from very different social and cultural backgrounds. These can lead to intergenerational tensions within families. Children's experiences of these conditions can be quite different to adults' and parents'.

DP has been criticised as damaging family life for asylum seeking families. Feelings of isolation, apathy, boredom, dependency leading towards increased incidence of family and relationship problems have been reported in research on DP accommodation in Ireland (see Appendix B). The communal living arrangements and lack of private cooking facilities in many accommodation centres (like Glengarry) present a series of challenges to parents, many of whom are existing on incomes that are well below the poverty line. Research consistently points to the detrimental effects of close, cramped and insufficient accommodation on residents living in DP; parents in Glengarry also commented on the detrimental effects of communal living on their parental authority. For example D's (age 7) mother complained that her daughter had learned inappropriate language from older girls in Glengarry.

The communal living conditions in DP presented problems for other adults. Staff in the 'Sunshine' club had problems recognising who was (and was not) 'signed in' to after-school activities. These problems stem from the fact that in Glengarry, childcare was brought to the children, not vice versa, turning the normal relationships between parents, children and child-carers upside down. In Glengarry 'normal' childcare practices - registering attendance, gaining parental consent, supervising/separating toddlers from older children – were difficult to implement. Over time the 'Sunshine' staff worked to resolve these difficulties and develop plans for recruiting parents to supervise children using the resources outside normal hours. The management of the centre and involvement of parents proved to be important in providing support and encouragement in these efforts.

Children's experiences of living in cramped and communal conditions were varied and ambiguous. Some children complained about the lack of personal space or food they were given in Glengarry. While many spoke of their wish to move out of the centre and to have their own (family) home and individual bedrooms, when this actually happened to some children (five family groups left the DP centre during fieldwork), this was described by these children as *exciting* but also as *really scary*. This response suggests paradoxical and ambiguous experiences of children living in DP accommodation. On the one hand, living in communal conditions offered opportunities for developing important peer friendships. In addition the grounds around the DP centre offered children access to spaces that were free from adult and parental supervision. On the other hand, living in DP accommodation like Glengarry institutionalises children (as well as adults) in that moving out into the wider community implies a lack of structure and support that they can become dependent upon.

Key finding #5:

For lots of young migrants the places that they live, go to school and socialize in are very important to them. Migrant status can play a hugely important role shaping their access to these places.

Place and neighbourhoods were also important to teenagers. Teenagers who attended 'CJs' (an afterschool homework and social club for immigrant youth in Cork city) took part in a series of exercises involving drawing pictures about their summers or maps of Cork city or taking photos about their lives. The photos, pictures and places referred to in discussions with African/Irish young people (who have migrated to Ireland through the asylum system) stood in marked contrast to other young people in CJs (most of whom had traveled back to countries of origin and seen friends and families during the summer). Daya (see Figure 4) had migrated to Ireland from a southern African country with her family and had recently attained refugee status. She had spent her summer in Cork and did not refer to any non-family members in conversations about her summer which she spent playing football with her father and visiting relations. It was impossible for Daya to return to her country of origin to see friends and family.
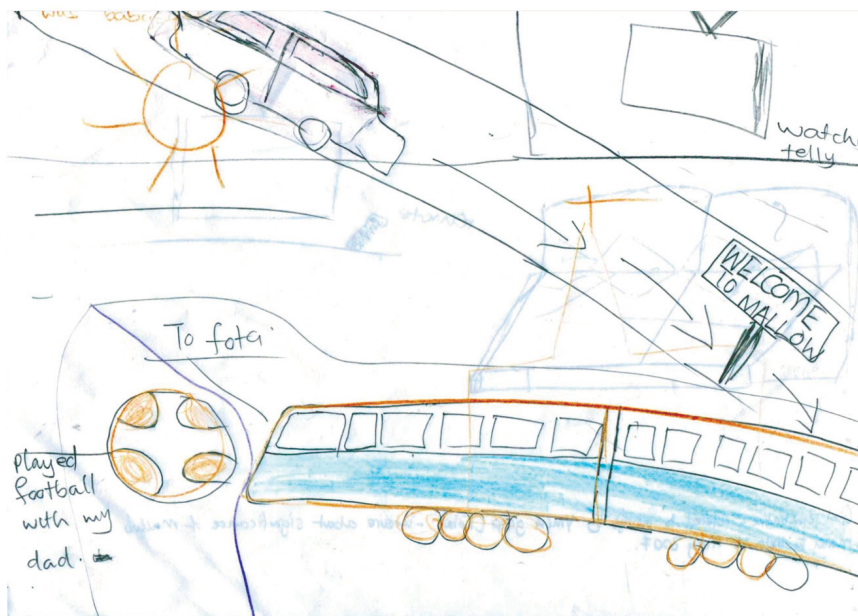

Figure 4: Daya's (15) holiday drawing

Genius is an unaccompanied aged-out minor[19] from an east African country who took part in a photography project which revealed he spent all of his summer in Cork city. Genius's photograph shows the central post office in Cork because he goes there frequently – to collect his state living allowance (see Figure 5). 'CJ's' provided young people like Genius and Daya with an opportunity to meet with other young people from different backgrounds and with different statuses who had migrated to Cork. For particular young people (especially those seeking asylum) these social interactions were important because of the lack of opportunities they have to meet with other young people. Migration status can play an important role in shaping the things that young migrants can do and the places they can go to.

Figure 5: Genius's (18) photograph of the post office

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[19] An 'aged-out minor' is someone whose asylum claim was lodged when they were an unaccompanied minor (below 18) and is now older than 18. Young people in this position are usually placed out of the system of care for unaccompanied young people claiming asylum (which in Ireland is under the responsibility of the Health Service Executive) and into the Direct Provision system. In this instance Genius was aged 18 and was still living under the care of the HSE in Cork.

Feeling 'Irish'

Key finding #6:

Many of the young people described themselves in 'hybrid' and 'hyphenated' ways – such as Nigerian-Irish or African-Irish. Globalisation and consumer capitalism offer a range of different cultural traditions and cultural repertoires for migrant children to construct new hybrid identities for themselves.

African-born teenagers were reluctant to describe themselves as simply 'Irish' in interviews. Instead these young people represented themselves in ways that claimed hybrid and hyphenated identities and challenged dominant and exclusive understandings of Irishness. For example in a series of interviews, African-born young people rejected 'either/ or' exclusive identities and instead emphasised their hybrid identities. Take the following accounts:

Between, yeah something in between because I am African so I can't just be Irish just because I live there for longer so I am African but I am also Irish in a way because I live here and I have grown up here more so then I have, I made more friends here than Africa so then the school here I studied here so I am Irish schooled, this is where I am living …. (Sarah, 15).

Both… em because I have like my Irish friends I like Irish music and stuff but I am also Nigerian because I still have my culture and I speak my language and all that (Jess, 15).

I feel both but like my mum is from Nigeria and lives here so I like but I prefer living here from back home but they are both part of my life they are both part of my life (John, 13).

If someone asked me what I am I would say Kenyan, you can't abandon your roots you know but like my whole behaviour and all that is Irish you know because I am here so long so … I'd say in common-sense I am Kenyan-Irish-Kenyan (Thierry, 19).

These young people rejected the choice of being either Irish or African/Nigerian/Kenyan; instead they saw their self identities as simultaneously Irish and African, Nigerian etc., thus challenging hegemonic exclusionary understandings of Irishness.

These young people (un)consciously used multiple (local, national, global) places of belonging which they wove together as part of their life experiences in complex and dynamic ways. As Thierry's mother put it talking about him and his group of friends:

if you ask me about identity I think our kids are going to be very - they are not going to be Irish, they are not going to be African - they are going to be very global (Thierry's mother).

However at different points in their accounts and self-descriptions their migrant status intersected with other dimensions of their identities in particular ways.
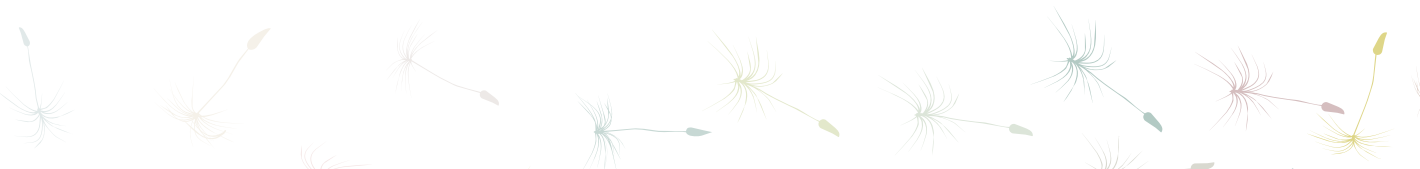
Case Study: Ruth, 14, moved from Nigeria in 2005.
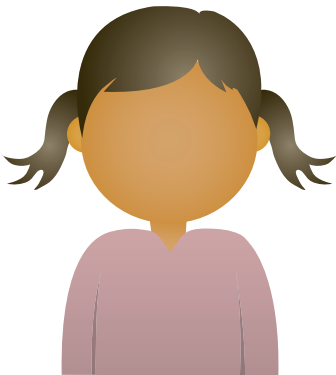
Ruth moved to Ireland from Nigeria just before she started secondary school (at age 12). When we first talked (in 2007) she was 14 and was living in west Dublin. She spoke of the differences between Ireland and Nigeria, citing the weather, as well as key social, cultural and economic differences. She had found it difficult to move to Ireland and settle into school. She had a lengthy commute to school each day. She was acutely conscious of how teenagers in Ireland were less friendly than in Nigeria and some she had found to be *mean*.

She was especially interested in talking about music and in particular rock music which she linked to her favourite pastime - meeting her friends in Dublin city centre and going to Temple Bar, Grafton Street and St Stephen's Green or to the Central Bank to watch skateboarders. We met again about 18 months later. Ruth had moved house, she had more friends since the last time we had talked but had fallen out of contact with many of her friends in Nigeria. She didn't really mix with or talk to any people in her school.

She still went into Dublin city centre to socialise with her friends but this entailed meeting a different crowd in a different part of the city; instead of going to Temple Bar she liked to hang out on O'Connell St (which has emerged over the last ten years as an ethnic neighbourhood). Ruth explained this change as in part a change in her music taste: whereas once she just listened to one type now she listens to *loads* as well as citing a range of her favourite digital music channels e.g. KISS, MTV Base.

Peer groups and friendship networks (especially for teenagers) are frequently highly localised and territorialised and based around the consumption of globalised cultural products and texts. In the example above Ruth's changing music tastes and new friendship groups involved changing use of certain locations in Dublin city centre. For Ruth global popular cultures, dress codes and music tastes are relevant to her everyday life and experience; they help her mark out her similarity to and difference from other groups of teenagers in Dublin. Ethnicity is important in these practices; most of the young people talked about having ethnically diverse peer group and friendship networks. However research data (photographs, discussions and observations) suggested that these peer groups were mainly African/Irish young people. Working out who they were and how they wanted to present themselves involved, for many of the children and young people, taking up a particular look, or hairstyle, or clothes range or activity (like playing soccer) that was popularised by famous and successful black role models. So for example Venus chose her project-name because her favourite tennis player is Venus Williams; Ruth switched her music tastes from 'indie rock' to urban R'nB; Genius loved 'hip-hop' style (and included pictures of himself shopping for these clothes see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Genius shopping.

For many of the boys, sport, playing soccer, supporting English premiership clubs (especially those with famous black African players) and wearing replica kits (often of these players) offered them a means to articulate their differences in ways that were easily intelligible to their white Irish peers (see Figure 7). Of course these practices were shaped by gender, and boys had a number of narrow but significant ways of gaining acceptance from their peers. Girls had fewer options but clothing and styles were ways they could use materials and symbols of global consumer culture to represent themselves (as Ruth did). In other words, the identity that the young people and children stressed draws on only those aspects of their past and present life which can be useful in the here and now, that presents a 'cool' or attractive black persona, and at the same time emphasizes 'being like anyone else'.

On occasion this strategy of emphasising their 'sameness' as their non-migrant peers may lead to conflict with parents surrounding different understandings about parental discipline, disrespectful children and appropriate behaviour in public. In Errow's case his mother felt his 'Westernised' expectations of what he could and could not do with his friends were at odds with what she described as her more 'African' values and expectations.

Figure 7: Stephen playing sport

Experiences of racism

Key finding #7:

Because of their ethnicity many African/Irish children are singled out and made feel different to majority white Irish society. They negotiate this 'othering' on an everyday basis in a number of different ways. This can often result in rejection and exclusion.

Discussions about 'race' and experiences of racism and racialisation are often difficult to talk about, no matter what the age of respondent. In many cases the children and young people sought to brush over (or deny) their experiences of racism. For example Genius denied that he had any experiences of racism:

> *I mean you know about racism because it didn't happen to me and I am really not familiar with such things and it didn't happen to me. The problems to do with racism [didn't happen] to me so I can't tell about this reaction (Genius, 18).*

Ruth described her initial experience of Irish society as: *I dunno a few people are mean but you probably get that everywhere, even in Nigeria.* Experiences like these (and the reluctance to talk about them or to brush them off as due to individual prejudice) were common among the younger children. However my presence as a white, male, adult, majority community member may have shaped these discussions about racism in particular ways. Amy described a local (majority white community) girl as *kind of my friend but she is mean… she says I am not a proper girl and she is.* Errow had been given an explicitly racialised nickname, saying *I got called that name for some reason*. His mother described Errow's (and his siblings') experiences of name-calling and taunting from local children:

> *Interviewer: How was that move, did it, I mean, did the children like it or did they..?*
> *Errow's mum: They didn't like it at all….it had a lot of, what's the word - racism - it was very difficult for the kids playing outside, a lot of rejection…. a lot of name calling, it wasn't nice really… it was very difficult and we still have difficulties at other times and they go and they're called names, you know.*

These accounts reveal that rather than seeing racism as a series of culturally-based beliefs about 'race' that subordinate non-white groups, most children and young people understood racism to refer to instances of individual bigotry, ignorance, prejudice and name-calling. Thierry remembered when he first moved to Ireland (some eight years previously):
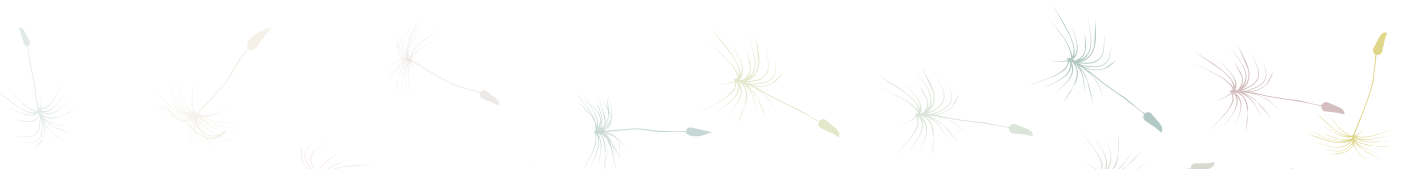
Thierry: I remember I was the only black guy in the whole place
Interviewer: Really?
Thierry: the whole of [local neighbourhood] like in the whole school I was the only one …. it was weird but it was grand, it was weird in like people weren't used to it like, people would look over at me, there wasn't any like racism or anything like that it was just out of curiosity. Even in school like they weren't used to it like, I'd say they probably, cause of that, now they might have been more friendly or tried to be more friendly.

Thierry's account reflects the fact that being different could sometimes be desirable for migrant children. This 'acceptable difference' is however still based on his ethnicity. It is clear from the accounts and narratives offered by African/Irish migrant children and young people that discourses of inclusion/exclusion organised around 'race' and ethnicity are deeply entrenched within the structures of Irish society. It was this 'othering' that children and young people had to negotiate and navigate on an everyday basis. The children and young people did this in ways already identified: through emphasising their locally embedded lives, through emphasising their hybrid African- (or Nigerian-, Kenyan or Zimbabwean- etc) Irish identities, through articulating globalised 'culturally valuable' black identities and through emphasising their 'sameness' as their peers. Accounts of racism, while circumspect, were common and point to understandings of 'Irishness' being organised around ideas about race and ethnicity. The children and young people in this research developed complex and sophisticated strategies to counter these exclusionary processes.

strand **b**

from central and eastern europe to ireland: children's experiences of migration

Naomi Bushin

Introduction

It is difficult to know exactly how many children from Central and Eastern European (CEE[20]) countries currently live in Ireland because of the lack of data that includes children and because these migration flows are difficult to estimate. However, we know that almost 85,000 non-Irish children lived in Ireland in 2006 (CS0 2006), which is more than 7% of the total child population. Sixteen per cent of these 85,000 children moved to Ireland from CEE countries and many of them are EU citizens. This reflects the Irish government's decision not to restrict workers migrating to Ireland from new EU Accession countries in 2004.

Research exploring the migration flows of workers from CEE countries to Ireland, particularly EU citizens, is beginning to emerge but so far it has concentrated on adults' experiences. The central aim of this research was to engage with children who have migrated from CEE countries to Ireland, using children-focused participatory research techniques, so that their experiences of migrating to, and living in, Ireland were revealed. The majority of children who participated in Strand B had one or two parents working in Ireland as economic migrants. A minority of children were asylum-seekers who entered Ireland prior to the accession of the new EU member states, or they originated from countries on the fringe of CEE. The fact that the children entered Ireland through different migratory systems allows comparison of their migration experiences within and between these systems, as well as allowing comparisons between their experiences of living in Ireland. Therefore, despite originating from the same geographical region, children who participated in Strand B were subject to different immigration procedures in Ireland. The majority of them were EU citizens (and could move freely within the EU) but some of them were dependants of employment permit holders, asylum-seekers, or had been granted leave to remain.

Research Aims

1. To ascertain the motivations for family migration from CEE countries to Ireland
2. To further understand children's experiences of migration from CEE countries to Ireland
3. To explore migrant children's constructions of identities and how these are related to conceptualisations of 'home'
4. To analyse migrant children's socio-spatial practices.

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[20]   For the purposes of this research, CEE countries have been defined as: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Republic of Macedonia, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia and two countries on the fringes of CEE – Georgia and Ukraine.
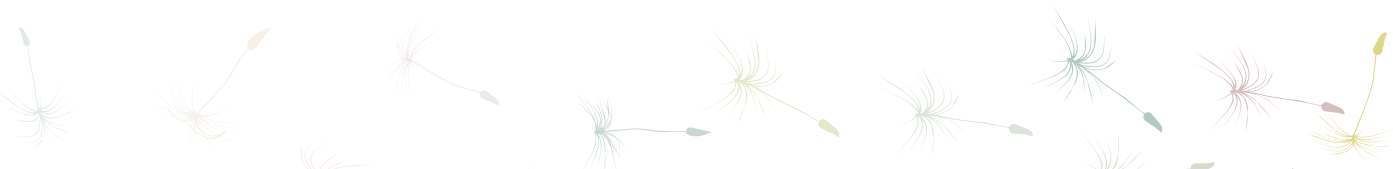
Methodology

Although research in the area of child migration has increased in recent years, the development of comprehensive frameworks within which children's experiences of migration are explored has been limited. This research engaged with children, using children-focused and children-centred participatory research techniques, so that their own perspectives on their experiences of migrating to, and living in, Ireland were revealed. A total of 74 children (40 girls and 34 boys), aged 5 to 18, who had migrated to Ireland between 2004 and 2008, took part in this strand of the research. Fieldwork took place in seven key sites: 'CJ's' homework/social club for migrant teenagers in Cork City, a secondary school in County Cork, a primary school in County Dublin, a primary school in County Cork, a Direct Provision centre (see Appendix B) for asylum seekers in County Cork, a parent and toddler group in Cork City, and in public spaces. Children were able to choose whether or not they took part in the project and were able to choose which activities they would like to participate in. Research visits often took place over a period of several months and research methods included observation, participant observation, photo elicitation, drawing, mental maps, life-journey drawings, model-making, journals, interviews, focus groups and brainstorming. In addition, 13 interviews were conducted with parents and teachers/play-workers were also interviewed[21].

Key Findings[22]

Key finding #1:

The primary motivation for families moving from Central and Eastern European countries to Ireland was economic, but many other factors influenced the families' views that life was better in Ireland than their home countries.

The primary motivation for EU citizen families that migrated to Ireland from CEE countries between 2004 and 2008 was economic. Children and parents discussed the economic advantages of living in Ireland when compared with their home[23] countries and, although many thought that the cost of living in Ireland was high, the salary differentials meant that it was economically advantageous. Some of the families who had migrated to Ireland from CEE (non-EU) countries to seek asylum also mentioned that the economic conditions in Ireland were better than their home countries but they were not able to work in Ireland because of the restrictions imposed on them by the asylum system. The reasons why families moved to Ireland specifically, rather than to another EU country, varied but often it was because of the availability of employment, the relatively small population, the perceived environmental benefits, and because they thought that Irish people were friendly.

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[21]   Some of the fieldwork for Strand B was aligned with some of the fieldwork of Strand A.
[22]   These findings reflect the experiences of families from CEE countries with children who moved to Ireland between 2004 and 2008 and who live in urban and suburban areas of Cork and Dublin.
[23]   Home country was the term the children used to refer to their country of birth.

For many of the migrant worker families, working in Ireland enabled them to save money to send back to relatives in their home countries. Some families planned to return home in the near future to build homes using the money they had earned in Ireland. However, not all families discussed the decision to migrate to Ireland as a short-term economic measure. For some it was part of a longer term plan. Children and parents highlighted the advantages of being able to learn and regularly practise speaking English, something that many of the young people considered to be important for their future employment prospects. Some families felt that living in Ireland offered them a better quality of life not just in financial terms but also that the pace of life was better. Some children commented that they preferred living in Ireland to their home countries because they felt safer, there was less crime than where they had lived previously and they enjoyed visiting the countryside.
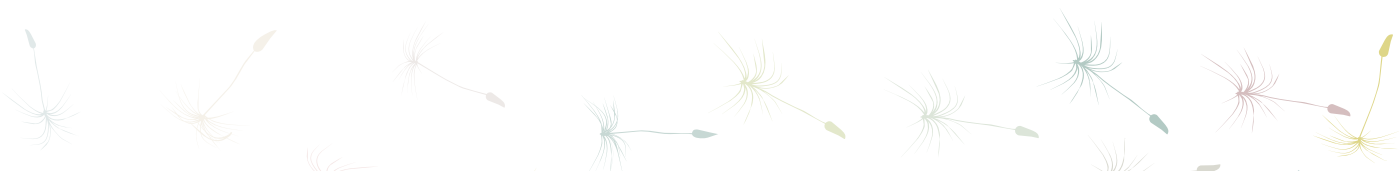
Living apart from family members

Key finding #2:

Many children experienced temporary family fragmentation because of migration.

The majority of the children who participated in this research strand were EU citizens which meant they had free movement within EU member states. Most of the children had never been to Ireland before they migrated and were told by their parents that they were moving a few months before the arrangements had been finalised. The children often migrated to Ireland in the school holidays, often the summer holidays, and travelled by car. A few children were told that they were just visiting Ireland for a holiday and then when they got here they were told that they had migrated.

> *I was really so upset. My Mum said I was just coming for a summer holiday, for one month. And then she said I had to stay. And I said 'No way' but now it is okay (Pamela, aged 15).*

Many of the children had experienced a period of temporary family fragmentation because either one or both parents migrated to Ireland before they did. This was especially the case if the children were teenagers and often meant that they remained living in their home countries for a period of between a few months to two years, before joining one or both parents in Ireland. The reasons for this varied – sometimes it was because of the stage of schooling that the child was at but more often it was because the destination and employment prospects in Ireland for one or both parents was unknown. Migration as a family was perceived to be too large a risk so often one parent would migrate, secure employment and somewhere to live before the rest of the family would migrate. In two-person headed households, the father would often migrate first and then the mother and children would migrate.

> *Agnes said that her older brother had been in Ireland for two years with their father. Her brother also comes to 'CJ's'. Her father has been working and her brother has been at school (he is 17). She moved to Cork three months ago with her mother, elder sister and younger siblings to join her Dad and brother. She said that she liked it in Cork but she missed her friends. (Notes from Naomi's Fieldwork Diary from 'CJ's Homework Club', October 2007).*

Sometimes the reunited families would move location within Ireland or move house within the same residential area. Therefore some children experienced a series of migration steps in addition to their initial migration into Ireland. These processes impacted upon children's socialisation and feeling of connectedness towards local places.

Children whose parents had employment permits (non-EU citizens) often could not migrate with their parents immediately because of the restrictions of various employment permit schemes. Both non-EU citizen children and EU citizen children found periods of temporary family fragmentation, which resulted from parental migration, problematic. Separation from parents was very difficult for some young people and they sometimes found it hard to cope when they were staying with extended family members. Some teenage participants mentioned arguing with grandparents, aunts and uncles a lot during this stage of the migration process. For non-EU citizen children, these difficulties were compounded by the lack of agency they and their parents had – they could not migrate to Ireland at the same time as their parents because of the rules of the employment permit schemes. Unlike non-EU citizen migrant worker families, children with EU citizenship were able to migrate at the same time as parents but some chose not to (or their parents made this decision). Many of the children with EU citizenship were able to live mobile lives – travelling back and forth between Ireland and their home countries, particularly during school holidays.
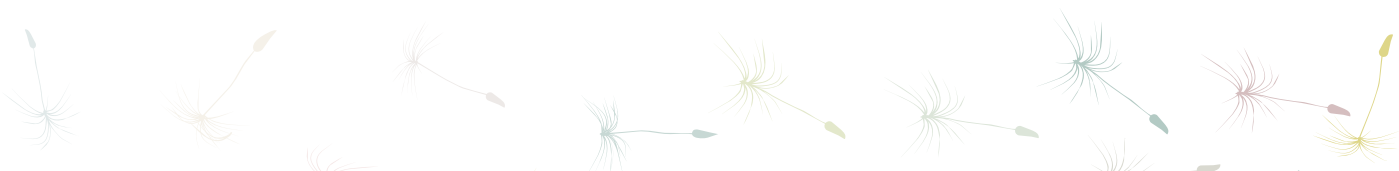
Case Study: Gemma, aged 15
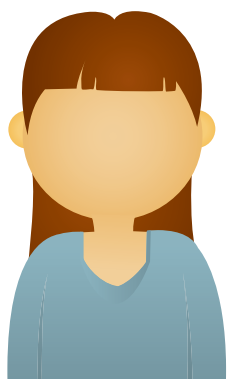
Gemma had lived in Ireland for one year when I interviewed her. Her parents were divorced and she lived in Poland with her mother and sister. Her mother wanted to move to Ireland to look for employment as a teacher. Gemma was quite happy about the idea of moving to Cork but she thought her mother was joking at first. She knew some other people who had migrated to Ireland but she did not think her mother was serious about it. Then, after a few months, she realised that her mother was serious and that they would be migrating. Her sister (aged 17) did not want to move so she stayed with her grandmother in Poland.

Gemma and her mother moved to County Cork and lived with a friend until her mother found work and they found a house to rent. Gemma found saying goodbye to her friends in Poland very difficult. However, her sister eventually decided to move to Ireland because she and grandmother argued a lot. Gemma thought that it was much easier living in Cork when her sister had migrated because it meant she was not alone. She and her sister had more fun because they could do things together. Their mother wanted to stay in Ireland and was in the process of buying a house in County Cork.

tell me about **yourself**

Family is very important when you move

Key finding #3:

Children often connected their parents, particularly mothers, to local communities in Ireland, while the children themselves emphasised how important siblings were in combating isolation.

Parents of young children often met people – other migrants and Irish people – through children-centred activities such as toddler groups, school events and through children's friends. In this way, children became 'connectors' for parents, particularly their mothers – connecting them to everyday life in Ireland. Children also became translators for parents in different situations, such as at the supermarket or at the doctor's surgery, which points to the complexity of intergenerational relationships in migrant families.

The boys started talking about learning English and said their Mums didn't really speak English very much. Adam said that his Mum spends a lot of time at home and only really goes to the supermarket. She has a few Lithuanian friends but no Irish friends. The other boys said that their Mums hardly ever speak English either and they have tried to teach them some English. (Extract from Naomi's Fieldwork Diary, 'CJ's' homework club, April 2007).

Migrating to Ireland with parents and siblings was very important for some young people and their family relationships had become stronger since they had moved. Being away from their friends meant that they sometimes felt isolated but having siblings with them meant that they had other young people to socialise with before they made new friends, often through school.

'My family' by Charlie, aged 9.

Thinking about Ireland and Irishness

Key finding #4:

Children often had stereotypical views of Ireland before they migrated, and interestingly these views remained even after they had been living in Ireland for six months or more. Although the majority of the young people liked living in Ireland, they did not talk about wanting to become 'Irish'.

Children's comments about what Ireland was like and what it was like to live in Ireland often reflected myths and stereotypes such as leprechauns, shamrocks, pots of gold, and also aspects of the physical landscape, such as green hills and rain. These stereotypical views remained even when they had been living in Ireland for six months or more.

'Ireland' by Robin, aged 10

Children's national identities often were very important to them. When discussing their nationality, the children said that they were 'Polish', 'Lithuanian' or 'Hungarian' for example; they did not hyphenate or hybridise their national identities. However, this was sometimes different for children from CEE countries who lived in Direct Provision. Some of these children were proud of their home countries, some did not speak about where they were from, and some criticised their home countries and felt that their futures lay in Ireland.

> '[Name of country] is no good. It is not a good country' (Chloe, aged 6).

Young people did not speak of wanting to become 'Irish' even though they sometimes to referred to the 'Irish' habits or phrases they had picked up. The ways in which they felt they were different to Irish children were mentioned frequently – their 'otherness' – such as the language they spoke, the music and fashions that they liked. Young people had multiple or polyvalent identities but national identities were still important. Ireland was not often considered to be home for many of the young people, just the country they were living in at the present time. They had developed attachments to local places, the places where they 'hung-out,' but they did not speak of wanting to become Irish or Polish-Irish, Lithuanian-Irish. Their otherness was frequently discussed in relation to their experiences of living in Ireland and feeling different to Irish young people.
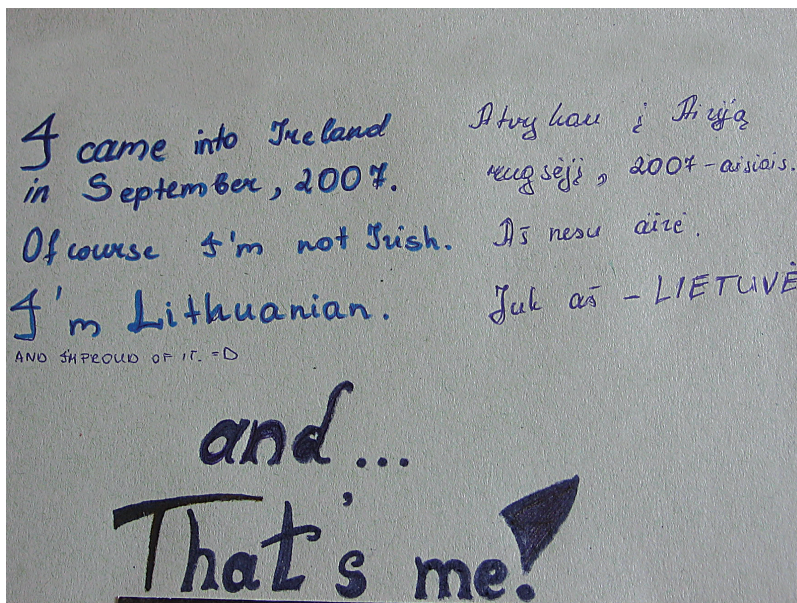
'My Life' book by Samantha, aged 14

Localities in Ireland

Key finding #5:

**Children had strong attachments to their home country nationalities but they
also felt attached to the local places in which they lived in Ireland.**

Although children's ideas about Ireland were often stereotypical and they did not necessarily feel connected to
Ireland *per se*, they often described their attachments to local places, for example: the places and recreational
spaces where they hung-out with their friends, their housing estates, their friends' houses and, sometimes, their
schools. However, these place attachments were not always presented uncritically – teenagers often highlighted
the lack of facilities and activities for young people where they lived. This was particularly the case for teenagers
living on housing estates who mentioned that all the facilities were for young children.
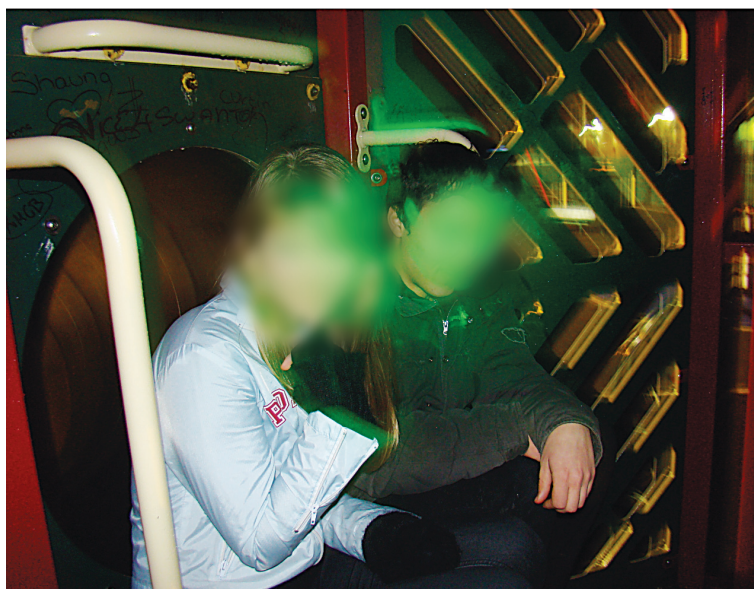
'Hanging out' in a children's playground, Anka, aged 15, and Szymon, aged 17.

Key finding #6:

School was a key site of interaction for migrant young people from CEE countries but being in school sometimes reinforced children's sense of difference in relation to their Irish peers.

Due to the changing make-up of the school-aged population in Ireland, guidelines have been developed for teachers in the areas of teaching English as an additional language and managing a diverse classroom[24]. Generally, however, there is a lack of resources and in-service training for teachers in schools with pupils from migrant backgrounds (see discussion in Section 2). In this context, it seems that responses to the needs of diverse classrooms can vary from school to school. In the three schools (two primary and one secondary) that participated in this research strand, teachers often were coping with difficult circumstances and some felt that they had a lack of support and training. Children who attended 'CJ's' homework and social club also reported different experiences of secondary schooling in Ireland and it was clear that individual schools and teachers applied different management strategies.

One strategy that was implemented in two of the schools (one primary and one secondary) was celebrating the cultural differences between 'Irish' and 'newcomer' children by displaying information about children's home countries and asking children to discuss their home countries. This was seen to be a way of 'integrating' the migrant children into mainstream schooling and normalising difference. Some children appreciated having lessons in which to explore different cultures and enjoyed having the opportunity to speak about their countries and experiences. However, some children felt that these events drew attention to the ways in which they were different to their Irish peers and emphasised their 'otherness'. Some of the children who attended 'CJ's' felt that some of their teachers did not understand the difficulties they faced trying to settle into a new country and a new school. Some young people wanted to refrain from drawing attention to their differences during this settling in period and this meant that teachers' efforts to celebrate difference could be seen to be to the contrary.

> *I was in the school newspaper. For new people. Everybody knows us because this class was in the newspaper. And it is very bad because you hear you name and you turn around and they know you and then they don't like to speak to you (Francesca, aged 13).*

Teachers in one of the primary schools were teaching classes with over 30 children from several different countries. Some of the strategies they used to manage the class were, by their own admission, inappropriate but because of the lack of assistance and training they had they were trying to cope as best they could. Examples of these strategies included having a 'Polish table' at the back of the classroom on which Polish children sat. The Polish children were

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24   For example the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's (2005) *Intercultural Education in the Primary School: enabling children to respect and celebrate diversity, to promote equality and challenge unfair discrimination* and the Irish National Teacher's Organisation (2002) *Intercultural Guidelines.*
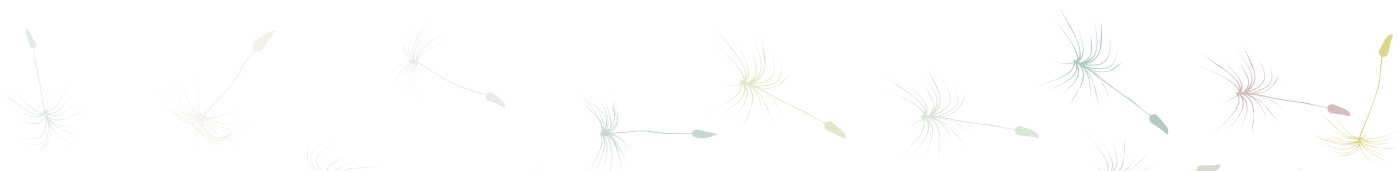
given activities to do but were effectively separated out from the rest of the class so that the teacher could concentrate on what she perceived to be her main job – *teaching the Irish children* (quote from a primary school teacher). Another strategy that was used in one of the primary schools and the secondary school was using children as translators. If a new child joined the class and did not speak much English, a child who spoke the same language as the new child and had more English was asked to translate teaching materials or important information for the new child. These strategies for managing a multi-lingual and diverse classroom were not always agreeable to the teachers who implemented them but more support and in-service training for teachers is needed in this area, as the teachers themselves identified.

The children had varying levels of English when they arrived in Ireland and participated in English language classes, ranging from fulltime for a short intensive period to 45 minutes per week[25]. The length of time children received English language tuition varied according to their length of time in the country and their perceived need. Although some of the children enjoyed speaking English, they often preferred to speak in their home language to each other whenever they could. By speaking their home language in school, the young people's status as being different from the rest of the school population was emphasised. For example, break-times showed the differences between national groups and these could manifest themselves spatially within the school environment. Some young people preferred to remain in the classrooms where they had English language tuition and felt that this was a 'safe space' where they could speak their home languages at break-times.

In addition to attending school during the week, many of the younger children went to weekend schools to be taught the education system of their home country in the home language. These schools are often funded by the national governments of CEE countries, their concern being that if/when children migrated back to their home countries they needed to be able to re-enter the education system at the stage appropriate for their age. Parents often agreed that it was important for children to 'keep up' with the education system in their home country and maintain the language of their home country, even if they were not intending to return there in the foreseeable future.

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[25]   The children in the secondary school had separate, intensive English language classes and attended fewer mainstream classes until the teacher thought that their English was of a standard which meant they could cope with all mainstream classes; the children in the two primary schools were based in a mainstream class and had small-group English language tuition for several sessions a week.

Making and maintaining friendships

Key finding #7:

Children often made friends with other migrant children and/or those who shared their own nationality. They also maintained contact with friends in their home countries by using transnational technologies.

Making new friends in Ireland and maintaining contact with friends in their home countries was very important for children from CEE countries. The majority of children made new friends through school and going to school was a central part of children's socialisation in Ireland. Often they made friends with children of the same nationality or other migrant children. Many of the families were trying to save as much money as possible and/or did not have much spare money so the majority of the children did not attend extracurricular activities which limited their opportunities for making friends outside of school.

Negotiating friendships was not always straightforward for the children from CEE countries. The similarities between Irish children and CEE children – religion and skin-colour – are mentioned frequently in public debates and it can be argued that CEE children are less visible than other groups of migrant children in Ireland. However, the debates concerning migrant children in Ireland often have been over-simplified and have not reflected children's own lived experiences. Many of the CEE children said that they felt labelled by their peer and teachers, particularly in school environments – they felt singled out as 'newcomers', 'immigrants' or 'non-nationals'. This difference was keenly felt by the children in asylum system because they are residentially segregated from other children by the system of Direct Provision.

Some migrant young people had made friends with their Irish peers in school but they rarely socialised with them outside of school time. Children who had joined a school with a high proportion of students from their home country sometimes only had friends who shared their nationality. The main reason for making friends with children with the same nationality was the shared language and shared experiences.

It would be strange to see them [Irish friends] out of school because they are speaking English all the time and they don't understand us. I don't understand them always. I spend time with my Polish friends. I think it's good for me to be in Ireland because it would be hard to leave Ireland now because I have friends and it is another part of my life (Mauva, aged 17).
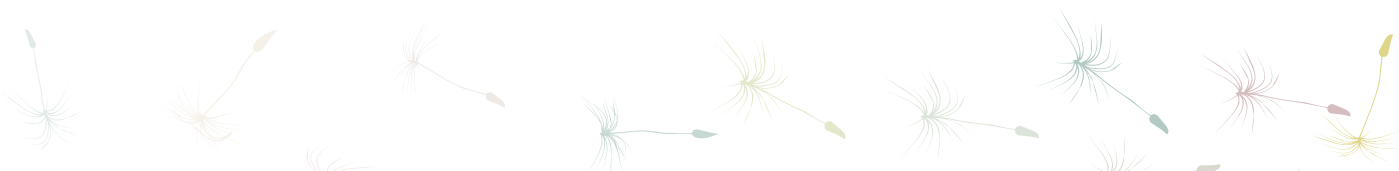
For some young people, this preference for making friends with people from their own national group resulted in friendships with young adults outside of school time; in these cases, shared language and cultural identity was more important than age when young people chose their friends.

> *Adam said that his mother is worried that he will lose his home language if he doesn't have any friends from his home country. He plays basket ball after school with older men from his home country. They work on the clothes' collections and are in their 20s. No one else from his home country is in his school.*
> *(Extract from Naomi's Fieldwork Diary, 'CJ's' Homework Club, April 2007)*

Young people identified being 'migrant' as important when choosing their friendship groups – i.e. they made friends with children who had also migrated rather than those with whom they shared nationality. This was especially the case for children from countries with smaller migration in-flows into Ireland, such as Hungary. To some extent this may be because of the way in which the classes were structured in schools – English language classes placed all migrant children together.
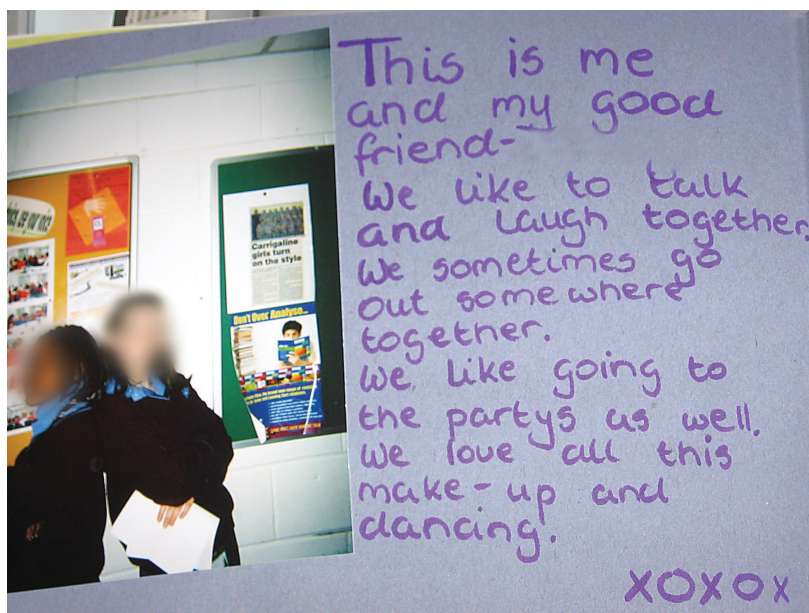
'My Life' book by Sally, aged 13

Older children (apart from those in Direct Provision) maintained frequent contact with friends in their home countries by using transnational technologies, such as internet messaging and social networking sites. This connection to their home countries was very important to them, especially as many of them visited their home countries during the school holidays. However, they often commented that people and places 'back home' were changing whilst they were not there and they sometimes found this difficult. They also discussed how migrating to Ireland had changed aspects of their own personalities, such as having to be more outgoing and confident in order to make new friends.

*For my summer holidays I went to Poland. I spent there one month. I see all my friends and I met my family. I find it really good. However the people and m home town has changed a lot. Anyway I had a lot of fun, I enjoy the fun and a summer time.

For the rest of my holidays I were in Ireland, I am working in a KFC to have my own pocket money. Sometimes it was very busy and tyring but I enjoyed it because of staff working there and the atmosphere in my job.

'My summer holidays' by Abigail, aged 15
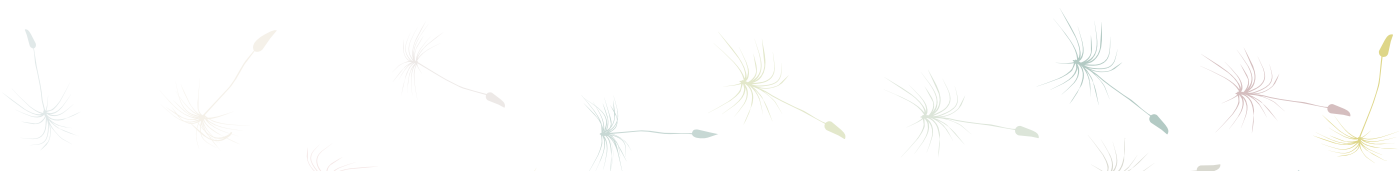
Case Study 2: Adam, aged 13
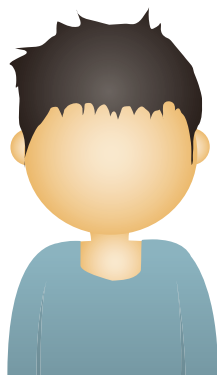
**Interviewed five times between
February 2007 and December 2008**

Adam moved to Ireland with his parents and younger brother. His father works as a driver and works with other men from his home country. His mother does not work outside the home and speaks very little English. Adam was the only person from his home country in his secondary school until the start of the new school year in 2008 when another boy from his home country joined the school.

Adam said that he did not have many friends and that he found making friends in school difficult. He spent a lot of time playing on his computer at home or playing basketball with older men from his home country. Adam went back to his home country for his summer holidays, staying with his aunt and some old school friends. He played sport a lot during the summer and he loves basketball. He fights a lot with his brother but sometimes said that it was good having his brother with him in Ireland. He quite liked living in Ireland and thought that his family would probably stay living in Cork.

Thinking about the future

Key finding #8:

**Older children wanted to stay living in Ireland in the short-to-medium term because they thought it would improve their employment prospects. In the long-term, they were keen to return to their home countries.**

The majority of the children of secondary school age wanted to stay living in Ireland in order to finish their schooling. Although they considered the education systems in their home countries to be better than the education system in Ireland, they recognised the value of learning English and having qualifications from Ireland for their future careers.

Maybe I will go study to Poland but I'm not sure. Because school in Poland is a lot harder than here. What I'm doing now I was doing in Poland at primary school (Ben, aged 16).

I think I will go back to Poland but first I must learn English (Christopher, aged 15).

The migrant worker parents of younger children often stated that they wanted to stay living in Ireland but that this was dependent on employment. Some of the parents had secure employment and had bought homes in Ireland; others were less settled and had temporary jobs. The families who lived in Direct Provision had placed their future hopes on staying in Ireland because of the conditions in their home countries; they could not consider going back. The economic slowdown had made some of the migrant worker families' plans uncertain and some had returned to their countries of origin during the period of research, even though they had originally said that they had planned to stay in Ireland. Other families said that they would stay in Ireland because they had employment, children were settled in school and the quality of life was good.
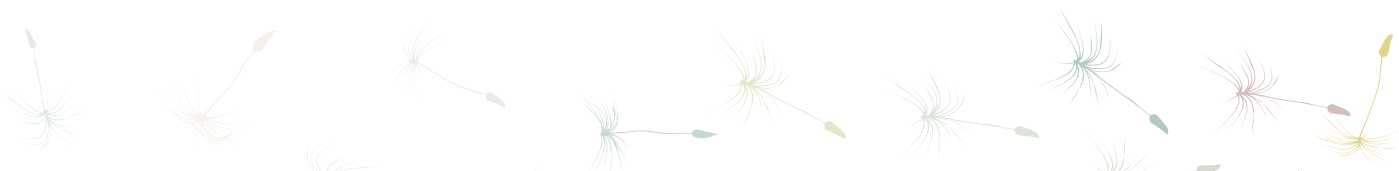
strand **C**

latin american migrant children in ireland

Fina Carpena-Méndez

Introduction: Latin Americans in Ireland

Latin American migration in Ireland is extremely socio-economically diverse and shows a multiplicity of migration statuses, pathways and trajectories. Except for the Brazilians settled mostly in rural towns, the rest of Spanish-speaking Latin Americans are a highly invisible immigrant group in Ireland. The largest group of Latin Americans in Ireland comes from Brazil. The bulk of Brazilian migration began in 1999 from the state of Goiàs with the availability of contracts for qualified workers in the meat processing industry. Over the last decade there has been a steady development of documented and undocumented migration networks from almost every state in Brazil, using Gort (county Galway) as the first stop in Ireland, to rapidly spread out in search of employment, forming additional smaller Brazilian communities in other Irish towns.

There is another less visible group of Spanish-speaking Latin Americans in Ireland, mostly middle class professionals, who arrived with the Celtic Tiger. Some of them hold European passports as descendents of European migrants in Latin America, while others came with work permits. Some travelled directly to Ireland from Latin America, others after migratory trajectories through different European and non-European countries. Some Latin Americans were able to secure jobs according to their qualifications, especially during the settlement of American transnational companies during the Celtic Tiger in Ireland. Others were unable to find jobs according to their qualifications and have progressively experienced difficulties in obtaining and securing employment with Irish employers. Still others have attempted to remain in Ireland by way of self-employment or through starting their own business.

Some Brazilian working class families had Irish-born children and/or could bring their children after settling in Ireland. In other cases, families had children still residing in Brazil or had sent their children back to Brazil, after staying some years in Ireland, mainly due to economic reasons. Brazilian and Spanish-speaking Latin American professional middle class families are either childless couples or the children remain with them. There are some split nuclear families where the mother and the children continue to live in Ireland for a period of time after the father has relocated to another country due to employment reasons. Under such circumstances it was considered desirable to allow the children to finish the school year or cycle with their friends in Ireland.

Research Aims

My research aims at developing an ethnographic understanding of what it means to grow up as an immigrant child in contemporary Ireland. My project explores the migratory experiences, transnational and everyday lives of Latin American children growing up in Irish society. I seek to trace the diversity of situations and experiences of Latin Americans in Ireland according to their migrant status, migration trajectories, ethnic, national and social origin, and rural and urban settlement in Ireland. I am particularly interested in the social worlds of immigrant children, the nature of their experiences in Ireland and of intergenerational relationships in their families.
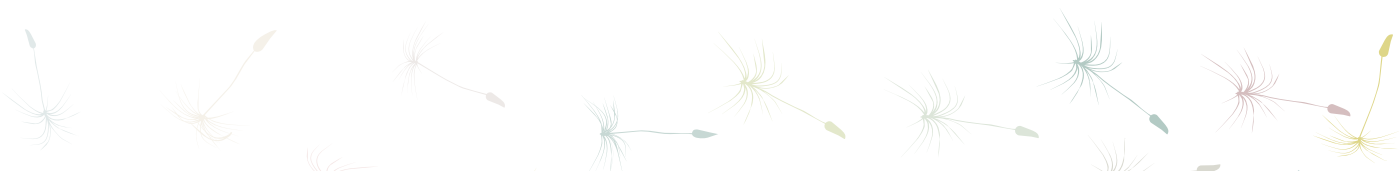
Research Procedures and Methodological Options

I have aimed at framing this work within the ethnography of children and childhood through in-depth participant observation and extensive time shared by following children across social domains in families, schools, public spaces and the broader community. In the tradition of ethnography, an honest account of the conditions under which fieldwork was carried out and the character of the relationship between the ethnographer and the subjects of her study are crucial if the reader is to evaluate the materials presented. In conducting ethnographic fieldwork the ethnographer abides by the serendipitous flow of events, subjecting herself and her time to her subjects' convenience and availability, aiming to continuously forge and nurture the possibility of witnessing and being part of what is happening in the group under study. In this case, logistical factors made it difficult for me to sustain deep ethnographic work outside county Cork (in Gort, Roscommon and Dublin), where most Portuguese and Spanish speaking Latin Americans reside.

I began the first fieldwork visits in Dublin at the beginning of 2007, three or four consecutive days at a time, sharing informal conversations, meals, and walks around the neighbourhoods or nearby parks with parents and children. Sometimes I was invited to spend a few days living with a family and joining them in their routines, mostly during weekends, including leisure activities, attending religious services, visits to friends or other family members. I conducted individual interviews with adults and children, lasting one or two hours and occasionally I was invited to record informal group conversations in which children participated, especially when friends were joining for coffee or weekend visits. Although I participated in the conversations, these recorded group discussions were not intended to be "focus groups" because I was not directing them with an outline of prepared questions.

By April 2007 I had secured the needed connections to initiate fieldwork in Gort and Roscommon. I was introduced to families who knew other families in these towns. I interviewed gatekeepers or intermediaries (such as leaders of cultural associations, NGOs, priests, social workers) but did not enter the field through them. In summer 2007 I spent several weeks in these towns working and living with four families and their children. I consider my work in Dublin, Gort and Roscommon as preparing the ground for subsequent exhaustive fieldwork. This is usually the long, difficult, though indispensable process of familiarization with a specific social and cultural context necessary for a strong ethnographic construction. This initial period of familiarization is crucial to build the abilities to participate in cultural practices and construct numerous, direct (without intermediaries), solid, and extendable networks of relationships. Someone unfamiliar with the ethnographic task might consider that this time spent in the field in short and erratic visits is sufficient if well used. However, this is only the case when the personal knowledge on the broader context of the group under study is already solid, allowing the application of focusing techniques with selected field sites and informants. Although I had previous extensive fieldwork experience on the area of migration in Europe (Spain) and Latin America (Mexico), both the diversity of Latin American communities and the broader Irish society in which they are incorporated were new to me. For this reason, my work on the Latin American communities in Ireland must be read as what it is, a prospective ethnographic exploration, which I intended to be serious and carefully conducted, laying the foundation for subsequent research and producing the emerging findings outlined below.

From October 2008 until March 2009 I conducted fieldwork exclusively in county Cork with breaks in between, visiting mainly Spanish-speaking families and doing participant observation in primary schools one or two days a week. I have remained in contact via email and phone with families and individuals I have worked with outside of Cork. I have worked with a total of 20 families and their children in different parts of Ireland. During this period of time, the economic situation has radically altered in Ireland as well as the world, which has affected particularly non-EU labour migrants such as Latin Americans. Over the last several months, I would frequently discover on calling a family that they had decided to move outside of Ireland and were preparing to leave. I would attempt to schedule a (last) meeting with them. Sometimes these rushed meetings could only allow for a courtesy farewell chat or meal. In other instances, these meetings unexpectedly became deeply cathartic reflections by parents under particular mental and emotional states conditioned by the imminent departure. In some cases, these emotional meetings would engage up to four hours of recording. Children would also be present, participating in the reflections, often teasing parents and the ethnographer with opposing interpretations. They would play and move in and out of the kitchen (full of packing boxes and books and toys that would be left behind), or fall asleep if the conversation continued after midnight.

I understand the ethnography of childhood as a form of inquiry that places children at the focal point of the analysis and in that sense my work is child-centered. When appropriate, I supplemented participant observation with research techniques adapted to children's ages such as drawings as well as talk and play. However, these techniques did not mediate my relationship with children; I mainly employed them as an activity to further facilitate a connection and establish trust with them. Some children enjoyed drawing for and with me or with other children, and others did not feel inclined to draw in their homes as it felt like a school activity or homework. Many children had their own cameras and liked to take pictures of their surroundings, weekend trips in Ireland, family visits or simply of themselves and their friends. They generously showed and/or offered those pictures to me as an illustration of their stories and experiences.
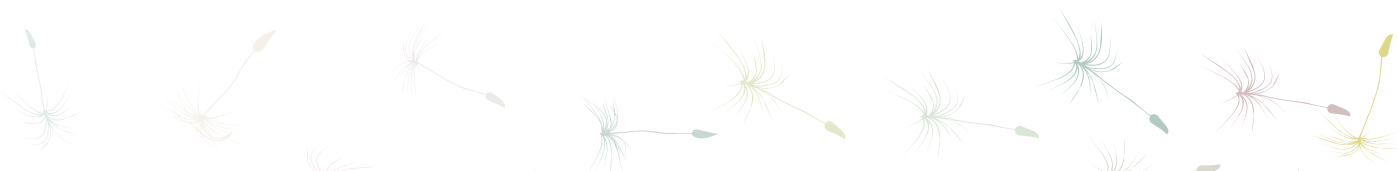
Emerging Research Findings

Diversity of experiences

Key finding #1:

An extreme diversity of lived experiences of migration and incorporation exists among Latin American children in Ireland which challenges common understandings of homogeneity among ethnic categories constructed in migration research and policy.

The experiences of Latin American children in Ireland are characterized by an extreme diversity of situations in origin (national, ethnic and social class status), migration trajectories and migrant status. This has important implications for the experiences of children. There is little sense of a collective identity as an immigrant group and weak networks of support and communication except for the Brazilians settled in specific rural areas like Gort and Roscommon. Therefore, there is an extreme multiplicity of family strategies regarding the desirability of maintaining the language of origin at home, dense transnational lives or an active social life with other Latin Americans (weekend visits, celebrations and vacations together so that children can develop friendships). The possibility and desirability of maintaining dense transnational lives depend on socio-economic status, migrant status and the perceived opportunities for remaining in Ireland and/or returning home.

Key finding #2:

Strong bonding or close knit networks of relationships with other migrants from the same place of origin can smooth the transition of migration and settlement for children. However, these connections are not always experienced as beneficial to them and in some cases reproduce social tensions and conflicts from the society of origin.

Even in Brazilian communities settled in Irish rural towns where interdependency and bonding is important in linking migrants to informal forms of support, formal services, and the information necessary for finding jobs and day-to-day survival, there can be high levels of intra-ethnic competition and exploitative practices, especially in the context of a shrinking labour market. Families I worked with often complained about competition and lack of support in the community, even among family members settled in the same town. Caty, a 40 year old woman, explained:

> *even if you have family members in Ireland you can expect more help from a good neighbour or friend than from them (Caty, parent).*

Claudia arrived from Brazil without knowing anyone in Ireland,

> *when I asked for housing or employment with other Brazilians, most of them from Goias, they would give me a dirty look, because I was from Sao Paulo (Claudia, parent).*

In this context, children have contradictory experiences. Having relatives or friends upon arrival in Ireland can be a valuable form of social and cultural support facilitating their settlement. They often strongly depend on other children from the same ethnic and language group upon arrival in Ireland for initial help with translations and for being introduced to friendship and play groups while at the same time finding themselves affected by adults' conflicts and social divisions. In a world given to them by adults, children struggle with adult prejudices and their own spontaneous curiosity and need to interact with others. I found many children wishing to play with neighbours whose parents opposed to such interactions due to the reproduction of social conflicts and prejudices from their countries of origin. At the same time they are often expected to provide support at home as translators and language teachers for adults. Claudia, for instance, explained that she worked for two years in Ireland interacting only with other Brazilians and could not learn any English until she brought her daughter to Ireland. Her daughter was seven years old, learned English quickly and now translates for her. Claudia complains that her daughter sometimes is not very interested in helping her with English grammar as she would like to learn English faster.

An uncertain future and the role children play in migration decisions

Key finding #3:

The future for non-EEA labour migrants in Ireland is very uncertain due to the effect of economic, migration, and integration policies. However, children's experiences can have an important role in family decisions to stay in or leave a country.
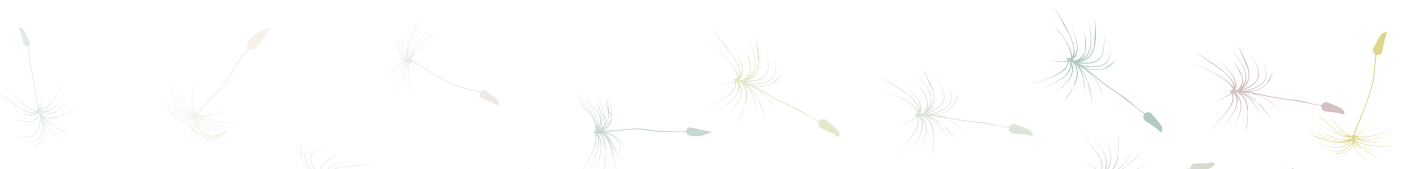
Coinciding with the current economic deceleration and the effect of immigration and integration policies, in the last year the number of Latin Americans who have returned to their countries of origin after living in Ireland has exceeded the total number of migrants leaving Ireland in the last decade[26]. The current economic deceleration and their migration status determine the possibility of a future in Ireland for immigrants of Latin American origin. There is a strong sense that their presence in Ireland is temporary. In many cases children I began to work with in 2007 have returned to their countries of origin, have migrated to other countries within Europe or outside Europe, or the mother and the children have moved to their country of origin and the father to a different one (split nuclear families in different countries). Children's experiences and circumstances can have an important role in family decisions to leave or attempt to remain in the country. One family, for instance, decided that the children would return with their mother (who quitted her job here) to Chile since the oldest daughter was *becoming too introverted, shy, and insecure, spending too much time alone at home on the internet* given her experiences of bullying in her school and the neighbourhood, while the father would move to Germany for another employment. Another family from Argentina decided to stay in Ireland against all odds since they considered it necessary to finally provide their children with a stable social and cultural environment after successive migration trajectories through different countries.

Key finding #4:

Socio-economic class has emerged in the research process as very significant in shaping children's lived experiences of migration and incorporation in Ireland.

In Latin American middle class families there is a tendency to maintain a highly mobile life style, choosing to rely on social resources and services back in their countries of origin, which they perceive as being of higher quality, rather than those on offer in Ireland. For instance, many families travel back to Latin America when giving birth to a baby or for health care services. Some also prefer to bring a care giver from Latin America rather than relying on child care services in Ireland. A family from one central American country, for instance, decided to bring a friend from another central American country to take care of their children here in Ireland. When this woman took some weeks of vacation, the children's grandparents would come from central America for a few weeks or months to substitute her.

Many children belonging to Latin American professional middle-classes have gone through successive migration processes through several countries before reaching adolescence. In each country they have experienced different constructions of their identities (national, ethnic, and socio-economic), as well as different school systems, and language learning processes. Children have incorporated these experiences in their sense of self and understandings of the Irish context in which they currently live. In some children experiencing highly mobile childhoods there is a resilience coupled with worldliness, but also a progressive emotional exhaustion and struggles to cross and negotiate different cultural and social worlds.

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[26]   IOM, (2008) *Assessment of Brazilian migration patterns and assisted voluntary return programme from selected Member States to Brazil*

**Exclusion, isolation, and inter-cultural relationships**

Key finding #5:

Children play an important role in connecting their families and communities with wider Irish society. However, many children and families perceive that it is difficult for them to break into and be accepted into Irish social networks. Some of them understand that integration is a two-way process of immigrants being allowed to participate and locals being opened to difference.
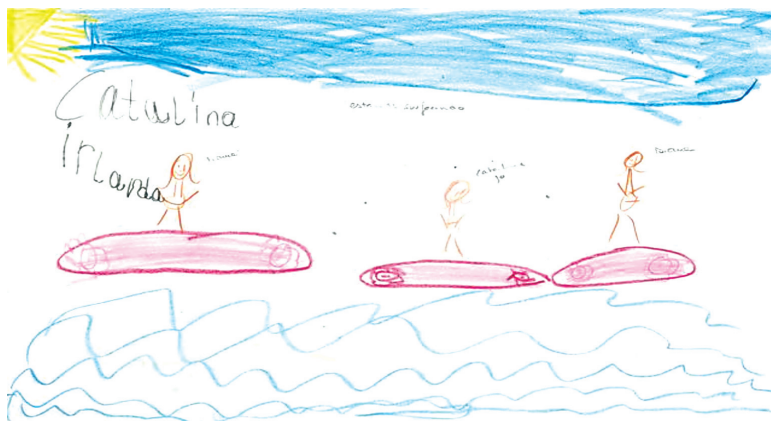
Cat, 7 year old girl, often drew for me scenes of her weekend activities and leisure time in Ireland, representing mainly herself with her mother and siblings. She said she had good friends at school but did not play often with them outside school time.

What has emerged from Latin American migrant children's and families' narratives is a perception that social integration of immigrants in Irish society is weak, that there are few spaces for broader social interaction and opportunities for inter-cultural communication other than the school and the workplace. Many families and children experience social isolation in their towns and neighbourhoods. Many Latin American families tied their struggles for social mobility and/or the maintenance of a middle-class status to a transnational migration project. Their perception is that Ireland offers their children the opportunity to grow up in a more peaceful and socially equitable context than in Latin America. However, their experiences in Ireland are not always positive. Many children struggle to carve a space for themselves in the local networks of meaningful friendships and belonging. They experience forms of exclusion that go beyond socio-economic and spatial segregation, like peer bullying in schools and neighbourhoods. Social isolation and indifference can be soul destroying for some immigrant children, which in some cases shapes their understandings of what it is to be Irish - a way of being in the world firmly rooted in the local and indifferent to other ways of doing, being and perceiving.
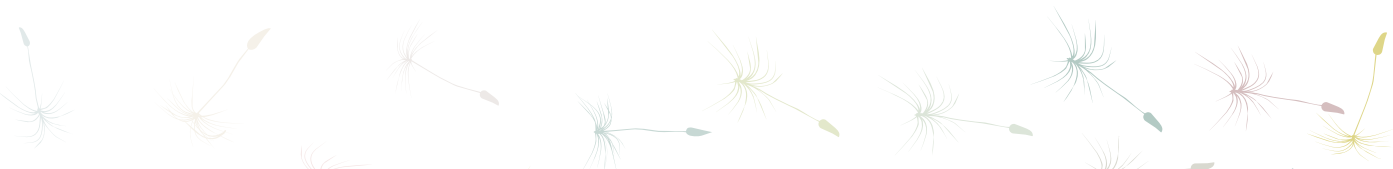
Experiences of the Irish school

Key finding #6:

Local schools are the first spaces where immigrant children come into contact with Irish and other immigrant children. The school can be a key integrating mechanism for immigrant children in wider Irish society, and a space in which to experience a two-way integration process.

Miguel, 8 year old boy, said he is learning to play hurling and Gaelic Football at school, and that he is now joining his group of friends to play after school in a nearby park in his neighbourhood.

The school is a very important institution for immigrant children's well-being given the lack of other public spaces and infrastructures for social interaction in Ireland. It is a primary space for constructing local networks of friendships and belonging that could extend beyond the school. Latin American families and their children experience adaptations to the Irish school system which, in some cases and circumstances, can involve conflicts. They find that it is difficult to make their concerns heard, to talk and negotiate emerging issues directly with teachers and school principals given divergent styles of communication and cultural values regarding conflict resolution processes. Many children and their parents also find that the standard of education in Ireland is not as high as they experienced elsewhere. In some families, there is a perception that the Irish education system deprives their children of fundamental rights (to develop their own potentials, interests, and abilities to the fullest) and limits their future possibilities in the international labour market, as it is not certain that they will remain indefinitely in Ireland, or return to their countries of origin in case of those who might end up leaving Ireland.

Latin American families demand social integration, knowledge and relationships for their children. They also demand respect, appreciation of their cultural background and circumstances and harmonious coexistence. The school can give both Irish and immigrant children such an opportunity, which is frequently not given in other social contexts and spaces. It is a matter of showing to parents, children, teachers, and the broader society, that other forms of relation and communication are possible and more rewarding. Another type of school is possible, one in which the immigrant family and child is not taken for granted as different but appreciated in their efforts and suffering. If the immigrant family and child do not find empathy in their efforts and circumstances, it is possible that they may remain separated in the emerging social fabric of Ireland and tied to cultural and social stereotypes.
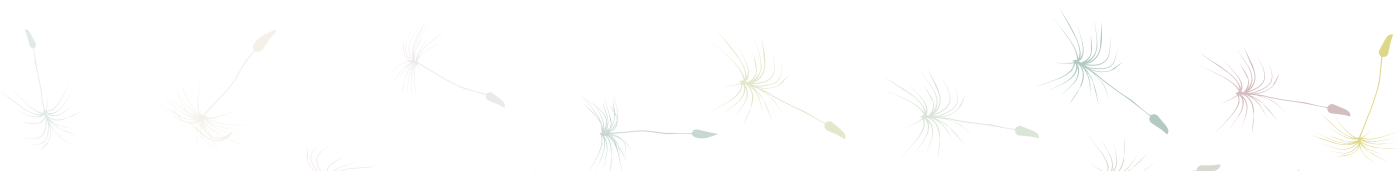
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coming home? children and young people in returning irish families

Caitríona Ní Laoire

Introduction

Returning Irish migrants are one of the largest groups of migrants in contemporary Ireland, making up almost 9% of the population[27]. A significant number of the 1980s generation of emigrants returned to Ireland during the economic boom between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s. Many brought their foreign-born children with them, in the belief that Ireland would provide a better environment in which to raise their children than where they had been living. These migrant children are in many ways a relatively invisible population in Ireland, overshadowed in the public mind by the visibility of 'non-Irish' migrant children. Media, public and policy concerns with issues affecting young migrants tend to be directed towards those who are visibly most different, and perceived therefore to be culturally most different, to the majority Irish population. As a result, children in returning Irish families are a particularly under-researched and overlooked group.

Research aims

This research aimed to contribute to better understandings of the lives of children and young people who have moved to Ireland as part of returning Irish families and, in this, to prioritise the voices of the children themselves. It set out to explore:

- the migration experiences, everyday lives and social worlds of these children and young people;
- the ways in which they are both included and excluded among their peers
- their relationships with other family members in the context of return migration; and
- the ways in which the children and young people negotiate their own identities and senses of belonging.

Methodology

In-depth qualitative research was conducted over a period of almost two years (2007-2009) with 36 children and young people (15 boys and 21 girls), and 21 parents (in 16 families) who moved to counties Cork and Kerry in the south-west of Ireland. Thirty-three of the 36 young participants were aged between 3 and 18 (the remaining three were aged 19 to 23 and had moved to Ireland as children). Some of the children had one or two Irish-born parents and some had one or two second-generation Irish parents. They lived in urban, rural and suburban locations, and they all moved to Ireland during the period of high return migration between 1995 and 2007. They had moved from a variety of global locations, with the US and England being the most common. Repeat visits were made to each family (on average three to four visits with each family), when participative research activities, such as 'draw-and-talk', photography and mapping, were conducted with the children and teenagers, and in-depth interviews with parents.[28]

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27   Just under 9% of the population comprises Irish-born persons who have lived abroad for at least one year (Census of Population 2006).
28   These research encounters occurred in the children's homes, and all family members were invited to participate. Usually, parents were not present during research with children, and neither were children present during research with parents. Efforts were made to include participant families with a range of geographical, family composition and social class profiles, which reflect as closely as possible the known characteristics of the population.
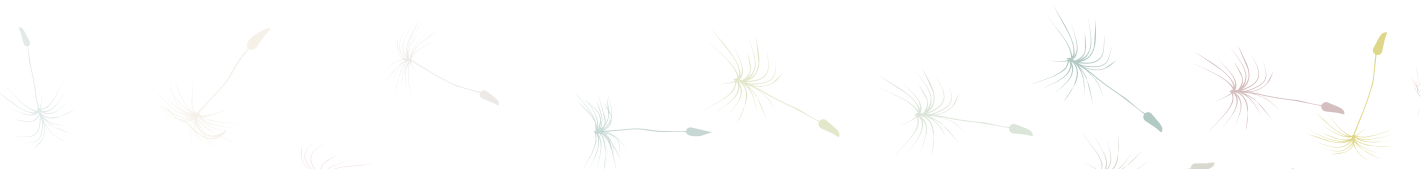
Main Research Findings

Invisibility

Key finding #1:

Children who move to Ireland as part of returning Irish families are invisible in many ways in Irish society which means that the difficulties they experience tend to be overlooked.

Children who move to Ireland as part of returning Irish families are in many ways invisible in Irish society, partly because of assumptions that they are white and Irish, and therefore 'the same as everyone else'. The children who participated in this research lived lives that were similar in many ways to Irish children who had never migrated: they shared the same likes, dislikes, hopes, fears, lifestyles, leisure activities and interests. Their ages, genders and preferences were just as or more important to their identities than their migration background. This invisibility means that children in returning Irish families are often overlooked in considerations of child migration, and it is not usually recognised that their experiences of migration to Ireland can be both complex and difficult. People frequently assume that they are not really migrants at all, that they fit in without any problems and that they do not have the same experiences as other migrant children.

Sense of loss

Key finding #2:

Children in returning Irish families experience a sense of loss in relation to people, places and other aspects of life in the place in which they lived previously.

Many of the children and young people who participated in the research were generally happy with their lives in Ireland. However, they still missed their friends, other adults, their house, their neighbourhood, as well as food items and other aspects of life and culture where they used to live. Peer friendships are extremely important to children and young people and their experiences of losing old friends and making new friends were, for them, by far the most important feature of their migration experiences.

> *…we were also sad when we left 'cos we got friends there but then we've got friends here so we're happy but we're sad at the same time (Esme, age 8).*

Sometimes they talked in the present tense about their old friends even if they were no longer in contact with them. Making new friends was seen by many of them as the key to being happy in the new location. They also sometimes left behind relatives, which could be quite traumatic for them, especially if grandparents, cousins, aunts/uncles previously played a significant part of their everyday lives.

> *…it was just like I was scared, 'cos I'd lose my friends and all that and it was going to be a long time until I make friends, and I'll leave my grandparents, […] also because my cousins, we used to see each other like every day at school, so… (Jade, age 9).*

Connecting through citizenship and family

Key finding #3:

Children in returning Irish families can and do benefit from having Irish citizenship and Irish relatives, which connect them into Irish society in particular ways, although these connections are not always beneficial to them.

Unlike other migrant children, children in returning Irish families usually have automatic rights to formal Irish citizenship and of course also have Irish parents and Irish relatives. Both of these factors can be advantageous in terms of facilitating their integration in, and connecting them to, Irish society in the long term. However, this is not always the case and is not necessarily straightforward.

Being Irish citizens
All of the children who participated in this strand of the research had, or were entitled to, formal Irish citizenship, as is the norm for returning Irish families. While this was taken for granted by many children, it could also be extremely useful in certain circumstances. For example, it could be used as 'proof' of identity and belonging when these were challenged by others.

> *Interviewer: And do you think other people consider you to be Irish?*
> *David: Maybe, I wasn't born here, I never lived here but my passport's Irish, so (David, age 12).*

It also means that they can consider a future in Ireland - they can assume that staying in Ireland, going to university there, and so on, are taken-for-granted possibilities. This can enable strong ties to develop in Ireland. It also means that there is freedom to travel outside Ireland without fear of being unable to return.

Having Irish parent(s) and relatives
The children's Irish parents, having lived in Ireland or spent time there, usually have some familiarity with local norms. This can ease transitions for their children and can open doors for them. Some of the children themselves were familiar with Ireland or the locality to which they moved, having spent time there in the past on holidays. In addition, having relatives and especially cousins living there was often a valuable source of social support.

> *Interviewer: How about you Sean, would you say it's hard to make friends or easy?*
> *Sean: No because I had a cousin and I knew him before and I just hung out with him and I made friends*
> *(Sean, age 12).*

These factors can work together to reinforce the children's connectedness in Irish society and to facilitate their settlement in Ireland in the short and long-term. However, none of these factors can be taken for granted and the realities are often far more complex than this. The research also found that having Irish citizenship was not necessarily sufficient protection for the children against arguments made by others about whether they could legitimately claim to belong in Irish society – see below. Relatives were not always or necessarily supportive, or living nearby. Return migration can often result in tensions within families between migrants and non-migrants. In addition, familiarity with Ireland from having spent holidays there sometimes led to unfulfilled expectations and disappointment on the part of the children. Some found that relationships with family members in Ireland had changed after their return. Conor talks here about his cousin who lived nearby:

> *… and we were always best friends like, so I suppose I was half thinking that when I came back like, we would kind of be friends or whatever but he had his own life like and I was in town, so it's kind of different like you know (Conor, age 18).*
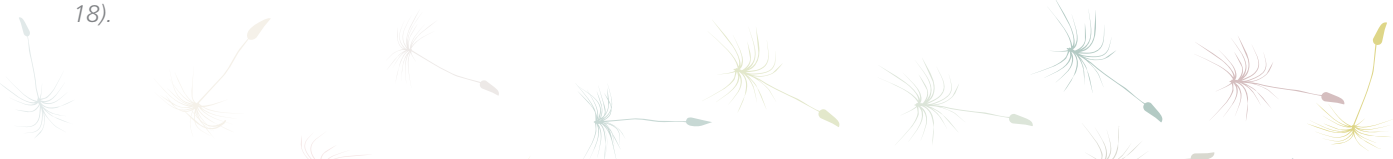
Connecting through leisure and play

Key finding #4:

Leisure and play shape the children's interactions with their peers in different ways. The important role played by male-dominated competitive team sports in Irish society means that boys face significant pressures to conform through sport in order to be accepted. Neither the pressures for, nor the rewards of, participation in team sports are as powerful for girls as for boys.

Leisure, play and shared interests can provide an important point of connection with other children and young people. For children and young people of all ages, having access to spaces in which they can interact with peers away from the gaze and control of adults is very important. Many of the children in the research had moved from urban to rural or suburban areas. For the younger children, this meant that they had greater freedom to play outdoors in open green spaces and to mix with neighbouring children, a factor which was generally welcomed by them and their parents.

'Where I live', by Emily, age 8

For example, this is Emily's map of where she lives, showing the central role of the green space in which she plays with neighbouring children. However, for some of the older children and teenagers, the lack of public transport connections in such areas meant that their independence was restricted, they became more dependent on parents for getting around and they experienced boredom as well as difficulties in meeting friends.

Anne: Like I was so independent I had more friends when I was 5 in England than I did when I was 15 in Ireland.
*Interviewer: Really?*
Anne: Yeah, I did and like you know [in Ireland] I was driven everywhere and like... it was like I used to.... like it was a big deal if I wanted to go to meet somebody in McDonald's for an hour (Anne, early 20s, moved to Ireland age 5).

In part, this reflects the growing privatisation and formalisation of children's and teenagers' recreation and leisure time. Participation in formal leisure activities was an important aspect of life for many of the research participants. This provided some continuity with their previous lives and could also be a means of fitting in with local practices, as well as making friends. This was recognised by their parents, who usually had the material and other resources to make this possible. Being relatively familiar with Irish society, return migrant parents recognised the importance of activities such as sport as a means of integration. These are also often bound up with particular narrow cultural definitions of Irishness (for example, gaelic games and Irish dance or music), and thus could be used by the children as a badge of identity. For example, Colin (age 18), when discussing his feelings of being part-Irish and part-American, referred to sport to explain his 'part-Irishness':

> *… but like part Irish or part American, yeah like because I, my sport is football like, Gaelic football, but like I feel American like, so it's kind of like the best of both or whatever like, you know, so I don't know (Colin, age 18).*
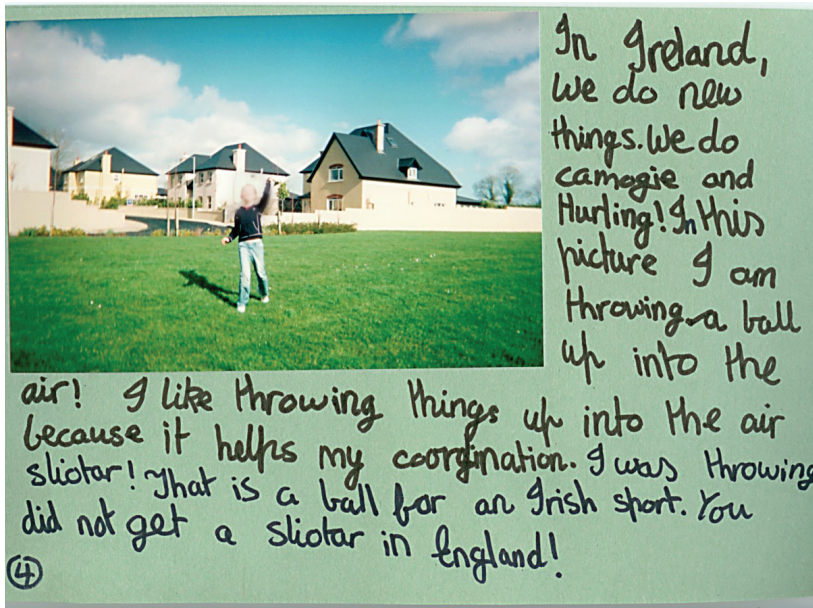
Page from Sally's (9) photo-book 'My Life'

However, participation in sport is highly gendered. Despite increasing female participation, football is still a male-dominated sphere. Its pervasiveness in Irish society means that it is also a key means of social acceptance, particularly dominant in boys' cultures. While both boys and girls have access to, and participate in, the dominant team sports (gaelic games, soccer, rugby), these can have quite different meanings in the lives of boys and girls. Because of the close relationship between masculinity and football in Irish society, football is more all-pervasive in boys' cultures than girls', especially in the teenage years. This means that the social pressures for migrant boys to participate in sport are greater than for migrant girls. On the other hand, the reward of participation for boys is acceptance among their peers and in the local community, and sport can become an integral part of their identities. Of the 13 boys aged over 5 who took part in the research, 11 of them presented gaelic games, soccer or rugby as being central to their lives and identities. When asked to draw a picture or take a set of photographs to represent themselves and their lives, many of the boys chose to represent themselves participating in a team sport.

'My life' by Bart, age 7

This does not mean that sport is not important to the girls also. Some of the female participants did participate in different sports and gained from this. However, it was just one of a range of options open to them in terms of developing their identities and socialising with peers.

Being excluded

Key finding #5:

Children in returning Irish families can experience processes of exclusion which are based on assumptions that they cannot fully belong in Irish society. This highlights the inherent contradictions of definitions of Irish belonging that claim to be inclusive of members of the Irish diaspora.

Children in returning Irish families can and do experience difficulties in being accepted in Irish society. This can involve being made to feel different, being excluded in peer group contexts and experiencing struggles over identity and belonging. Being seen to be the same as their peers is extremely important to many children, especially young children, although this can become less important in certain contexts where difference and uniqueness can sometimes be desirable.

Feelings of difference
Some of the children talked about having felt different, or being identified as different, when they started school in Ireland; this was related to factors such as having a different accent, standing out from the crowd, or just being the new boy/girl. Anne talks here about starting primary school when she moved to Ireland:

> *Anne: It was like you know I was stared at and things.*
> *Interviewer: Really?*
> *Anne: Like I don't think that would have happened in England if you know somebody with an Italian accent you know that maybe that had Italian parents that had a bit of an Italian accent like for instance I don't think they'd have been talked about and stared at in England whereas in Ireland like... it really... I was stared at (laughs), and there was no other returning migrants in my class they were all Irish totally that had always lived in Ireland (Anne, early 20s, moved to Ireland age 5).*

These feelings of difference, while they were often temporary and diminished with time – partly because of their own efforts in asserting their sameness (see below) –were a source of anxiety and distress for the children at the time.

Bullying and exclusion
In some cases, the children had been excluded from peer groups. This was sometimes related to being unfamiliar with local norms – for example behaving in ways which were not socially acceptable in the new peer group context – or, alternatively, being familiar enough to know not that they should not push themselves forward and as a result becoming somewhat isolated. In certain cases, children described being bullied; for example, their accents and other aspects of their behaviour which apparently diverge from the norm were ridiculed, or they were targets of verbal abuse.
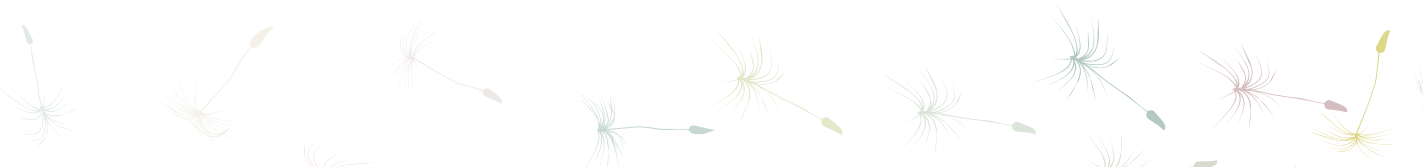
Caoimhe: I mean I have been bullied in primary school 'cos I came from England like do you know? And it wasn't girls it was boys do you know. […] I was English and I was weird and do you know....
Interviewer: Really?
Caoimhe: I wasn't like the rest of them. I wasn't from Cork and things like that. I mean I was just like them - I was just born in a different country. I mean I see myself as Irish anyway so... It did upset me a lot like and do you know I felt like I was ... wasn't right and normal like... (Caoimhe, age 15).

Caoimhe went on to explain the other children's attitudes with reference to local adult attitudes which they were simply reproducing. The ways in which children and young people become involved in processes of inclusion and exclusion must be understood in the context of wider societal (adult) beliefs about identity, in-migration and belonging. These wider and often exclusionary beliefs about what it means to be Irish are reflected and reproduced in schools, neighbourhoods and children's cultures and are manifest in the migrant children's encounters with Irish society.

Struggles over identity and belonging
Very often these encounters involved the children's Irishness being challenged by others. In challenging their Irishness, what was also being questioned was their right to fully belong. This was particularly difficult for children who had been brought up to see themselves as being Irish. It meant that they were put in the difficult position of having to assert their own and their family's Irishness and thus their claim to belong to the peer group, the local community and Irish society. These processes of exclusion reflect wider societal beliefs and attitudes in relation to Irishness, belonging and migration, in which second generation Irish are frequently constructed as being 'not fully Irish', and thus not fully belonging. Some of the children reflect these views themselves, such as in this statement by David about the importance of place of birth and upbringing in being accepted as Irish:

Interviewer: Say, what do you think of if I said 'Irish'? What are the words that come into your mind?
David: Being born there or living there and, like, if you're used to that way of living (David, age 12).

This can be related to the persistence of essentialist notions of what it means to be Irish, often drawing on markers of identity such as accent, and denigrating the claims to Irishness of members of the diaspora. However, this contradicts the growing public and official acceptance of diasporic or ethno-national definitions of Irishness[29] (which simultaneously work to exclude others such as those born in Ireland to non-Irish parents). In other words, while ethno-national definitions of Irishness which relate to a *jus sanguinis* model of Irish citizenship[30] have been gaining currency officially, children of the diaspora who return to Ireland often find that different definitions of Irishness have currency in their social worlds.

The research challenges the idea that children in returning Irish families can and do become integrated in Irish society without any difficulties. While they can benefit from their formal and familial connections to Irish society and to the state as members of the (returning) Irish diaspora, at the same time, their everyday encounters with Irish society can serve to mark them out as different and to question their claims to belong. This highlights the inherent contradictions of narrow ethno-national ideas of citizenship based on the principle of *jus sanguinis*.

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[29] As reflected, for example, in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement and the 2004 Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act; see also Mac Éinrí, P. (2009) 'If I wanted to go there I wouldn't start from here: re-imagining a multi-ethnic nation' in Ging, D., Cronin, M. and Kirby, P. eds. *Transforming Ireland: Challenges, critiques, resources,* Manchester University Press
[30] A *jus sanguinis* model of citizenship is based on the idea of citizenship by 'blood' or ancestry, in other words, the right to citizenship based on one's parents' and grandparents' citizenship. The 2004 Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act marked a shift from a *jus solis* (citizenship based on birthplace) towards a more *jus sanguinis* type of model of Irish citizenship.

Negotiating belonging

Key finding #6:

Migrant children are not inherently adaptable; neither are they inherently different from other children. Instead they develop (sometimes through necessity) complex coping strategies for dealing with migration and difference, which reflect significant cultural competences.

These experiences of exclusion caused considerable anxiety and distress for the children involved. In response to being stigmatised for seeming different, they developed strategies for asserting their sameness or becoming 'the same', or (usually as they got older) for asserting their difference in acceptable ways.

Asserting sameness
Many of the children worked hard at asserting their sameness in relation to their peers. While accent and language usage were used by others to mark them out as being different, the children also used these to assert their sameness. In other words, some of them consciously changed their accents or 'hybernicised' their English language use, in order to fit in.

> Interviewer: And em what was it like? Can you remember when you moved here then?
> Elaine: Mm, I was kind of being teased when I first got to school because of my accent.
> […]
> Interviewer: and was your accent kind of different?
> Elaine: Yeah they'd an Irish accent, so that's why I kind of changed my accent (Elaine, age 7).

For others, this happened subconsciously. Some even held on to both accents and varied their usage of them depending on the cultural context, for example, having one accent at home and one in public.

> I prefer the Irish one [accent]. Say how I'm talking at the moment, that would be how I would like to talk all the time but if I don't, I don't really care anymore. See, it's just whoever I spend time with. Say, if my dad calls me up, by the time I hang up I could have an English accent. Because he has a real English accent (Cait, age 15).

This is clearly a viable strategy in response to circumstances and shows a remarkable degree of cultural competence on the part of these children and young people.
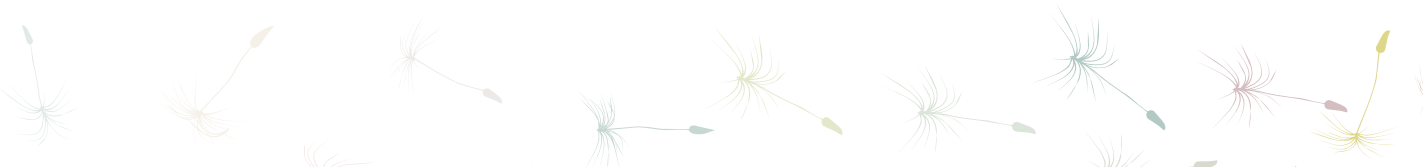
Acceptable difference

In some contexts, usually involving teenage peer groups, a degree of difference or uniqueness which makes one stand out from the crowd can actually be desirable. Some of the young participants displayed a desire to be recognised as unique, by performing aspects of their transnational or non-local identities in particular contexts.

> *There's a new family down where my friend lives and they're from England as well and so they'd be speaking the way I'd speak and I'd be speaking back like that and she'd be fascinated by it because I'd just speak to her and I'd just change back straight away (Jane, age 12).*

So although Jane claimed that sometimes she is 'mocked' because of her ability to speak in two accents, she also displayed with pride her ability to speak in different accents in front of her friends. Performing 'difference' in this way occurs when young people can recognise and use those aspects of their difference which they know are acceptable in a particular context, or when they feel safe to do so. For example, David (age 12) liked to feel he was accepted as part of 'the gang' but that his difference was also acknowledged within 'the gang' in an unthreatening way:

> *…because he was born in England, he considers himself English you see. But [David] loves that - he loves the fact that for the most part he's part of the gang but he has some way of sticking out and that really doesn't bother him and they seem to make a big joke of it … (Pauline, David's parent).*

Being unable to express aspects of their identities in this way was frustrating for the participants in contexts where they felt that conformity was prioritised.

tell me about **yourself**

Case Study: Cait, age 15

Cait was born in England and moved to Ireland at the age of 8. She was bullied in primary school, where there were very few other migrants and she stood out from her peers in terms of accent and other traits. However, she then went to a more multi-ethnic secondary school where she felt that diversity and difference were valued, and she developed a wide circle of friends from different national and religious backgrounds. Her self-esteem and self-confidence improved immeasurably. She likes that she is accepted by the group but also that the group does not necessarily conform to local norms.

Transnational identities

Key finding #7:

Although children in returning Irish families are frequently put in the position of having to defend or reject a national identity, their meaningful connections are not necessarily to one narrowly defined nationality, or to nationality at all.

Children and young people in returning Irish families, like other migrant children, are often actively involved in transnational social or family networks. Many of the children in this research had regular contact with relatives and friends in other countries, as well as opportunities to travel and knowledge of life in another country, all of which shaped their values, ambitions and perspectives. This provided a transnational dimension to their frames of reference and knowledge, which they could draw on in expressing 'acceptable difference'. For some, this took the form of a belief in their own cultural sophistication or cosmopolitanism in comparison to their peers who have never migrated.

I'd find some of them kind of immature but... like not in a bad way, not at all, just quite funny. [Interviewer: In what way?] Just like their views on things, like they don't realise what they said was completely offensive to someone else... (Emma, age 16).
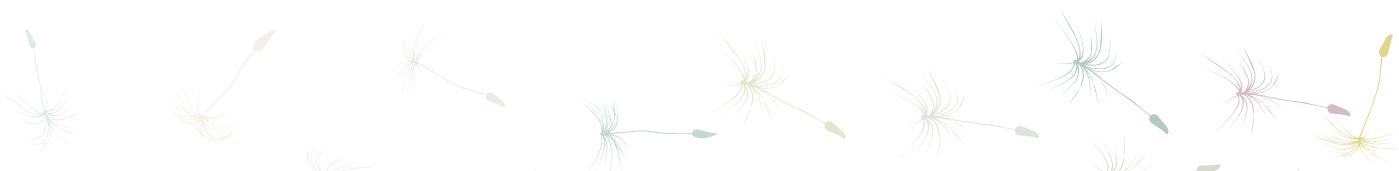
These migrant children knew what it was like to live in more than one place or more than one country, or to go to different types of schools. This meant that they could bring new and different perspectives to the local contexts in which they live in Ireland. This was sometimes viewed as threatening and so was suppressed, but where it was valued, it contributed to their self-esteem.

Some of the children felt a strong connection to the country/ies in which they lived before migrating. This meant that their affiliations were not necessarily to a fixed and narrow view of Irishness, or to Irishness at all, but instead some expressed a sense of being both Irish and other (English, American, or other), reflecting a degree of hybridity although not through the explicit use of hyphenated identities. Some chose to emphasise one above the other depending on the context, or chose instead to identify with a locality or county in Ireland.

> *Homer: …most people here would say that we are born, we are from here, like, and I could play for England or Ireland because I was born in England so some people say I'm English and some people say I'm Irish.*
> *Interviewer: And what do you think?*
> *Homer: I like people from Kerry better! (Homer, age 9).*

Despite the complex nature of their affiliations, they were frequently put in the position by others of having to choose one nationality or another, reflecting the tendency towards essentialist concepts of national identity. Homer's solution to this dilemma was to choose a county affiliation. Many also found a greater sense of belonging in other types of communities that were more meaningful to them, such as 'our school', 'my extended family' or aspects of global popular culture.
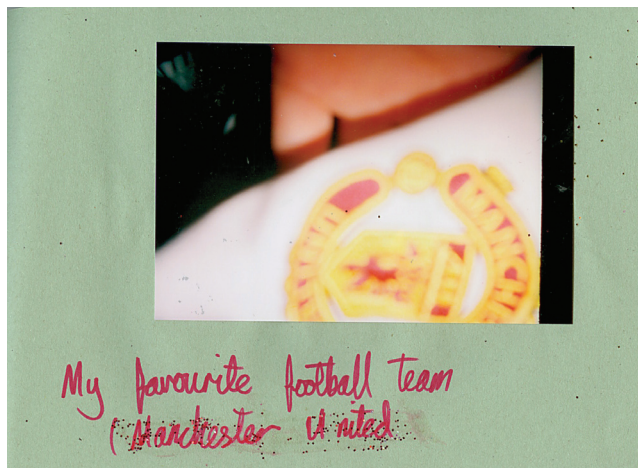
Page from David's (age 12) photobook 'My Life'

In other words, despite assumptions that are made about return migrants, these children did not necessarily or always identify as 'just Irish' or 'not Irish'.

> *We were there [in the US] for St Patrick's Day and […] we were in for lunch and they had corned beef and cabbage inside the canteen […] and everybody said what, you know, they're eating cabbage and corned beef! I said we're going out for pizza, we're not eating that. [Laughter] Yeah but this is your native dish. I went - not really. (Caroline, age 23, moved to Ireland age 10).*

Neither did they see themselves as being trapped between two cultures, but instead saw themselves as being comfortable and competent in more than one cultural setting. The research highlights migrant children's competence in negotiating their own identities and connecting with others in often contradictory contexts, and thus points to the valuable dynamic and innovative roles which they can play in Irish society.

section 4

synthesis and key insights

synthesis and key insights

This final section presents an integrated synthesis of the main findings of the research, from across all four strands. We present the findings here in two ways: first, in Section 4(i), we summarise the main findings from across the strands in relation to some key spheres of life for migrant children; and secondly, in Section 4(ii), we outline some key points (in relation to policy, practice and the ways in which migrant children are represented and described) that we want to emphasise as a result of these findings. Our aim here is to contribute to debates in the area and to offer a nuanced perspective on the place of migrant children in contemporary Ireland.
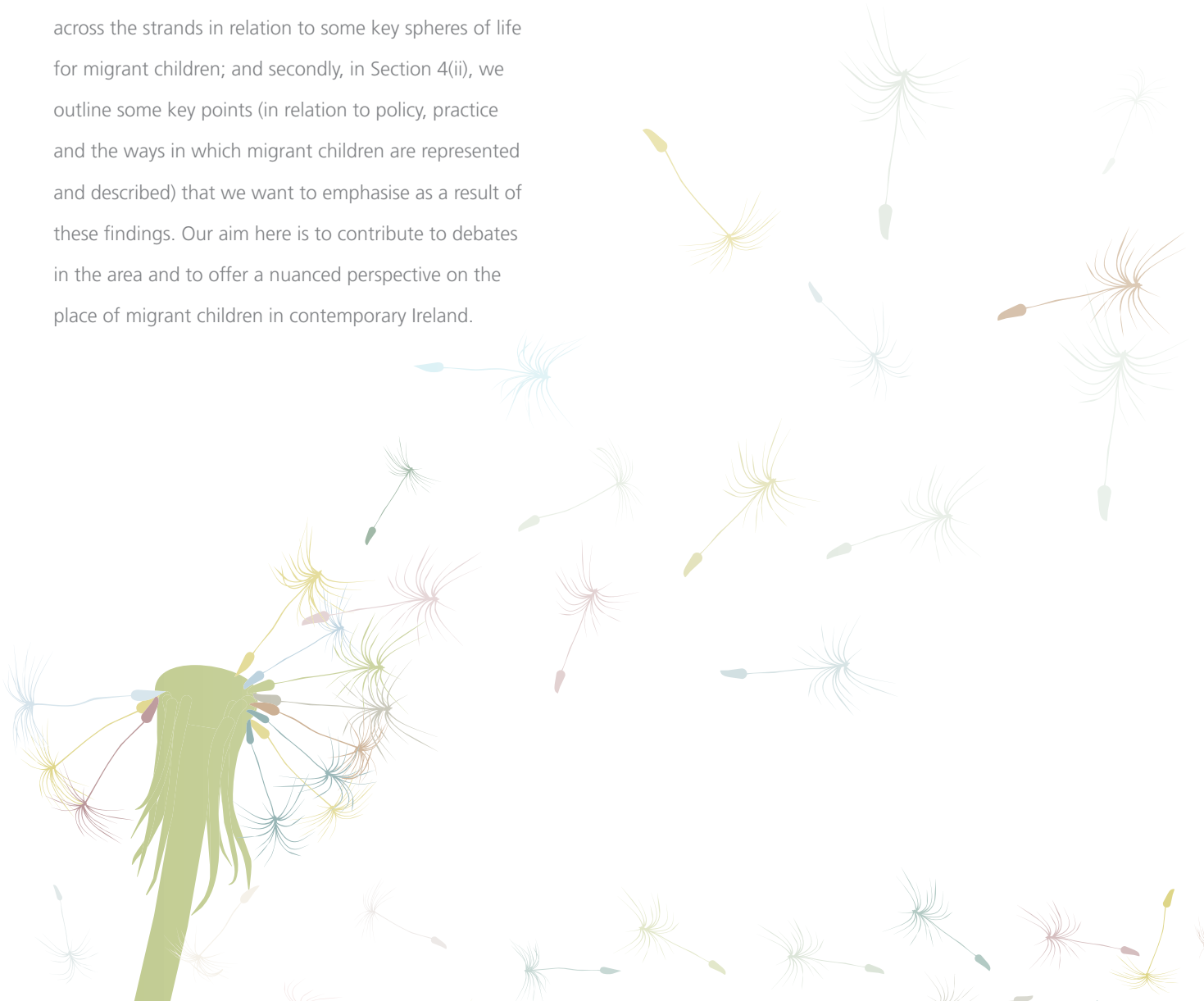
Section 4(i): Synthesis

Home and Family

Many children (and parents) emphasise the importance of family support in easing the transition to living in Ireland. Children appreciate the company of their siblings at times when they might otherwise feel quite isolated, while parents also sometimes rely on children to connect them with wider society. Children in some families can benefit from having extended family in Ireland, although this can depend on the specific family circumstances and on how supportive family members choose to be. Migrating without family support (especially of immediate family members) can be very difficult, although connections with extended family members and others from the same country of origin are not always helpful to migrant families.

Many migrant children experience family fragmentation as they move. Many children – especially children in migrant-worker and asylum-seeker families – move to or from Ireland with some, but not all, of their immediate family. Other family members live in countries of origin (or other third countries). Typically this is a strategy used by families to reduce the risks associated with international migration, and in some cases has been accelerated by the recent economic downturn. The absence of these family members can be very painful for children and young people.

Thus the migrant family and home can be marked through the absence of (extended and immediate) family members. The degree to which migrant children are able to see family members who live in other countries is shaped by economic and legal factors. It may not be possible for some migrant children to see or visit family members because of the expense of travelling or because immigration regulations prevent them from leaving the state. For others (especially migrant children who have EU citizenship), travel costs can be relatively low and visits to family members are facilitated by EU citizens' right to free movement within the EU.

Children living in families that are claiming asylum (and therefore live in Direct Provision (DP) centres) face a series of barriers to 'normal' family life. Communal living and a lack of private 'family space' (to do 'family things' such as cooking and eating together) present a series of challenges to family life and parental authority. Children living in DP centres experience communal living in quite different ways to their parents, seeing potential playmates and friends in other children who reside there.

tell me about **yourself**

School

Schools are key locations where migrant children come into contact and interact with fellow nationals, other migrant children or non-migrant children. Given the lack of other public infrastructures and spaces for social interaction, this is especially important for migrant children whose avenues for social interaction are more restricted, such as those living in DP centres, or those who do not have strong social support networks. Schools are also key sites for children's general well-being and socialisation. Available evidence suggests that much more needs to be done in relation to meeting the needs of migrant children in Irish schools[31], and that the current inadequacy of guidelines for schools and teachers means that strategies for dealing with diverse school populations can vary considerably from school to school.

In this context, our research highlights examples of some of the ways in which migrant children can become marginalised in the Irish school system. Children develop different coping strategies for this. In certain situations, children's adaptations to the Irish school system can lead to situations of conflict. In addition, many children and their parents perceive, for a variety of complex reasons, that the standard of education is not as high as they had expected. This gap in expectations is viewed less negatively by returning Irish migrant parents than it is by parents and young people who expect to compete in global labour markets in the future.

Furthermore, being in school sometimes emphasises the difference and otherness of migrant children, for example, by 'celebrating different cultures' or separating out migrant children for English language tuition. Many migrant children do like to learn about their classmates' cultures and traditions but these practices and activities require a great deal of sensitivity. These types of practices can sometimes work together with language and other differences to emphasise and reinforce national identities and allegiances. Sometimes school can be the first site in which children encounter feelings of 'being different,' whether from peers or from school practices or curriculum. Some children, particularly those in returning Irish families, can and do work hard to minimise their sense of their own difference. Others adopt alternative strategies, such as spending break times in school with other migrants. This was a coping strategy that was common among children from central and eastern European countries, whose first language is not usually English and who are more likely than some other migrants to be present in sufficient numbers to form national friendship groupings. Often they spend out-of-school time with fellow nationals and some attend 'weekend' schools that are organised and funded by the governments of their countries of origin. Therefore some migrant children, depending on the context, rarely socialise with their non-migrant peers. Others are particularly isolated, especially if there are not many other migrants in their school, and they can find it difficult to carve a space for themselves in local friendship networks.

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[31]   Smyth, E., Darmody, M., McGinnity, F., Byrne, D. (2009) *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students,* Economic and Social Research Institute Research Series No. 8
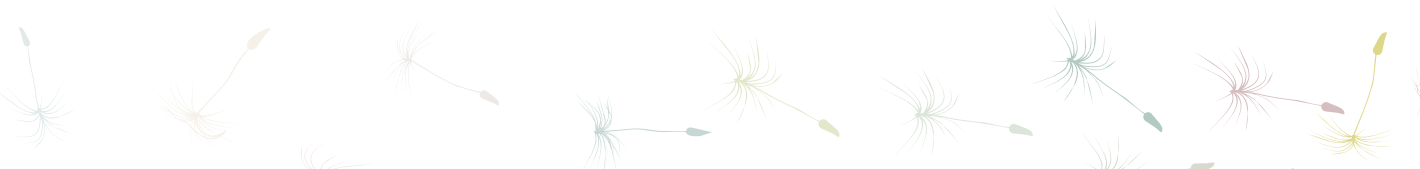
Friendships and peer networks

Missing old friends in their countries of origin, maintaining contact with these friends and making new friends are seen by all migrant children as extremely important. Migrant children often talk about missing friends in their country of origin and some refer to these friends in the present tense even when they are no longer in contact. Some migrant children return regularly to their country of origin and keep in contact with their friends there. Many migrant children and young people are actively involved in transnational social networks, contacting old friends using IT and social networking websites. These practices involve costs that are beyond the means of some migrant children, especially those living in DP.

Making new friends is important to migrant children, with leisure, playtime and shared interests providing important points of connection with other young people. This is rarely a straightforward process. Many new friendships are made through being in school (as discussed in the previous section), while shared public spaces such as local green areas, leisure activities (and shared accommodation in the case of children living in DP) also provide opportunities. Some migrant children make friends with non-migrant children, while some find support and friendship among others of the same national background or a shared 'migrant' background. These patterns of friendship-making are shaped in part by school practices but also by residential patterns and lifestyles. Making new non-migrant friends is particularly problematic for children in DP centres, and schools are important sites where they have opportunities to get to know their non-migrant peers. Meeting friends outside school-time also can be problematic for children in DP but some children feel that the communal living arrangements provide welcome access to new friends and peers.

Migrant children can experience difficulties in being accepted into Irish society by being made to feel different and experiencing exclusion in peer group contexts. This can sometimes manifest itself through bullying or social isolation. Children, especially younger children, place an importance on being seen as the same as their peers, although within particular contexts, being different and unique can be seen as desirable. These feelings of difference can be temporary for some migrant children, in part because of the 'work' they put into asserting their sameness, or acceptable difference, from other (often non-migrant) peers. For other young people, these feelings of difference and exclusion are more long-lasting, can contribute to isolation and be emotionally very difficult.

Migrant children and young people sometimes work at accentuating their sameness with peers, which can cause anxiety, be stressful and lead to conflict with parents. It is commonly assumed that simplistic notions of 'sameness' revolve exclusively around skin colour, thus particular migrant children (who are 'white' and/or English speaking) are seen as 'the same' as, or very similar to, 'Irish' children. However, the reality for migrant children is much more complicated than this. Many children use different strategies, such as using language or accent, to present themselves in acceptable ways. Some children articulate their differences in ways that are culturally intelligible to their peers and some choose to accentuate their differences

Peer groups and friendship networks for young people are often territorially defined and organised around local spaces and places. These can have important symbolic value for young migrants. National identity and language are important but so are globalised dress codes, musical tastes and fashion styles that are used to mark out and distinguish particular groups of young people. For some young people, in particular those in the asylum process, social interactions with other young people are difficult because of the lack of opportunities to meet other young people who are not in the social care system.

Community

Children can act as 'connectors' for families and parents with wider Irish society through involvement in toddler groups, school events and extracurricular activities. This contrasts with the disconnection and segregation that many children in the asylum system experience, compounding their families' social and economic marginalisation from 'mainstream' Irish society.

Migrant children place importance on being part of local communities and places. Some migrant children meet their friends regularly in particular local spaces and places. Communities provide the sites, individuals, institutions and infrastructures that are central to children's lives and that allow them to connect with others. However, migrant children may also experience rejection in these local sites and institutions and feel excluded from majority community peer groups. Familiarity with local norms and cultures, often through family links or previous regular visits, can ease the transition and open doors for particular groups of migrant children. This is rarely a straightforward process, and many migrant children face the challenge of developing this social and cultural familiarity themselves with little or no support.

Public Spaces, Leisure and Playtime

Access to children-oriented materials and resources is very important for all children but not always achievable for children in the DP system. Access to public spaces and places that allow a degree of independence from adults is also important, but sometimes not achievable, for migrant children. Many young migrants express their attachment to particular places where they like to 'hang out' with their friends. Changes in peer groups over time sometimes result in changes in use of these places.

For some migrant children, their move to Ireland involved a move from highly urbanised to suburban or rural contexts. The lack of publically available transport connections can reduce the level of independence from parents that they were used to in their previous residence. As a result, their participation in activities are frequently organised as part of formal leisure activities, which often are commercialised and commodified. Sometimes taking part in sports activities provides continuity with previous lives and places, as well as offering ways of 'fitting in'. Children in returning Irish families participate a lot in formal extra-curricular activities, including sport, while for others informal activities seem to be more important. However the predominance of particular sports, their association with narrow cultural definitions of 'Irishness', their gendered nature, and the associated financial costs of commercialised leisure activities can exclude many migrant children. These children's access to spaces for social interaction is further limited by the lack of available public infrastructure. Furthermore, participation in activities and sports is often highly gendered, with emphasis being placed on particular team sports over most alternatives. While girls and boys have access to (and do participate in) team sports in Ireland, these can hold quite different meanings for boys than they do for girls. There seems to be more pressure on boys to participate in sporting activities but a greater potential reward of acceptance among peers if they do. For girls, sport is just one of a range of different ways in which they can 'fit in'; an interest in fashion, style, clothes and/or music offer other ways.
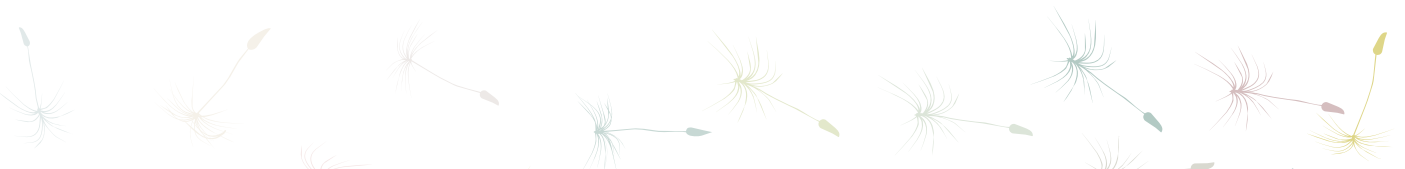
National Identities

Many migrant children do not refer to themselves as simply 'Irish' or as simply 'not Irish'. For some migrant children, having Irish citizenship is assured; however this does not offer protection against accusations that they cannot claim to belong in Ireland. These accusations are effectively a challenge to these migrant children's right to claim and assert their Irishness. This can be difficult for children who have been brought up to believe they are Irish, and for all migrant children who experience rejection and exclusion in their everyday lives in this way. While many migrant children may not have Irish citizenship, they can develop strong attachments to local places and communities and these loyalties can be challenged through experiences that provoke them to have to question where they belong.

Although nationality is not necessarily important to all migrant children, they are frequently placed in contradictory situations and face the dilemma of having to choose one nationality or another. Some migrant children, in their response to the narrow ethno-national frameworks surrounding 'Irishness', assert that their national identity is that of their country of birth and do not hyphenise or hybridise this with being Irish. While some migrant children express polyvocal or multiple identities, for many, national identities remain very important. They can feel a strong affinity for the country of previous residence, and may refer to it as their 'home country'. Migrant children may not see themselves as fixed to a narrow understanding of what being 'Irish' means. Rather, they stress that they are simultaneously Irish and another nationality, or they prefer not to define themselves by nationality at all. Like all young people, migrant children frequently refer to themselves in hyphenated or hybrid ways which reflects their capacity to use multiple cultural frames of reference to create new identities, and their migrant background is not necessarily the most important aspect of this.

Section 4(ii): Key Insights arising from the Research

Migrant children are not a homogeneous group

Key insight #1:

There is no one 'migrant child' experience.

This research points to the diverse nature of childhood and youth in Ireland, and specifically highlights the ways in which a child's migrant background can shape their lives and opportunities. Policies which deal in various ways with children's and young people's lives need to acknowledge the heterogeneity of childhood and youth, and the ways in which policies and social structures may affect children in different life circumstances in different ways. Furthermore, the research highlights the heterogeneity of migrant childhoods. Contrary to dominant assumptions about the issues that migrant children face, the experience of being a migrant child or young person is contingent on many factors such as one's own and one's family's citizenship status, migration pathway, family circumstances and social class, as well as gender, age and local circumstances. The strand reports show how the children's experiences of family life, school, friendships, community and play/leisure can be very different, based in part on the migration pathway through which they entered the country (and may also leave it), but on a myriad of other factors also. In fact, it is clear that migrant children's experiences vary considerably even if they are within the same migration stream. Their experiences are influenced by the complex nature of migration and citizenship rules, as well as factors such as social class, ethnicity, motivations for migration and locality.
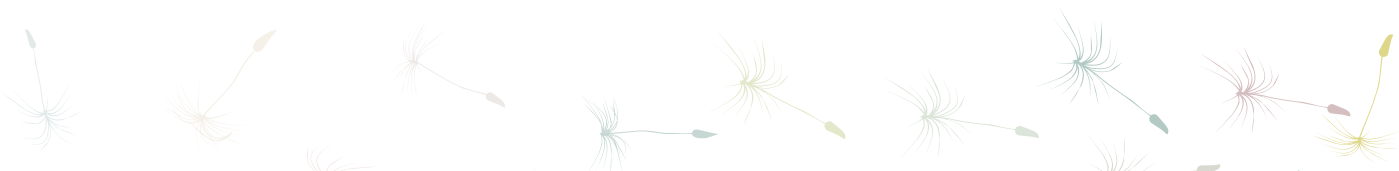
Migration policy matters to children's lives

Key insight #2:

Migrant children's rights and opportunities are shaped in part by the migration pathway through which they enter Ireland and also by their citizenship status. Their status as migrants can take precedence over their status as children.

This research reveals the ways in which migration policy and practice shape the contexts in which migrant children move to and live in Ireland. For example, it is clear that living in DP results in segregation from non-migrant peers and a lack of play spaces and facilities. The current formal and informal restrictions on family migration and on family reunification for most non-Irish and non-EU citizen migrants mean that children may experience difficult family separations. For example, global economic factors and the lack of family-friendly labour migration policies mean that children can experience temporary family fragmentation. Parents' or young people's own status as either an EU or non-EU citizen makes a significant difference to children's lives in a number of ways: having EU/Irish citizenship means that frequent travel to and from a country of origin is possible for children. It also means that staying in Ireland, or leaving for a while and then returning, are possibilities which these young people consider when talking about their futures. In contrast, the freedom to choose whether to stay or to leave is much more restricted for children of non-EU migrant parents, especially in the current uncertain economic climate when parents' employment opportunities are limited. Third-level education in the EU is much more affordable for EU citizens and a wide range of possibilities for the future are open to these young people, which are not available so easily to non-EU citizens. Being part of the Irish return migration stream can also confer additional advantages on children. The research undertaken in the different migration streams reveals very clearly the ways in which migration policy and practice result in differing rights and opportunities for children depending on their migrant status and position.

Dynamics of exclusion/inclusion are deeply embedded

Key insight #3:

The dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in which migrant children are involved are deeply embedded in the structures, institutions and values of Irish society.

The research highlights that the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in which migrant children are involved are deeply embedded in the structures of Irish society. For example, it is clear that to an extent, children reproduce adult discourses of belonging and exclusion in their interactions with each other. So, historically deeply rooted racist, anti-English or anti-immigrant sentiments are reproduced in children's peer group interactions. Furthermore, the mechanisms by which families and children 'get on' in Irish society frequently work to marginalise migrant families and children. For example, they are disadvantaged by their lack of knowledge about 'how things work' in Ireland, lack of contacts and extended family support. In this way, children in returning Irish families can connect to Irish society in ways which are more difficult for other migrant children. Some migrant families and children are excluded from wider Irish society because they lack the financial resources, and sometimes the time, to engage with activities that might develop a sense of belonging. In other words, the dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in which migrant children are involved go far beyond the attitudinal, and instead are deeply embedded in the structures, institutions and values of Irish society. Policies which aim to address exclusion and racism in Irish society need to recognise this.

Children's issues can affect migrant children disproportionately

Key insight #4:

Migrant children's issues can be addressed by addressing issues which affect all children.

Migrant children are affected by the same issues as all children, such as: poor recreational facilities, a poorly resourced education system and poorly planned neighbourhoods. However, in many ways, these issues can affect migrant children disproportionately. For example, the lack of public recreational facilities and poor public transport links in many areas limit opportunities to meet other children and young people, which particularly affects those who are new to an area or who cannot afford to access commercial recreational facilities. Similarly, a lack of investment in the education system impacts disproportionately on those pupils who are not considered to be 'mainstream', for example, children whose first language is not English. Increased investment in staffing and resourcing of schools could contribute to better educational facilities for all children. Therefore, it is not sufficient to view 'migrant children's issues' as a distinct problem; rather, it is necessary to view them in their wider context and to address the pressing issues which affect all children. This means going beyond narrow understandings of what children's issues are and looking at the underlying structural, spatial and social contexts of their lives.
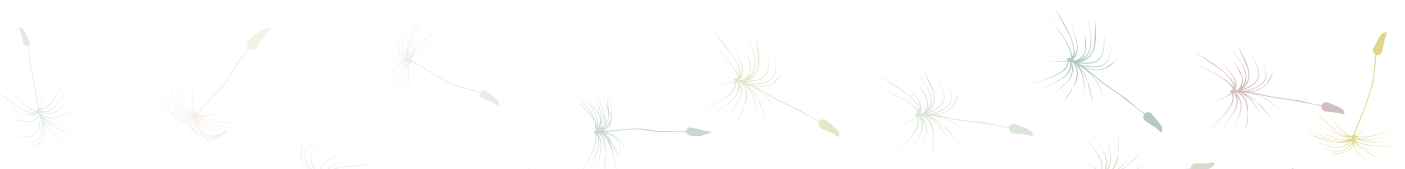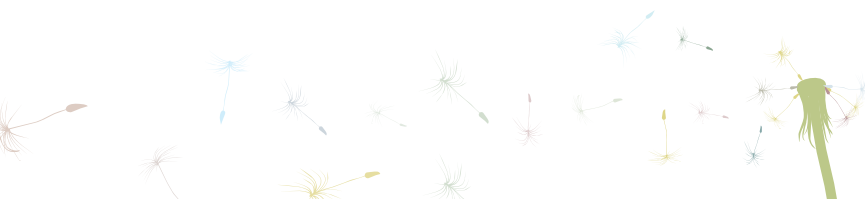
Migrant children challenge assumptions about identity

Key insight #5:

'Being a migrant' is only one aspect of migrant children's identities. Migrant children's identity negotiations can challenge dominant assumptions about ethnic and national identities.

Migrant children's identities and belongings, like those of all children, are shaped in the context of their experiences in spheres of life such as family, media, locality, friendships and popular culture. They develop identities and attachments which are related to their age, gender, social class and where they live. Therefore, 'being a migrant' is not the only important factor in defining who they are and how they interact with others – also what is important is being a boy or girl, being a child or teenager, living in one neighbourhood or another, liking one type of music/sport or another. However, being a migrant does intersect with other aspects of their identities, in different ways; for example, being a migrant can become important in situations where one feels or is labelled as different, or where language differences or educational or other practices segregate migrant children from non-migrant children.

It is also evident that migrant children and youth express their identities in ways which often diverge from the labels that are imposed upon them (usually by adults). National or ethnic labels are not necessarily very important to them and they can be used by them in many different ways. For some children, living in Ireland simply highlights a sense of being a nationality other than Irish. Return migrant children's experiences can destabilise the idea of a clear Irish/non-Irish divide, while some children's hybrid or multiple identities subvert assumptions about being either one nationality or another.

Children challenge assumptions about sameness and difference

Key insight #6:

Like all children, migrant children emphasise both their sameness and their differences in peer group contexts. In this way, they challenge societal assumptions about hierarchies of sameness and difference.

Society tends to define migrant children by their perceived cultural difference to 'Irish' children. In general, factors such as nationality, skin colour, religion and language are all used as markers of similarity and difference in relation to migrants in Ireland, marking certain groups out as being more culturally close or distant than others to an imagined Irish norm, based on perceptions of these markers[32]. However, the children's experiences revealed in this research confound many assumptions about hierarchies of sameness and difference which underlie these processes. Many migrant children emphasise their sameness with their peers and underplay any differences. Others, who are assumed to be culturally similar (based on skin colour or religion for example, or on Irish or EU citizenship), often emphasise their differences, or find that they are perceived as being different by their peers. Many children work very hard to assert their sameness and thus ensure their acceptance by peers and others, while some children and young people like to express difference, but only in ways that they know are socially acceptable among their peers. In this context, blunt policies of 'celebrating difference' are not always welcome, and policy concerns which are based only upon migrant children's differences from 'Irish' children can be imbalanced.

Children develop complex coping strategies

Key insight #7:

Children develop complex strategies for coping with migration.

It can be argued that two ideas dominate thinking on how children cope with migration. First, it is often assumed that migration is unnatural and disruptive for children, giving rise to ideas of migrant children as inherently vulnerable victims. Secondly, there is an assumption, often expressed by parents, that children are inherently adaptable and can cope with migration with no difficulties whatsoever. Our research suggests that these are extreme views and that many children develop complex transcultural competences and strategies for belonging, often through necessity. In other words, they do learn to cope but not without effort and action (sometimes considerable) on their own part, and sometimes in difficult circumstances. So, we have seen that migrant children develop complex strategies involving for example using accents, music or sport to access or create friendship groups and to belong in ways in which they feel comfortable. Also, some young migrants talk about feeling that they have become more confident and outgoing as a result of migration. Furthermore, in contrast to the idea of migration as unnatural for children, many of the children feel that migration has been beneficial to them, for example in facilitating a better quality of life. However, sometimes the demands of migration can be overwhelming for children, especially in situations where they have experienced multiple successive migrations between different countries, languages and school systems.

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[32]   See for example: O'Connell, M. & Winston, N. (2006) 'Changing attitudes towards minorities in Ireland,' in Garry et al. eds. *Irish Social and Political Attitudes.* Liverpool University Press; McGinnity et al (2006) *Migrants' Experiences of Racism and Discrimination in Ireland,* Economic and Social Research Institute, November 2006; Halpin, J. (2008) *An exploration of Irish attitudes to migration and integration in Ireland,* unpub. MA thesis, UCC

Migrant children have a right to family life

Key insight #8:

Children's and young people's rights to migration and family life can be undermined by the policies and practices of migration.

Migrant children's human rights are undermined in a number of ways by immigration processes and policies[33]. In addition, children's right to family life (as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child) can sometimes be undermined by the short and long-term family separations which can ensue as a result of migration. Even short-term separations can be difficult for children. These separations result in part from family strategies to reduce the risks of international migration as well as parental choices and children's lack of agency in relation to such decisions. However, policies and practices surrounding migration also contribute to these short and long-term family separations, whether relating to restrictions on family reunification for non-EU citizen parents, the insecurities of the labour market and of housing and education provision for migrant worker families in Ireland or global migration processes. The outcome of these processes and policies is that children's and young people's rights to migrate with their parents, and therefore to live with their parents and siblings, can be undermined.

Children's material circumstances matter

Key insight #9:

Children's lives and opportunities are profoundly affected by their migrant parents', or their own, material circumstances, which are in turn shaped by the policies and practices surrounding migration to Ireland.

Migrant children's material circumstances vary considerably, from the relative material comfort of children in many returning Irish families to the poverty experienced by those in the DP system. While material resources can provide children with the opportunities to take part in extra-curricular or other leisure activities, or to travel to visit family members or friends in other countries, the opposite is also true. Lack of financial resources in many migrant families, including migrant worker and asylum-seeker/refugee families, means fewer or no such opportunities for the children. Many migrant families experience downward social mobility on migration to Ireland, especially African and Latin American families, although interestingly, this is not always perceived negatively by the children. Low incomes in many migrant families, associated with deskilling of parents, the DP system and general barriers to occupational mobility for immigrants[34], have a profound effect on children's lives in many ways.

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[33] Children's Rights Alliance (2006) *From Rhetoric to Rights:* Second Shadow Report to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child; Kilkelly, U. (2007) *Barriers to the Realisation of Children's Rights in Ireland,* Report Commissioned by the Ombudsman for Children
[34] Barrett, A. and Duffy, D. (2007) *Are Ireland's immigrants integrating into its labour market?* Working Paper 199, Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin.

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Children's perspectives matter in migration and integration

Key insight #10:

Attempting to listen to children's voices can reveal different and sometimes unexpected perspectives on migration and integration. There is an urgent need for children's own perspectives to be acknowledged in these areas.

Our research has highlighted children's own perspectives on migration, integration and living in Ireland, and shows that these are often different to those of adults, or to the ways in which adults assume that children view and experience the world. In the first instance, this research shows that children are migrants too, and are not simply 'attachments' to adult migration. They form an integral part of complex family migration strategies (and sometimes migrate on their own) and they have their own views on the experiences of moving to and living in Ireland. For example, while the problems of the DP system and family reunification procedures are well-known, the research has highlighted the ways in which these impact upon children's lives in very specific ways. The research reveals, from children's own perspectives, the ways in which family members can support each other during migration and settlement, as well as the painful and traumatic effects of short- and long-term separations from family members and friends as a result of migrations.

This research also suggests that 'integration', or making connections with other children, happens in a variety of ways, such as through school, shared interests in popular culture and having access to shared public spaces. In other words, social mixing can happen in ways and in spaces which go beyond the formal and sometimes exclusionary avenues of sport and English language acquisition on which many 'integration' strategies rely. There is an urgent need therefore for children's own perspectives to be acknowledged in areas which impact on their lives, such as in migration and integration policies and strategies.
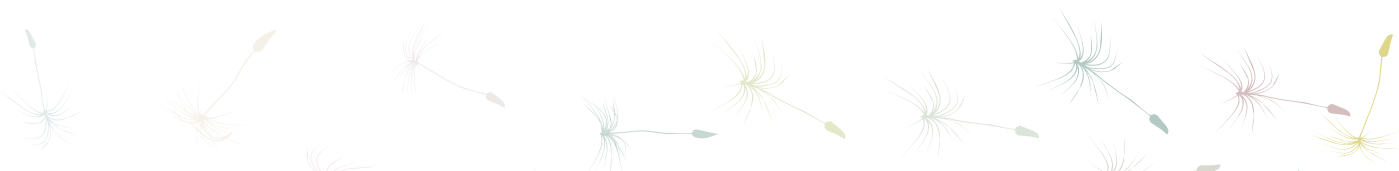
Appendix A

Selected Further Reading

Please note: This list is not intended to be exhaustive and is just a selection of available material on the subject.

Bushin, N. and White, A. (2009) Migration politics in Ireland: exploring the impacts on young people's geographies, *Area* (online early)

Devine, D., Kenny, M. and Macneela, E. (2008) 'Naming the 'other': children's construction and experience of racisms in Irish primary schools', *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 11(4): 369-385

Devine, D. and Kelly, M (2006) 'I just don't want to get picked on by anybody': dynamics of inclusion and exclusion in a newly multi-ethnic Irish primary school, *Children and Society* 20: 128-139

Christie, A. (2002) Responses of the social work profession to unaccompanied children seeking asylum in the Republic of Ireland, *European Journal of Social Work* 5(2): 187-198

Christie, A. (2005) Unsettling the 'social' in social work: responses to asylum seeking children in Ireland, *Child and Family Social Work in Ireland*, 83: 223-31

Corrigan, C. (2006) *All Our Children*: *child impact assessment for Irish children of migrant parents*. Dublin: Children's Rights Alliance

Fanning, B. and Veale, A. (2004) Child poverty as public policy: direct provision and asylum seeker children in the Republic of Ireland, *Child Care in Practice* 10(3): 241-251

Fanning, B., Veale, A., and O'Connor, D. (2001) *Beyond the Pale: asylum-seeking children and social exclusion in Ireland*. Dublin: IRC

Mintern, B., Separated Young People's Group and Dorney, L. (2006) Separated young people seeking asylum-standing alone? *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies* 7(2): 18-26

Ní Laoire, C., Bushin, N., Carpena-Méndez, F., White, A. (forthcoming) *Childhood and Migration in Europe: portraits from 21st century Ireland,* Ashgate

Smyth, E., Darmody, M., McGinnity, F., Byrne, D. (2009) *Adapting to Diversity: Irish Schools and Newcomer Students,* Economic and Social Research Institute Research Series No. 8

Veale, A. (2006) Child-centered research with ethnic minority populations, *Irish Journal of Psychology* 27(1/2): 25-36

White, A. and Bushin, N. (forthcoming) More than methods: learning from researching with children in the Irish asylum system, *Population, Space and Place*

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Appendix B

Direct Provision

The Direct Provision system works as follows. On receipt of an asylum application in the Office of the Refugee Applications Commissioner (ORAC), asylum seekers (whether single or as part of family groups) are placed in temporary accommodation in the area of Dublin for a period of 14 days. After this period they are relocated (usually outside Dublin) to one of 75 asylum dispersal centres where they receive accommodation, three daily meals and a weekly cash payment (of €19.10 per adult and €9.50 per child). Asylum seekers are also entitled to a bi-annual exceptional needs payment of €100. Asylum seekers (again whether single or part of a family group) must remain in the centre while they are in the asylum determination process. Most dispersal centres do not permit residents to cook their own food and asylum seekers are prohibited from gaining paid employment. The (limited) research that has been carried out on the Direct Provision policy in Ireland has consistently pointed to the problems associated with extreme boredom, material deprivation, social exclusion, feelings of helplessness, anxiety and depression amongst residents[35]. Despite the negative impacts the Direct Provision system can have on many residents, these same residents and management in individual centres can sometimes work together to relieve these tensions and difficulties. It seems obvious to point out that an aim of the dispersal policy is to prevent asylum seekers from settling into a community or locality until a decision about their asylum claim is has been made (a process that can take many months, if not years). In December 2007 approximately 30% of those living in Direct Provision centres in Ireland were below 12 years of age; this numbers 1,964 children. This means that there are hundreds of children living in the country's 75 direct provision centres.

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[35]   See Breen, C. (2008) The policy of direct provision in Ireland: A violation of asylum seekers' right to an adequate standard of housing *International Journal of Refugee Law,* 20: 611–632; NASC (2008) *Hidden Cork: The Perspectives of Asylum Seekers on Direct Provision and the Asylum Legal System,* Cork; O'Connor, C. (2007) *Direct Discrimination? An analysis of the scheme of Direct Provision in Ireland* Dublin; Vanderhurst, S. (2007) Identity in refuge: The distinct experiences of asylum seekers in Ireland *Notre Dame Journal of Undergraduate Research.*

Contact details:

Marie Curie Migrant Children Project
Department of Geography
University College Cork
Cork
Ireland.

Tel. +353-21-4902804
Email: c.nilaoire@ucc.ie
Web: http://migration.ucc.ie/children