

National Council On Ageing And Older People



RETURN MIGRATION Ageing in Ireland Fact File No. 12

In recent years there has been much speculation about the number of older people who are migrating to Ireland. Social welfare benefits available in Ireland, particularly the universal benefits such as free travel, are seen as an incentive to older people from countries with no similar benefits to migrate here. These benefits have also been identified as an incentive for older Irish emigrants to return.

This fact file shows that little evidence for a large influx of older people to Ireland exists. In 2000 the net in-migration by those over 65 years was approximately 2000 people, which is only a slight increase from 1995.¹ Irish-born migrants seem to constitute a falling proportion of in-migrants as a whole.²

Older Irish People in Britain

- There has been a long history of migration by Irish people to Britain, with the Irish-born population in Britain numbering 837,464 persons in 1991 (Table 1).¹ The Irish make up the largest migrant group in Britain today. According to the 1991 Census, the Irish-born population of Britain comprised 1.58% of the total population. Approximately two-thirds of this community were born in the Republic and the remainder in Northern Ireland.³

Table 1. The Irish-born population of Britain 1951-1991

Census	Irish-born	% change inter Census	% increase (cumulative) 1951 base
1951	716,028	—	—
1966	948,320	32.44	32.44
1971	957,830	1.00	33.77
1981	850,397	11.22	18.76
1991	837,464	1.52	16.96

Source: Malcolm (1996)

ⁱ The 1991 UK Census is the most comprehensive and recent source of statistics on Irish people living in the UK. Results from the 2001 UK Census will not be available before 2002.

This population has a much older age structure than that in the Republic of Ireland. In England and Wales for example, 32% of Irish women and 19% of Irish men were above pensionable age in 1991. There is also evidence that a large section of the Irish-born older population in Britain has some desire to return to Ireland.³

- Significant sections of the Irish-born population in Britain seem to have a poor economic and health-related quality of life on a number of indicators. In the areas of housing and finance, this may be due to the economic dislocation generally experienced by first generation migrants. The poorer average health of the Irish-born population, on the other hand, is linked to its older age profile.³
- In view of the large number of potential older return migrants to Ireland from Britain, the apparently high level of desire to return, and the relatively poor economic and health characteristics of this population, the Council published a report in 1996 that established the scale of recent return migration from Britain to Ireland by older people and profiled the characteristics and needs of this population. This study also compared the pensions and entitlements available to older people in Britain and Ireland with a view to establishing their influence on decisions to return migrate.⁴

Scale of In-Migration by Older People

- Despite the apparently high level of desire to return to Ireland amongst Irish people living in Britain, there has been a relatively small level of return migration by older people.
- Over the past fifty years there has been a remarkably stable pattern of migration in the Irish older population, with negligible out-migration and in-migration of around 1,500 persons on average (Table 2). Despite the predominance of women among the older Irish-born population in Britain, there is evidence that there are slightly more male than female older in-migrants.

Table 2. Net migration (in-migration less out-migration) of over-65s during inter-censal periods since 1945

Period	Total average per annum
1946-51	1,900
1951-56	1,300
1956-61	1,300
1961-66	400
1966-71	1,500

1971-81*	1,800
1981-86	1,300
1986-91	1,500
1995	1,900
1997	1,500
2000	2,000

*10 Year Period

Source: Central Statistics Office reports

Table 3. Older people resident in the state in 1996 who lived outside the state for one year or more classified by sex and country of previous residence

Country of origin	Males	Females	Total
UK total	14,331	15,435	29,766
Other EU countries	247	275	522
USA	1,598	2,434	4,022
Other countries	1,366	1,343	2,434
Total	17,542	19,487	37,029

Source: Central Statistics Office of Ireland

- In 1996, there were 37,029 persons over the age of 65 years who had previously lived in another country and returned to Ireland. The majority of these, over 80%, had lived in the UK for more than one year.⁶
- Population projections prepared for the Council in the mid-1990s did not foresee any change to the existing rate of elder in-migration (approximately 1,000 persons per year) to Ireland over the period 1991–2011.⁵
- Despite the small number of older people migrating from Britain to Ireland, some 75,000 UK pensions are paid annually to recipients living in the Irish Republic. The number of pensions paid from Britain to Ireland has increased significantly in recent years (Table 4).

Table 4. Pensions paid from UK to recipients living in Irish Republic 1984-1995

Year	Retirement pensions	Widows' benefit
1984	37,200	3,740
1985	37,800	3,780
1986	40,300	3,800
1987	43,500	3,760
1988	45,500	3,830
1989	48,500	4,160
1990	57,500	4,270
1991	59,200	4,130
1992	62,900	4,140
1993	63,700	4,010
1994	66,500	4,070
(January) 1995	70,318	4,044

Source: Malcolm (1996)

- The above is indicative of the large number of older persons living in Ireland (both Irish and UK nationals) who have at some point in their lives worked in either Britain or Northern Ireland and have accumulated national insurance contributions.⁴

Characteristics of Return Migrants

- There has been no substantial survey of the characteristics of older Irish return migrants. Should return migrants from Britain have similar characteristics to the older Irish population living in Britain, one might expect this group to be in relatively deprived material circumstances with a poorer physical and mental health status than older people living in Ireland.
- It is probable, however, that those who return migrate from Britain are from the wealthier section of the older Irish community in Britain. Whilst many may desire to return, older people with the necessary financial security would seem to be those most likely to do so.
- Where studies on older return migrants have been carried out there is evidence that many regret their decision to return. Return migration is predominantly from an urban area in Britain to a rural area in Ireland.

- It is unclear whether the dissatisfaction felt by older return migrants is linked to the unavoidable feelings of dislocation related to moving from one culture to another (which may be particularly acute for older people who have been living abroad for most of their lives) or whether it is linked to more material difficulties such as the financial demands of returning to Ireland.²

Incentives to Migrate to Ireland

- There is no evidence to suggest that entitlements for older people in the Republic of Ireland are a significant incentive to return migrate. Although Irish social welfare pensions, particularly the non-contributory payments, are worth more than comparable UK pensions, and a more comprehensive package of universal benefits (eg free travel) is available in Ireland, these differences are unlikely to compensate for the cost of return migration. It must also be borne in mind that health care for older people in the UK is free for all older people.
- A crucial factor in determining return migration is likely to be the ease with which a satisfactory home can be secured by an older person. Without substantial financial resources, most likely derived from the sale of a home, older return migrants will find it difficult to secure independent and affordable accommodation in Ireland.
- As studies indicate that Irish people in Britain are less likely to be home owners than the rest of the British population (55% compared to 63%), they are less likely to have the resources necessary to secure their own home in Ireland.³ Recent increases in Irish house prices add to this difficulty.

Needs of Older In-Migrants

- In addition to the health and social needs experienced by older people in general, migration is likely to create additional problems. It is vital that potential in-migrants are properly informed on all aspects of migrating to Ireland before deciding to return. There is a need to produce information specifically targeted at older migrants, which should be distributed in the country which they are leaving.
- Literature dealing with the Irish social welfare system, health and housing benefits for older people in Ireland would be particularly useful. The impact of income from other countries on entitlements to Irish health and social benefits could be explained, as should the treatment of older people's foreign income under the Irish tax system.

Reference Material

1. Central Statistics Office, 2001. Unpublished data.
2. Mac Éinrí, P., 2001. *Immigration into Ireland: Trends, Policy Responses, Outlook*. Draft project under Commission budget line B3-4102.
3. Greenslade, L., 1993. *The Irish in Britain in the 1990s: A Preliminary Analysis*. Liverpool: Institute of Irish Studies, University of Liverpool.
4. Malcolm, E., 1996. *Elderly Return Migration from Britain to Ireland: A Preliminary Study*. Dublin: National Council for the Elderly.
5. Fahey, T., 1995. *Health Service Implications of Population Ageing in Ireland, 1991-2011*. Dublin: National Council for the Elderly.
6. Central Statistics Office, 1996. Census.

Useful Contacts

Central Statistics Office, Skehard Road, Cork. LoCall 1890 313 414 Telephone 021 453 5000; Ardee Road, Rathmines, Dublin 6. Telephone 01 497 7144.
email: information@cso.ie website: www.cso.ie

London Irish Centre, 52 Camden Square, London, NW1, 9XB. Telephone 0044 171 916 7272.

Emigrant Advice, 1a Cathedral St., Dublin 1. Telephone 01 873 2844, fax 01 872 7003.

National Council on Ageing and Older People
22 Clanwilliam Square
Grand Canal Quay
Dublin 2
01 676 6484/5
01 676 5754
email : info@ncaop.ie
www.ncaop.ie

© National Council on Ageing and Older People, 2001