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Recent rapid immigration of a diverse group of migrant children into an almost exclusively White Irish school population makes Ireland an interesting case study for migrant education. This article explores key points in the careers of migrant secondary school students in Ireland from an equality perspective. The article draws on data gathered as a part of a large-scale study specifically designed to investigate provision for migrant children in Irish schools. The results of the study show that migrant students in Ireland face a number of educational barriers in terms of access to schools, placement in classes, year groups and types of secondary school programme. This disadvantage is likely to impact on their future life-chances in terms of progress to further education and their place in the labour market, as well as their general social positioning in the Irish society.

Keywords: educational careers; disadvantage; migrant students; Ireland

1. Introduction

Throughout the last decade, Ireland has witnessed an unprecedented increase in migrant families from a number of different countries moving to Ireland with school-age children. Understanding the educational careers of these children in Irish schools is critical not only because they form a sizable proportion of the student body (Smyth et al. 2009) but also because schools have an important role to play in supporting these students and their parents (Devine, Kenny, and McNeela 2008; Devine 2011; Lyons and Little 2009; Darmody and McCoy 2011). For all countries with a migrant population the question of how to facilitate migrants' integration and provide equal opportunities to ensure educational success is of vital importance for the new arrivals as well as for the cohesion of the receiving countries. Key to this task is an examination of the extent to which the education system has the power to mitigate or reproduce wider inequalities in society by providing

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young people with the relevant knowledge, capabilities, capitals and resources on the one hand or by contributing to inequalities of educational resources through the organisation of schooling on the other.

We place our research in a growing literature that explores migrant students' experiences in Irish primary and secondary schools[1] (see, for example Devine 2005, 2009, 2011; Nowlan 2008; Ní Laoire et al. 2009; Kitching 2010, 2011; Curry et al. 2011; Darmody, Tyrrell, and Song, 2011; Darmody, Smyth et al. 2011). Building on this work, using nationally representative data and insights from a theoretical sample of case study schools, we examine how migrant students navigate the educational system and how schools contribute to inequalities of educational resources through school admission policies and procedures, grouping and tracking practices and the lack of clarity about eligibility of progress to higher education. While in this article we focus on how the population of migrant students as a group navigate the Irish educational system, the diverse national, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of migrant students means that educational experiences are likely to differ across migrant groups (Darmody, Smyth et al. 2011). Given the ethnic and national diversity of the migrant student body within schools, it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed analysis of the experiences of different migrant groups. We can, however, determine whether schools contribute to inequalities of educational resources for migrant students through various school processes.

The article begins by setting the scene – describing migration trends in Ireland over a period of mass immigration – 1996–2006 – with reference to newly arrived migrant children and young people, and offering an overview of the Irish education system at secondary school level. In section three we discuss how schooling can both mitigate and reproduce inequality with the result that inequality can accumulate though educational careers. This is followed by an overview of the empirical research that has explored the experiences of migrant students in schools. We then describe the data and methodology used (section four), followed by our findings in relation to how the organisation of schooling impacts on immigrant youth in Ireland (section five). The final section of this article summarises the findings and reflects on their implications.

2.   Setting the scene: migrant children in Ireland

2.1.   Background

Much has been written about Ireland's exceptional economic growth that took place between the mid-1990s and 2008, which transformed Ireland to a country of large-scale immigration (Honohan and Walsh 2002; Hughes et al. 2007). Net migration increased from 8000 per annum in 1996 to almost 70,000 per annum in 2006. In 2006, just over 10% of the population (almost 420,000 people) were classified as foreign nationals. In general, migrants to Ireland have been a highly heterogeneous group in terms of nationality,

language skills, ethnicity, religion and legal status. The 2006 Census showed that they came from over 188 different countries (CSO 2008). However, the largest groups of recent immigrants have arrived from the new European Union member States, (particularly Poland); the United Kingdom and Africa. Distinctively, Ireland is thus different from countries where immigrants are predominantly low-skilled. Overall, the newly arrived adults had relatively high educational qualifications (CSO 2008), with the implication that immigrant parents, on average, are likely to have high expectations for their children in terms of success in the education system and beyond.[2]

While the migrant flow was disproportionately comprised of working-age adults, the number of newly arrived migrant children and young people also increased over the period (see Table 1). In 2006, 71,000 migrant children represented 6.2% of the national youth population aged 0–19 (Central Statistics Office 2008). Among migrant students, almost 30% of five to nine-year-olds were of UK origin, with this proportion rising to over one third in the 10–19 age group.

Combined with children of US origin and a number of other nationalities from different countries (i.e. those from Australia, Canada and New Zealand), about 40% of migrant children were from English-speaking countries.[3] From Table 1, we see that almost 40% of all foreign nationals were from the EU15 or EU10 countries. There were also more African children than Asian children in the 5–19 age group; though fewer Africans than Asians in the whole population. In 2007 migrant students made up approximately 10% of the primary school-going population and 6% of the secondary school population, with different patterns of distribution at primary and secondary school level (Smyth et al. 2009; Byrne et al. 2010). While the vast majority of secondary schools have at least one immigrant student, migrant students make up a relatively modest proportion of students (2–9%) within each school. The primary school sector is more polarized: four in 10 schools have no immigrant students while in some schools immigrant students make up more than a fifth of the total cohort.

2.2. *The Irish educational system*

How the Irish education system is organised is highly relevant for understanding the experience of migrant children, and how they navigate the system. In Ireland, young people enter secondary education[4] at 12 or 13 years of age. At present there are three types of school sectors: voluntary secondary schools, vocational schools and community/comprehensive schools, each following a national standardised curriculum In addition to ownership, the three school types also differ in their student composition with a greater concentration of working-class and lower ability students in vocational schools (Smyth 1999). In terms of access to schools, unlike in other countries, there is no overarching local authority to assign students to secondary schools. Parents have the

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Table 1.   Birthplace of non-Irish nationals under 20.

Age group	%	UK	EU15	EU10	Other Europe	US	Africa	Asia	Other nationality	Multiple nationality
0–4 years	%	19.0	7.4	31.6	5.2	7.0	10.8	11.2	6.5	1.4
5–9 years	%	28.6	5.1	16.8	6.7	6.8	17.8	11.1	6.1	1.0
10–14 years	%	38.6	5.4	12.7	6.3	6.5	13.8	9.3	6.6	0.8
15–19	%	34.7	7.1	20.4	6.4	4.5	11.4	8.3	6.7	0.6

Note: EU15 excludes Britain and Ireland (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portu-
gal, Spain, Sweden); EU10 (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia), plus Romania and
Bulgaria. Source: Census 2006, Volume 4: Usual Residence, Migration, Birthplace and Nationalities, Table 36. Excludes 'no nationality' and 'not
stated.'

opportunity to send their child to a school they deem best for their child. However, the potential for active school choice reflects a combination of factors, including the legacy of denominational (religious) schools, the historical emergence of the different school sectors, and the Constitutional guarantee accorded to parents as the primary educators of their children. Thus, parents are constrained in their choice of school along these lines as well as by admissions policies imposed by individual schools (Lynch and Moran 2006; Byrne and Smyth 2010; Kitching 2010). Students complete three years of lower secondary education leading up to the Junior Certificate examination, and participation in full-time education is compulsory until the age of 16, or until lower secondary has been completed, whichever is later. The lower secondary phase is followed by an optional (or in some schools, compulsory) 'Transition Year'[5] and a two-year upper secondary (Leaving Certificate) programme. Upper secondary education in Ireland follows a relatively formal tracking model which is hierarchical, as students study either a largely academic programme which offers direct entry to higher education (LCE, LCVP) or a distinct pre-vocational programme (LCA) which offers a mix of academic and vocational elements and is aimed at preparation for the labour market and participation in post-school education (e.g. further education sector) but does not offer direct access to higher education. Ireland differs from some other tracked systems, in that the vast majority of students (93%) take academic programmes (Banks et al. 2010). Because the academic programmes allow direct access to higher education, these tracks usually absorb students who have performed 'better' in their Junior Certificate (lower secondary) examinations and are generally orientated toward young people at risk of leaving school and students who have learning difficulties. As in other tracking systems, academic programmes (LCE, LCVP) are deemed to be more prestigious than programmes offering a mix of academic and vocational elements (LCA). Within the Irish tracking system there is little flexibility: inter-track mobility does not occur, thus reducing the opportunities that schools provide for obtaining the optimal educational experience for the individual.

3. Equality, academic sphere and educational experience

The ideology of equality in education extends to all children, given the important role that education plays in basic human rights but also because it is generally acknowledged that success in education ensures better social and economic outcomes and that young people who experience educational disadvantage are likely to experience restricted life chances later in life (Smyth and McCoy 2009). Education also plays an important role in empowering those who experience multiple disadvantages, and equality in education matters because of the potential that education offers to counter inequalities in other social institutions and systems (Baker et al. 2009; Heckmann 2008).

Thus, the educational experience of young people is a multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses far more than academic achievement, which has occupied a considerable focus of the vast body of quantitative research on migrant youth in other institutional contexts. Other important aspects of the educational experience include the social experience of schooling including interaction with teachers and peers; school attachment and school engagement as well as experiences of school organisation and process and exposure to curricular and pedagogical practices. In Ireland, there is now a considerable body of research that focuses on many of these issues (see for example Devine 2005, 2009, 2011; Devine and Kelly 2006; Devine, Kelly, and Macneela 2008; Nowlan 2008; Ní Laoire et al. 2009; Kitching 2010, 2011; Curry et al. 2011; Darmody, Tyrell, and Song 2011; Darmody, Smyth et al. 2011). Within this body of work the position is held that the educational careers of migrant students are also influenced by 'external' economic, social and cultural barriers that, while being ingrained within the educational system may extend beyond it. According to Opheim (2004) 'such barriers may exist in the form of discrimination and prejudice both in the society in general and within the educational system, among teachers and students' (Opheim 2004, 55). A considerable body of work in the Irish context has highlighted the role that such external influences may exert on the educational experiences and careers of migrant students through their lived experience but also through education policy and educational discourse (see for example Kitching 2011; Bryan 2009, 2010; Devine 2005).

In this article we build on this body of work, to provide – for the first time – a national overview of patterns of enrolment and access to schools in Ireland and give an insight into the rationale used at school level for tracking and allocation processes. In doing so, we consider whether systemic characteristics of the education system may act as barriers to equal educational opportunities for this group, resulting in educational disadvantage. In particular, we explore whether specific structural features of education systems such as school choice, tracking, selection mechanisms and resource inequalities contribute to segregation and have disproportionately negative impacts on migrant students. The following sections take a closer look at barriers migrant students may encounter when accessing and progressing in the education system of a receiving country. Firstly we consider access to schools, then allocation within schools, followed by progression. We also review research on the role of social and cultural barriers in educational opportunities for migrant students.

3.1.   *Institutional barriers – access, allocation and guidance*

Discussing the nature and causes of educational disadvantage experienced by migrant students, Heckmann (2008) acknowledges the impact of enrolment, as the type of school students enrol in may impact the educational

experiences of these students and their later outcomes. Family resources play a key role in the school selection process and account for substantive differences between the school choice routes typically pursued by migrants and natives. As migrants are less likely to possess country-specific strategic knowledge that can be used in choosing schools, their opportunities for discovering, evaluating and accessing certain schools differ from that of natives (Keogh and Whyte 2003; Darmody and McCoy 2011). The wider body of research on school choice in the Irish context suggests that a considerable degree of active school choice is exercised by Irish parents and their children, given that over half of secondary school students do not attend their nearest school (Smyth, McCoy, and Darmody 2004; Byrne and Smyth 2010). However, it would seem that the Irish educational system is far from 'open' as schools are differentiated according to the socio-economic and ability profiles of their students (Hannan et al. 1983; Breen 1986; Smyth 1999, 2009; Byrne and Smyth 2010). While school segregation of migrant children and young people is not pronounced in the Irish context, there is some evidence to suggest that migrant youth are over-represented in some types of schools than the native population. For example, migrant youth are over-represented in larger schools, schools located in urban areas and those with a socio-economically disadvantaged intake (Smyth et al. 2009; Byrne et al. 2010), raising concerns about whether 'choice' is available for migrant families. Furthermore, the national study found that schools subject to between-school competition are more likely than not to have migrant students, suggesting that these schools enrol migrant students in an area where other schools may not (Smyth et al. 2009). In explaining these patterns, international studies have indicated that access to schools and school segregation can be closely linked to housing segregation and that migrants with a low socio-economic status might not be able to reside in prestigious neighbourhoods with 'quality' schools (Rangvid Schindler 2010). In the Irish context, demographic patterns in school enrolment are important because the school context matters in the lives of children and young people (Smyth 1999; Byrne and Smyth 2010). Students tend to perform less well academically in schools with a socio-economically disadvantage intake. Furthermore, these schools are more likely to have experienced declining student numbers, attract a diverse body of students requiring extra supports, and have different school climates, and be more likely to use streaming practices. Given this evidence, the school-going patterns of these young people represent systematic disadvantage if these schools expose them to a heightened level of risk of not adjusting socially and academically.

Studies of school organisation and school process provide significant insights into the processes shaping student experiences and educational outcomes (see Smyth, McCoy, and Darmody 2004; Banks et al. 2010; Byrne and Smyth 2010; Byrne and Smyth 2011). To date, these studies have provided important insights into the educational experiences of migrant stu-

dents. Among students who make the transition from primary education to secondary education, migrant students, on average, take longer to settle into their new school and have greater adjustment difficulties (Smyth, McCoy, and Darmody 2004). Byrne and Smyth (2010) find that one-fifth of migrant students drop out of school compared with just under 10% of students with Irish parents, and migrant students are significantly more likely to drop out of school even when controlling for social class, gender, reading score on entry to secondary schooling, class allocation, interaction with teachers, time spent on homework and educational aspirations. Furthermore, contrary to international studies (see for example Heckmann 2008; Fibbi and Wanner 2009; Mencarini, Baldoni and Zuanna 2009; Clauss and Nauck 2009) which find that migrant youth are more likely to attend a vocational track or a track that does not offer direct access to higher/tertiary education, migrant students in Ireland are somewhat less likely to take the vocational track than other students (Banks et al. 2010).[6] However, it has been argued that children and youth of migrant origin are often guided toward less demanding and less promising educational tracks because of their perceived 'deficiencies,' particularly with regard to the proficiency in the language of instruction and perceived ability (see Lyons 2010). International research suggests that placement in tracks or ability groups can often be informed by subjective teacher recommendations, their often stereotypical attitudes and misjudgement of ability which can result in placement of students into classes below their age group (see for example Hanushek and Wössmann 2006). Student experience can also be affected by the fact that teachers often have lower expectations for the academic performance of students from low socioeconomic status and/or immigrant and minority backgrounds (Schofield 2006; Banks et al. 2010; Bryan 2010). Importantly, tracking/streaming practices have far reaching implications as segregation within class groups is likely to lead to different levels of educational attainment and subsequent pathways. According to Gillborn (2010), initial choices made in terms of grouping students by ability may translate into cumulative disadvantage; they 'compound inequity upon inequity until success can become literally impossible' (Gillborn 2010, 235).

While research on the experiences of migrant children in primary and secondary school sectors is starting to build up, to date, much less is known about how migrant students fare in making the transition from second level education to further and higher education in the Irish context, despite the voluminous body of work evident in other institutional contexts (Ball, Reay, and David 2002; Modood and Shiner 1994). Much of this work finds that the participation of ethnic minorities has remained limited. Research that has been conducted in this area in the Irish context identifies an information gap regarding options and financial entitlements that migrant students face when trying to access higher education (Keogh and Whyte 2003). More recently, the 2010 *National Strategy on Intercultural Education* highlights the need

for ongoing work on the entitlements of migrant students in higher educa-
tion. While in other institutional contexts research has highlighted the 'eth-
nic success ethic' or power of motivation and ambition to 'do well' that
putatively counter-balances disadvantage (Bullivant 1988) research in the
Irish context suggests that unrealistic expectations of getting high points in
the Leaving Certificate and hopes for entry to higher education is likely to
lead to disappointment and loss of motivation when migrant students see
that it is not as easy as they may have anticipated (Keogh and Whyte 2003).

4. Data and methods

The research reported here is part of a broader study which explored school
provision for migrant children. The wider research study adopted a prag-
matic or 'explanatory' sequential mixed method design in that the quantita-
tive data was collected in distinct phases followed by qualitative interviews
(see for example Johnson and Onwuegbuzie 2004). The rationale for the use
of this approach was to provide a better understanding of the phenomenon,
gaining a fuller picture of the school provision and educational experiences
of migrant students. The first stage involved a national postal survey of
school principals, selected to be representative of the population of schools
in terms of school size, location and disadvantaged status, which yielded a
response rate of 63%. The second stage involved in-depth exploration of six
case study schools, and yielded more detailed insights into issues relating to
ethnic diversity 'on the ground' in schools. The case study schools were
selected to capture key dimensions of the experiences of different schools in
managing ethnic diversity. Two of the case study schools had no migrant
students. Among the remaining six case study schools that had migrant stu-
dents, three had low to medium proportions while three had relatively high
proportion of migrant students (see Table 2). In all, 82 interviews were car-
ried out with principals, a selection of teachers, home–school–community
liaison co-coordinators (where present) and guidance counsellors – the
teachers who had direct experience in teaching and supporting migrant stu-
dents were chosen for the study. In total 43 group interviews were also car-
ried out with small groups of secondary school students, with separate
interviews for migrant and Irish students, representing 258 students in all. In
this article, we draw on both teacher accounts and secondary school student
interviews to improve our understanding of the educational careers of
migrant students.

5. Research results

5.1. *Access to schools*

As indicated earlier, results from the national study find that the distributions
of migrant students in primary and secondary schools differ substantially. In

Table 2.   Case study schools.

	Sector and gender mix	Academic orientation of immigrant students relative to Irish	Streaming/ banding for base classes	Percentage of migrant students in the school	Nationalities in the school	Countries represented in migrant interviews	Number of teacher interviews	Staff members interviewed
Huntington Road (not over-subscribed) Non-DEIS	Secondary (girls)	Average/same as Irish students	No	Low/medium (2.9%)	22	Africa, Belgium, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, America, Czech Republic	7	GC, deputy principal, learning support teacher 1, learning support teacher 2, learning/language support teacher, learning support teacher 3, principal
Bentham St. (not over-subscribed) Non-DEIS	Comm / comp (co-ed)	Average/same as Irish students	No	Low/medium (1.94%)	10	Moldova, Brazil, Poland, Latvia	7	Chaplain, GC, HSLO, language support teacher, principal, year head 1, year head 2
Wulford Park (not over-subscribed, competition for students)Non-DEIS	Vocational (co-ed)	Average/same as Irish students	Yes	High(4.32%)	14	Latvia, Poland, Lithuania, West Indies	4	Class tutor, language support, principal, resource teacher
Brayton Square (not over-subscribed) DEIS	Community/ comp(co-ed)	Above average	Yes	High(5.63%) Principal: newcomers 10% of student population High(33%)	Not available 146	Africa, Iran, Poland	8 10	5th class tutor + learning support, deputy principal, GC, HSLO, language support, learning support, principal, class tutor + learning support

School	Type	Attainment	Streaming	SES	No.	Countries	Staff no.	Staff interviewed
Ashville Lane (not over-subscribed) DEIS 'model school for migrant students'	Secondary (all boys school)	Average/same as Irish students	No, but migrants in B1 and B2 classes			Cambodia, Armenia, Somalia, Poland		Deputy principal, HSLO, language support teacher 1, language support teacher 2, language support teacher 3, learning support teacher 1, learning support teachers 2, 3, principal, tutor 1, tutor 2
Lowfield Street (not over-subscribed) Non-DEIS	Secondary (girls)	Above average	Yes	Low/medium (<1%)	12	Poland, Africa	4	Principal, 5th class year head + learning support, GC, HSLO

the latter, the vast majority of schools (around 90%) have migrant students, but many have a rather small proportion of such students, between 2% and 9%. Primary schools tend to draw students from their local area, while secondary schools have a much larger catchment area. Typically, a number of primary schools feed into any given secondary school, so even if one feeder primary school had no migrant students, the secondary school in the area would record migrants if there were such students in other primary schools in the area. The national study indicated that 20% of secondary schools tend to be oversubscribed, that is, have more applications than places. A multivariate analysis of the factors associated with being oversubscribed indicate that oversubscribed schools tend to be fee-paying schools, schools in urban areas and large schools (schools with over 600 pupils). On the other hand, schools which are deemed to be designated disadvantaged are less likely to be oversubscribed, and represent schools that are disproportionately attended by migrant students (Byrne et al. 2010). Where schools are oversubscribed, they employ a range of admission criteria, including date of application, other, religion, having older siblings in the school, and the primary school attended (see Figure 1).

The topic of school admission policy was further explored in the qualitative interviews with teachers, students and principals in schools that had varying proportions of migrant students, ranging from 'none' to 'high.' In general, school admission policies across the range of schools echoed those found in the survey: where schools were oversubscribed, enrolment criteria, such as 'first come, first served' and priority given to siblings already in the school, were likely to favour settled communities and thus migrants were under-represented in these schools. Among the two schools with no migrant students, it was evident that differences in admissions policies exist. One school, Adwick Street, was oversubscribed and their school admission policies were likely to favour settled communities given the use of policies such as preference given to siblings and daughters of past pupils and the practice
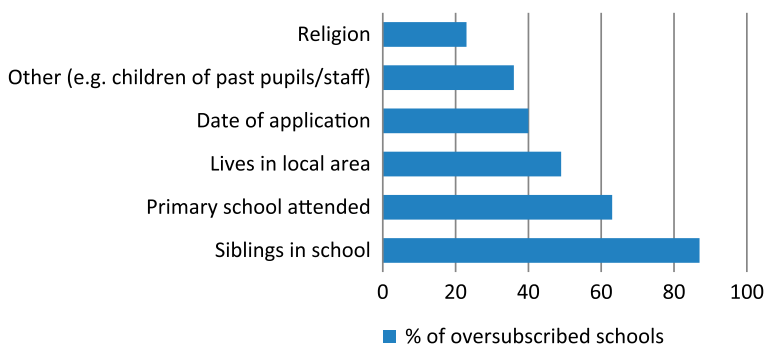

Figure 1. Admission criteria for oversubscribed schools, principals' response (multiple categories possible).

of drawing up a waiting list for applications which could be accessed once a child was enrolled in primary education at age four or five. It was also evident that between school competition exists in particular areas, with the implication that one school in the area would typically be more selective in nature, while other schools in the area reporting higher proportions of migrant students. Grange Park seemed to be typical of the former, as the principal of Grange Park explained that other schools in the local area attracted migrant students. She attributed this to active selection on behalf of migrant parents, explaining that these parents tend to target larger schools which, they perceive, have more resources:

> I think foreign nationals of the new communities are more inclined to go to the schools that have Home Economics and Woodwork labs and Tech, you know, they have. They tend to veer towards the larger schools…they all have far more resources that I would have…whereas [Irish] nationals would be more inclined to see the benefit of a small school. Newer community would be inclined to see the advantages, the other advantages of larger schools in terms of resources. (Principal, Grange Park, voluntary secondary school)

Interviews conducted with migrant students do not suggest that students and their families are necessarily making informed strategic choices about schools; rather, their views reinforce the suggestion of reliance on 'grape-vine knowledge.' While it was clear that at least some families had considered the reputation of the school when making their choice, in reality the preference for a particular school did not always follow through:

Interviewer: How did it happen that you came to this school?
Student: Well I had been to school many times, just this school is very good and someone I know was very [happy here].
…
Interviewer: What did you know about this school?
Student: Like good school. Me Ma told me about this school so she just said I should come here and she told me about the other school but at the time it was full so I just came to this school. [Migrant student, Brayton Square]
Interviewer: How did you hear about this school?
Students: A friend of ours, so when we came she told us about the school. So we came to this school.
Interviewer: So what kind of things did the friend tell you?
Students: Nothing, she just told us there was a school here, she came with us and I started my first week.
Interviewer: Did they say it was a good school?
Students: No she didn't say, she didn't know…She just knows there is a school. (Migrant students, Bentham Street)

Among the remaining six case study schools with migrant students, the reasons for the differing proportions related partly to differences in admission

policies but also to more complex processes. Declining numbers of Irish students represented one such complexity. For example, contrary to Grange Park which seemed to be more selective, it was evident that some of the case study schools had to compete for students due to declining numbers of Irish students in recent years (e.g. Wulford Park, a small vocational school), and subsequently had a higher proportion of migrant students. A second particular complication emerged if students enrolled in the middle of school year. This was particularly evident in Brayton Square (a medium sized disadvantaged school). In this school, mid-year applications had to be decided on by the Board of Management. While generally this school was not oversubscribed, and so was able to accommodate late arrivals, this would clearly not be the case in all schools. In stark contrast, Ashville Lane (disadvantaged, voluntary secondary, all-boys school), as a result of having an open admissions policy and typically not being oversubscribed, had a history of catering for migrant students. This school often had migrant students referred to them by other schools and agencies, resulting in a very high proportion of migrants in the school, representing one third of the student intake. Thus, we find that as well as issues relating to individual school admission policy; it was also evident that system through which resources are allocated to schools may serve as a significant disincentive for schools to accept migrant students. As resources are allocated to schools by the Department of Education on the basis of numbers of students enrolled by a specified date early in the school year, there is a case that schools genuinely do not have the resources to cater for migrant students.

5.2. *Allocation to ability groups and tracks*

The issue of tracking and ability grouping as well as the issue of the provision of language support was explored in the interviews. Grouping practices in some shape or form were at play across all our case study schools from the point of entry into the school. Our survey data indicate that schools use a combination of criteria to allocate migrant students to class groups on arrival; the most common approaches used being an interview with the student/parent; the age of student; a report from a previous school and individual assessment. In order to gain more comprehensive information about placement strategies for newly arrived migrant children, teachers were asked to describe the procedure used. While the strategy of placing students into lower year/age group was used to help the migrant students, it was perceived that the students themselves often resented being in a class with younger students:

> They [migrant students] wanted to be put in classes with students of the same age…where they're coming in to classes with students of the same age and they are way behind them, it is very hard for the senior students. Like we have a French student this year who has gone straight into Leaving cert. and is intending, you know and her language is terrible and she is intending to do

an exam and that puts huge pressure in the classroom to try and do a course, it is a two years course and really somebody like her, really needs to learn English, should be back, you know it is hard and I appreciate the students don't necessarily want to be in with the first years… (Learning support teacher, Huntington Road, city, medium sized girls' secondary school)

Dominant in the discourse surrounding placement was the issue of proficiency in English, and it was evident that proficiency in English often influenced the decision as to the appropriate year group for the migrant students, over and above the student's age and previous academic attainment in the sending country. Typical comments made by school staff were as follows:

> Well, I would talk to them and I would look at maybe their age and their level of English and how close they were to a state exam, so if they were at the age for third year [Junior Certificate year] and they were doing junior cert, if they didn't have very good English and couldn't express themselves, I wouldn't put them into third year, I would put them into second year, even though they might be a bit old for it…they could be very good but their English is not good enough for them to show how good they are. (Principal, Huntington Road, city, medium sized girls' secondary school)

One school, Ashville Lane which had a very high proportion of migrant students, devised a strategy of allocating migrant students to special classes within the school, as a 'pre-mainstreaming' strategy to give the non-English speakers a chance to get to grips with the English language before being exposed to the wider curriculum.

> Two criteria [are used in placement] largely their age and their level of English. Their proficiency in the English language, and that would largely determine whether they go main stream or whether they'd go into our special B1B2 beginners one or two, who are kids that need work on their English language before they come into mainstream. They would just sink if they didn't. (Ashville Lane, city, small, DEIS, co-ed)

Such differentiated strategies adopted by teachers and schools reflect the complexity of the educational experience endured by migrant students, particularly those who came from non-English speaking countries, and the challenges that schools encountered during the period of mass immigration. The national survey found that over half of secondary school principals reported language difficulties among 'nearly all' or 'more than half' of their migrant student intake, while also indicating that language difficulties have marked consequences for the academic progress of these students. Contributing to the complexity of the situation, state policy on language support was developed in an ad hoc basis as a reaction to the large numbers of migrant students enrolling into Irish schools. In addition, the amount of language support offered as a resource was limited, given the allocation in terms of

hours per individual. As a result, interviews with teachers and school staff indicated that the main effort across schools had been devoted to bringing migrant students 'up to speed' in the language of instruction, while teacher training in this area and resources available have been limited (for detailed discussion on this see Lyons and Little 2009).

Further grouping processes are evident in terms of the stratification of subject areas into different levels (higher/advanced, ordinary, foundation/basic) which is a dominant feature of Irish education, as well as grouping practices based on student measures of prior or expected ability. The national survey data indicates that streaming or banding was practiced in approximately one quarter of all schools with migrant students, and was practiced in two out of the six case study schools. Some of the students we spoke to expressed confusion regarding the process by which they were placed in different groups. These students were aware that grouping practices are often linked to teacher perceptions of the ability of migrant students (in line with Bryan 2010).

Student: If you live in Lagos they speak English as first language so when I go here just because I was, well they thought I didn't understand English.… ABC, this kind of thing, and it was annoying.
…
Interviewer: So the classes are grouped by ability, are they?
Student: Yeah,
Interviewer: The first time you come here…
Student: Yeah, you are put in maybe 2nd from last or last class.
Interviewer: Then can you move afterwards?
Student: Yes

Or maybe you can say this thing is too easy…maybe… (Migrant student, Brayton Square)

The school I came from, the school was like first priority, I mean if you get a B it would be like God what did I do. But when I came here they put me in this class [low ability class] and in Math I was just getting everything right, just sitting there, what is this class? And now I'm in the highest class and it's better, there's more challenge. (Migrant secondary school student, Brayton Square)

For some, a degree of flexibility was evident as once the student had progressed, there was a possibility of moving into a class offering a higher level.

An earlier section of this article showed that secondary school students can opt for three programmes or 'tracks' at upper secondary, each with a different focus: Established Leaving Certificate (LCE), Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and Leaving Certificate Applied (LCA). A recent report by the Department of Education and Skills

(2011) notes that 'migrants are well represented in the established Leaving Certificate programme with higher proportions taking this programme as compared to their Irish peers' (Department of Education and Skills 2011, 164). Further, it notes that this trend is changing with 'increasing numbers of migrants opting for the LCVP and LCA.' Supporting previous qualitative research, our interviews with school personnel demonstrated that migrant students were frequently steered towards the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

> I think over the years maybe, there have been one or two students, who came in fifth year [penultimate year of post compulsory secondary education], with very little English, and they're quite intelligent, I think, and we might have put them into LCA. (Principal, Brayton Square, city, DEIS, medium size)

Considering this, it may be questionable if migrant students are 'being mainstreamed successfully into the post-primary education system' as the DES (2011) report claims. Being veered toward LCA, which offers more continuous assessment and less exam pressure, was considered by teachers to be more manageable for some migrant students, particularly for those who had low proficiency in English. However, contrary to this belief, it was evident from the interviews with teachers that some students would have preferred to opt for the traditional Leaving Certificate:

> [student's name], the Polish student, did not want to do the LCA which probably would have been easier for her. She wanted to do the established leaving cert and we will try to facilitate her as best we could.… I think she must have heard something from someone because she wouldn't tell me directly but she said no I heard about LCA and I'd prefer to do the established Leaving Cert… (Head Teacher, Bentham Street)

5.3. Post school pathways

Overall, most principals in this study reported that academic achievement levels among migrants were at least as good as those among their Irish counterparts, and sometimes better. The migrant students were generally seen as hard-working, motivated about their schoolwork and as having high educational aspirations. In fact, in the national study, over half of principals rated migrant students higher than Irish students on both motivation and educational aspirations. A smaller proportion of principals rated migrant students higher on achievement, but lack of language competency was seen as adversely impacting on the achievement of some. On this note, the interviews with teachers demonstrated a concern about the academic progression of migrant students once they finish secondary school. While all migrants have access to primary and post-primary education, some groups do not have access to further education or third-level education programmes.

Although some groups of migrants may receive grants for 3rd level education, non-EU nationals must pay college fees, which are often substantially higher than EU fees. Considering the relatively new experience of catering for such a diverse group of students in secondary schools, many Guidance Counsellors who advise student of their future options feel uncertain about options available for different groups of migrant students:

> The biggest problem I have is the whole issue of progression to third level… you go and you talk to all the kids as a group, you can go here and you can go there, you do this or do that, but in reality that's not true, because the foreign students, some can, some can't [access third level] and the problem for me is that it's difficult to be a hundred per cent accurate on what exactly they are allowed…the kids themselves wouldn't know exactly what their status is….if they have residency, or if they have refugee status, they're entitled to the FETAC5 qualification, the PLC education [further education], but not to third level, and not to the higher education grant…we have not got very clear information really on that whole issue, and so therefore we're not really able to talk to the kids. (Guidance Counsellor, Brayton Square)

Given that the parents of migrant children are likely to know less about third level options in Ireland than Irish parents, the guidance of teachers and guidance counsellors is even more salient for them.

6.   Conclusions

Equal of opportunities in the educational careers are a precondition for the success of newly arrived migrant children and youth in the receiving countries. However, due to existing structural inequalities as well as social and cultural barriers, these young people continue experiencing cumulative disadvantage within the education system of a receiving country that is likely to impact on their future life chances. In this article we have discussed cumulative disadvantage as it applies to the newly arrived migrant students in Irish educational system. In particular, we demonstrate how institutional barriers affect migrant students' educational career in a number of ways, producing inequalities.

Key aspects in this process are access to schools and sorting students within the educational system. Existing international studies indicate that migrant students are often found in less prestigious schools that tend to cater for a disadvantaged student intake. In the same vein this study found that migrant students are more likely to be enrolled in large city schools, and more likely to be enrolled in schools with a disadvantaged (DEIS) status where the demand for places by Irish parents may be low. While other countries have experienced segregation between schools and 'White flight' from certain schools with greater migrant intake, this has not been the case in Ireland, although some schools here do have a significant intake of migrant

students. However, our analysis showed that when schools are oversubscribed, certain enrolment criteria apply that are likely to disadvantage families that have recently arrived to the country. A review of enrolment is currently being undertaken by the Department of Education, and it remains to be seen whether and how any subsequent reforms have an impact on the access to and distribution of migrant students in Irish schools.

As demonstrated in an earlier section of this article, migrant students tend to be allocated to less academic tracks and lower ability classes. In this study we also found that migrant students in Ireland are often allocated to younger year groups, less academic tracks, and, where practiced, lower streams/bands. This decision is often based on subjective recommendation of teachers. While our study showed that all three secondary school types in Ireland have migrant students, in some cases migrant students were channelled into less academic programmes. While 'sorting' may be less pronounced in Ireland compared to other countries such as Germany and the Netherlands where important educational choices are made very early leaving migrant students often at a disadvantage (Pásztor 2010; Allmendinger 1989), the practice is likely to disappoint migrant students and may have an impact on their motivation. According to the teachers, these practices were carried out with best intentions – to overcome the language barrier and provide students with feelings of achievement – but the decisions generally did not take into account how it may impact on students' educational careers and access to higher education. It takes little account of the fact that many migrant children and their families are positively disposed towards educational success and have high ambitions (Smith and Tomlinson 1989).

It is important to note here that access to higher education seems to reinforce patterns already established in secondary schools and illustrates divide between various policy documents advocating equal opportunities and actual practice whereby some options are denied for some groups of students. Currently many groups of migrant students experience specific barriers when it comes to entry to higher education: this disadvantage stems partly from their country of origin as non-EU students have to pay higher fees than their EU counterparts, thus accessing college is out of the reach of many of these students. There was also evidence of considerable confusion regarding access to higher education, with teachers and guidance counsellors not being clear on what guidance they should be giving to migrant students about their future options. It is important to note that many migrant parents may only be able to provide limited support and guidance to their children due to their unfamiliarity with the education system in Ireland and low proficiency in English. In this context, the ability of teachers to provide support and guidance for the students cannot be underestimated.

While many migrants have returned to their country of origin, there are many, particularly families with children, who have made Ireland their home. However, accumulation of educational disadvantage is likely to impact on

future life chances of first generation young migrants in Ireland. The cost of educational disadvantage may manifest itself at the individual level through lower occupational attainment and lower lifetime earnings, as well as at a societal level, through lower social cohesion. National contexts and/or specific organization of schooling play a part in the educational attainment of migrant children (Vallet and Caille 1999). Hence, greater scrutiny of the design of the education system and school practices with regard to ensuring equality for all students in Ireland needs to be undertaken as migrant inequality in education can be seen as a foundation of accumulative inequalities and failing integration later in life (Allmendinger and Leibfried 2003).

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. In Ireland, secondary school sector is also referred to as 'second-level' or 'post-primary' sector. Within this sector there are three types of schools: voluntary secondary, vocational and community/comprehensive.
2. Note there are substantial variations between migrant groups in terms of qualifications. For example, a higher proportion of East Europeans hold second-level vocational qualifications and a lower proportion hold tertiary degrees than other migrants. Old-EU and non-EU migrants have higher levels of third level qualifications. Overall though a very small proportion of recent adult migrants have low qualifications (McGinnity et al. 2011).
3. Published data from the Central Statistics Office documents the country from which adults and children have migrated from, thus conflating the meaning of 'region' and 'nationality.'
4. Also referred to as post-primary and second-level schooling.
5. Transition Year is a year between a junior and a senior cycle that is less focused on academic issues and aims to promote personal development of young people.
6. This pattern should be interpreted with caution due to the relatively small numbers of students involved.

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