

Irish Emigration Patterns and Citizens Abroad

A diaspora of 70 million

1. It is important to recall from the outset that the oft-quoted figure of 70 million does not purport to be the number of Irish emigrants, abroad nor the number of Irish citizens abroad. Rather it is a figure that could be seen as relating best to the reference in Article 2 of Bunreacht na hÉireann which states that *“The Irish nation cherishes its special affinity with people of Irish ancestry living abroad who share its cultural identity and heritage.”*
2. The vast majority of this 70 million figure are descendants of Irish emigrants, often through several generations starting with those who left Ireland around the time of the Famine. The largest group in this figure is the **36 million people in America** who in the last census self-identified as “Irish-American” or “Scots-Irish”. The balance of the 70 million figure would be made up of large Irish ancestry populations in Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and smaller Irish ancestry populations in Continental Europe and Latin America.
3. In terms of actual citizens abroad, it is estimated that there are approximately **1.47 million citizens resident outside the State**. This figure does not include the population of Northern Ireland and their descendants in Britain, who total 2.121 million people. It should be recalled that under the Good Friday Agreement people in Northern Ireland have the right to be British, Irish or both.

Historic Irish Emigration Profiles

4. Historically Ireland has occupied an unusual place in the wider pattern of European emigration, with very large numbers of emigrants relative to the total population of the country. There was a continuous decline in population from 8.2 million people in 1841 to 4.2 million in 1961. The peak years of emigrant outflow were in the immediate aftermath of the Great Famine of 1847-51. In the decades up to 1921 the vast majority (>80%) of emigrants from Ireland went to America. Post-1921 due to political and economic changes there was shift to Britain which into the 1960s remained the

destination of choice for over 80% of emigrants¹, and remained the destination for the largest number of Irish emigrants up until the 1990s.² Irish emigration is also notable for the number of women who have emigrated – up until the 1980s women’s rates of emigration were often higher than men’s.

5. As there are no official records kept of the exact number or purpose of people leaving Ireland, nor any legal requirement for Irish citizens abroad to register with the Irish authorities, estimates have to be made both of the numbers emigrating from Ireland, and of the number of Irish citizens living overseas at a particular time. For looking at historic patterns, census data is the most useful tool, but it should be noted that the census figures provides a balance of out-migration and in-migration which is generally regarded as underestimating the true size of migration flows in both directions.
6. After the first wave of mass emigration in the aftermath of the Famine, there were two further large waves of outward movement of people from Ireland in the late 1950s and the late 1980s.
7. Gross emigration in the 1950s until the early 1960s was approximately 500,000.³ The emigration of the 1950s was primarily a consequence of the loss of men’s and women’s work in agriculture and agricultural related employment. Economic development had yet to catch with a booming population and as result there was a mass wave of young emigrants who left over the period. Those who couldn’t find employment in agriculture and light manufacturing/industry were particularly hard hit and as such areas of the west coast and satellite towns and villages around major urban centres where the main source of emigrants. Emigrants of this generation were mainly of the semi-skilled or unskilled economic groups.
8. This wave abated in the 1960s with the publication of TK Whitaker’s plan for Economic Development, and the Government’s Programme for Economic Expansion and stemmed further in the 70s when Ireland’s new EEC membership came with particular economic benefits.

¹ Alan Barrett (1999) <http://ftp.iza.org/dp97.pdf>

² Bronwen Walter (2002)

³ UCC <https://www.ucc.ie/en/emigre/history/>

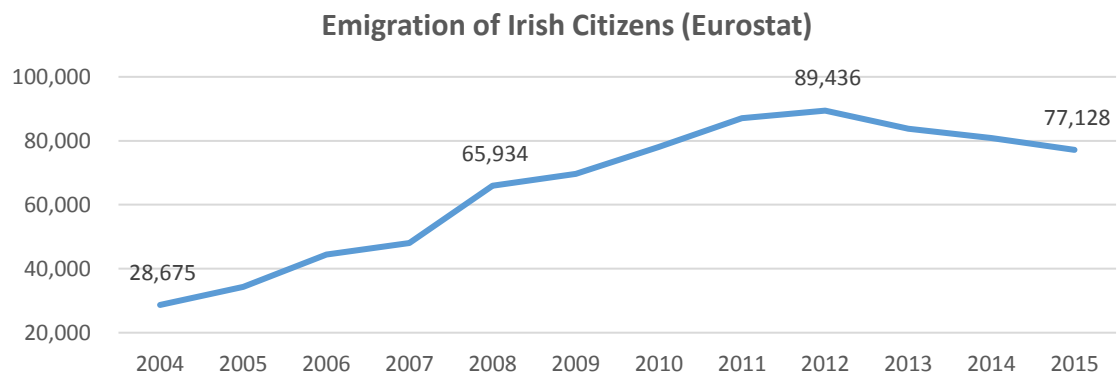
9. Gross emigration in the 1980s was approximately 450,000. The vast majority would have gone to Britain (~65%) followed by the United States (~25%) with the remainder mostly going to major European states and other Anglophone countries. This group would have had, for the first time, a relatively large percentage of highly skilled and/or educated people, and had a great geographic spread than previous waves, in terms of where in Ireland emigrants left from. Emigration from urban centres in Ireland became a new phenomenon.

Irish State Involvement in the Welfare of Emigrants

10. In 1937, 10 migrant workers from Achill Island died as result of a fire in their sleeping quarters in village called Kirkintollich in Scotland. An Inter-departmental Committee on Seasonal Migration was established, but their report in 1938 argued that the Irish state should not get involved in the welfare concerns of Irish nationals in Britain. That welfare role was then largely played by the Catholic Church.

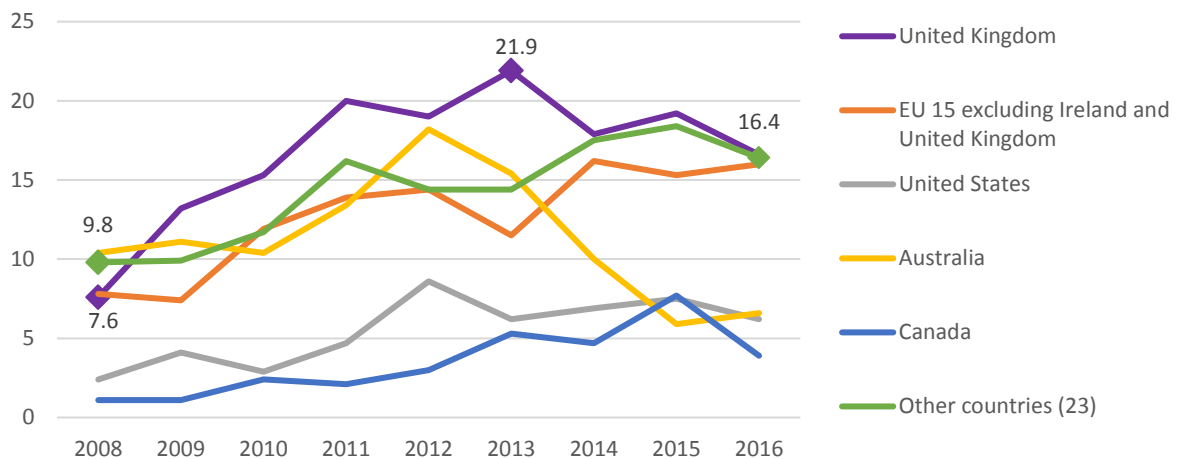
11. In 1968 there was a shift in Governmental thinking under Minister for Labour Patrick Hillery, when it was proposed that local employment exchanges would provide information about employment in Britain, that mutual recognition of educational qualifications be agreed, and that some state funding be made available for the welfare of emigrants in Britain. In the early 1970s, then Minister for Labour Joe Brennan set up the Committee on Welfare Services to support young people who were leaving for England with little or no preparation or money. This committee of 15 people met in the Department of Labour in Dublin and was superseded in 1984 by the establishment of the London-based Díon Committee by then Minister for Labour Ruairí Quinn who was of the view that a committee in Dublin was not sufficient to address the needs of vulnerable Irish emigrants in Britain. In 2004, following the report of the Task Force on Policy Regarding Emigrants, the Government established the Emigrant Support Programme, to be managed by a dedicated unit, the Irish Abroad Unit, which was set up in the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Post-2008



12. Gross emigration from 2008 to end-2015 was approximately 630,000. This figure is inflated by the existence for the first time of significant immigrant populations in Ireland, particularly from EU accession states in Eastern Europe, many of whom moved on from Ireland during the recession to find work elsewhere.
13. Post-2008 there were two very distinct categories of Irish emigrants and they can be grouped by age 30-45 and 18-30. For the first time an overwhelming majority of emigrants did not go to Britain or the United States. Significant numbers did go to these destinations (particularly Britain) but many went to Australia, Canada and to EU countries. For the first time a significant proportion also went to new destinations such as the Middle East and Asia.
14. The older group of emigrants would have been of prime working age during the so-called Celtic Tiger era. After the economic crash of 2008 some of this group would have emigrated abroad which was notable, as they were older than previous emigrant generations, and many would have brought, or left behind, families. This reflects increases in global mobility and connectivity but also the demand abroad for Irish workers. As a result this emigrant group would for the first time have had a majority of people that were highly skilled and/or educated. Indeed around 60% of those who left in 2009 were in employment

Irish Emigration destinations, by thousands of emigrants (CSO)



15. Among the younger emigrant cohort post-2008 an even higher proportion focused in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and core EU countries. This group would mainly have come into the work force after the economic crash of 2008. They are among the most highly mobile, educated and skilled group of emigrants in the world. Due to being raised in the internet age this group would also be especially connected to Ireland and would be consumers and contributors to Irish culture, media and port even while still abroad. The key differential between this group and the older emigrants is that they would not have been nearly as established (career, family etc...) when they left.

Establishing the Number of Irish Citizens Resident outside the State

16. There is no legal requirement for Irish citizens resident overseas to register with the Irish authorities, nor are there formal exit procedures at Irish ports and airports recording all citizens leaving to live abroad. As such there is no authoritative exact figure for the number of Irish citizens resident abroad. As such, accurately estimating the number of Irish citizens abroad is a difficult task due to lack of sufficient access to quality and consistent data sets both at home and abroad. With the notable exceptions of the CSO, OECD and census data from a select number of high-income countries, it is difficult to get an exact number on Irish citizens, extrapolate populations or indeed sometime compare like for like.⁴

⁴ e.g. Census data abroad is based on differently worded questions

17. In early 2017, Irish Abroad Unit analysed the most relevant available data, and while it is open to further interrogation, arrived at a figure of **3.601 million Irish citizens resident outside the State** who are citizens by virtue of being born on the island of Ireland or as a result of a parent's Irish citizenship, where that citizenship is from being born on the island of Ireland, or who have citizenship through the Foreign Births Registration (FBR) process.

18. It should be recalled that under the Good Friday Agreement people in Northern Ireland have the right to be British, Irish or both. The figures below are based on a maximalist approach and, for the sake of clarity, includes all people born on the island of Ireland as being Irish citizens⁵.

Location	Detail	Numbers	Robustness of Data (1-5)
Northern Ireland	Good Friday Agreement	1,870,000	5
Britain	Born in the State	382,000	5
Britain	Born in Northern Ireland	251,600	5
Britain	1 st generation children of people born in State	214,989	3
Britain	1 st generation children of people born in Northern Ireland	141,600	3
US	Born on the island of Ireland	127,000	5
US	1 st generation children of people born in the State	71,475	3
US	Undocumented Irish	50,000	3
US	1 st generation children of undocumented Irish	16,415	2
OECD (ex. UK & US)	Born in State	255,000	4

⁵ Changes introduced under the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 2004 are not relevant for the purposes of this paper

Rest of World (ex. OECD)	Born in State	57,000	2
OECD & Rest of World (ex. UK & US)	1st generation children of people born in the State	48,000	2
Foreign Births Registration	Living	115,777	2
TOTAL		3,600,856	

Large Baseline Populations in UK and US

19. Three large and high quality data sets on Irish citizens resident outside the state can immediately be identified. The first data set is the population of Northern Ireland which stands at 1.87 million⁶. The second data set is derived from the UK's 2015 Population Survey⁷ which indicates that are 382,000 people resident in the UK who were born in the "Republic of Ireland." Similarly there are at least 215,000 people born in Northern Ireland resident in England and Wales⁸ with at least a further 36,600 resident in Scotland⁹. In the first instance then we can identify a quantifiable 633,000 Irish citizens in Britain who are citizens based on being born on the island of Ireland. The third data set is the 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates¹⁰ which indicate that 127,000 people resident in America were born in Ireland. (This survey does not disaggregate between those born in Northern Ireland and the State). These three data sets combine to give us a baseline of 2.63 million Irish citizens.

⁶ NISRA, (2017) http://www.nisra.gov.uk/population_clock/ClockText.html

⁷ ONS, (2015)

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/datasets/populationoftheunitedkingdombycountryofbirthandnationality>

⁸ ONS, (2011) <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ks204ew>

⁹ Census Scotland (2011) <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/ods-web/standard-outputs.html>

¹⁰ US Census Data (2015)

https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_15_5YR_B05006&prodType=table

Building on Baseline Populations in the UK and US

20. The US and UK figures above only capture the numbers born in Ireland, and not those of first generation Irish citizens born in the US or UK to a parent born Ireland (who are citizens by virtue of having an Irish born parent). Projecting this potential population accurately is difficult. Initial analysis¹¹ indicates that this would conservatively (i.e. at least) add another 428,065 1st generation citizens in Britain and the US (286,465 who have a parent born in the State and 141,600 who have a parent born in Northern Ireland). This would need to be combined with the numbers of undocumented Irish citizens in America, who are not likely to be accounted for in US official figures, which is estimated at 50,000¹². Taking the same methodological approach as above in establishing 1st generation citizens (but using a shorter time period of 35 years, in line with emigration trends) would give an additional 16,415 people in the US who have a parent born in Ireland.
21. Overall then with a reasonable degree of confidence we could estimate that there are currently at least **3.124 million Irish citizens normally resident in the UK or US** who are who are citizens by virtue of being born on the island of Ireland or as a result of a parent's Irish citizenship, where that citizenship is from being born on the island of Ireland.

Estimated numbers of Irish citizens in the Rest of the World

22. In Europe and OECD countries we can only really identify foreign born populations resident in respective Member States and using Eurostat¹³ and OECD¹⁴ data. This indicates that in 2013 there were approximately 754,000 Irish born citizens resident in OECD Countries. Taking out the known data on Irish born citizens in the UK and US

¹¹ A somewhat crude analysis assuming that the populations have remained close to their present numbers and then netting population growth over this period using Irish 10 year average fertility rate (15.75) less death rates (6.37). This is then netted over a 60 year period (in line with recent emigration patterns from the 1950's) in an attempt to account for peaks and troughs in emigration, higher historical fertility rates, and increased 1st generation population growth as a result of 1 (as opposed to both) parents being an Irish citizen from birth. Overall then this figure should be considered a proxy figure in the absence of more robust analysis.

¹² This is an estimate using quantitative and qualitative data gathered by Ireland's Missions and Irish immigration centres in the United States.

¹³ Eurostat (2016) http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=migr_pop1ctz&lang=en

¹⁴ OECD (2014) <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/keystat.htm>

this leaves 245,000 citizens, rounded up to 255,000 to account for emigration since 2013.

23. The final global figures that need to be considered are from Irish populations in the rest of the world, particularly in the concentrated populations in the Gulf States and dispersed across Africa and South America. This is arguably the least robust data but can be developed by mixture of qualitative¹⁵ and quantitative¹⁶ data which indicates that there are approximately 40,000 Irish citizens in Africa, 10,000 in the Gulf Region, 5,000 in East and South East Asia (excluding OECD countries), and 2,000 in Central and South America. This would give a total Rest of World Figure of 312,000.
24. Due to complexities in migration flows, lack of robust data and the relative newness of many of these Irish communities, it would be very difficult to identify 1st generation numbers however a figure of 15% of total population would be a very conservative estimate (i.e. total population of approximately 360,000)

Citizenship through Foreign Birth Registration

25. In addition we know that there are 187,402 entries since 1956 on the Foreign Births Register held by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade¹⁷, which is the official count of citizens born abroad who have claimed citizenship through a grandparent born in Ireland or through a parent who was an Irish citizen at the time of the person's birth but who was not born in Ireland. Applying a death rate of 6.37¹⁸ per 1,000 of population per annum we would estimate that there are currently 115,777¹⁹ citizens resident abroad who have citizenship through Foreign Births Registration. The figures in this paper do not include "potential citizens" that is people who would be entitled to claim citizenship

¹⁵ Embassy estimates and estimates derived from passport renewal numbers

¹⁶ UN Migration Statistics (2015)

<http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/estimates15.shtml>

¹⁷ February 2017 figure

¹⁸ CSO (2016) 10 year average death rate for Ireland,

http://www.cso.ie/multiquicktables/quickTables.aspx?id=vsa02_vsa09_vsa18

¹⁹ Particularly crude analysis in the absence of analysis of FBR demographics and year of registration

through having a grandparent born in Ireland but who have not activated this entitlement by applying for citizenship through the FBR process.²⁰

26. In total, factoring all the available data sets and analysis we would estimate that on a conservative basis, there are **3.601 million Irish citizens resident outside the State** who are citizens by virtue of being born on the island of Ireland or as a result of a parent's Irish citizenship, where that citizenship is from being born on the island of Ireland, or who have citizenship through the Foreign Births Registration (FBR) process.

27. In this context it is also worth noting the figures relating to passport applications, and foreign birth registrations:

Category	Number
Overall Passport Figures	
Total number of passports issued by Passport Service from 2006-2016	6,994,211
Passport Figures based on where person born	
Irish passports issued to citizens born in Ireland (from 2006-2016)	5,378,000
Irish passports issued to people born in Northern Ireland 2006-2016	696,894
Number of current passports issued to citizens born outside the island of Ireland	634,052
Number of current passports issued to adult citizens born outside the island of Ireland	512,554
Number of current passports issued to children born outside the island of Ireland	121,498
Passport figures based on citizenship by descent	

²⁰ For the sake of completeness however it should be noted that a study by Anglia Ruskin University estimated that this maximum potential citizenry, were they to claim, could be as high as 3.4 million in the UK alone (BBC, (2016) <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-37246769>)

Passport applications received from people born abroad to parent born in Ireland (from 2006-2016)	559,783 (Note: these figures were fairly static at around 50,000 per year, until 2015: 53,062; 2016: 67,914)
Passport applications received from people whose entitlement is based on FBR (from 2006-2016)	126,690 (Note: these figures were fairly static at around 11,000 per year, until 2015: 12,517; 2016: 14,492)
Total number of Irish passports issued by offices outside the State in period 2006 – 2016	984,455
Irish passports issued to citizens over 18 by offices outside the State in period 2006 – 2016	789,112
Irish passports issued to children under 18 by offices outside the State in period 2006 – 2016	195,343
Foreign Birth Registration Figures	
Total number of people since 1956 who have been granted citizenship through Foreign Births Registration	187,402
Number of people granted citizenship through Foreign Births Registration since the FBR system was digitised in October 2012	26,187
Number of people granted citizenship through Foreign Births Registration in 2016	8,153

Irish Abroad Unit

20 June 2017