

# The Irish National Report

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## Introduction

The 2005 Human Development Report recently found Ireland to be the second wealthiest country in the world (UN Development Programme).<sup>1</sup> However, the same report also highlighted that Ireland was one of the countries with the greatest social inequality and with the third highest level of poverty out of the eighteen countries surveyed. The expansion of the Irish economy in the period 1987 to 2002 has been characterised as a ‘miracle’ (Sweeney 1999: 18), a reinvention (NESC 1999: 21), and a remarkable economic transformation (Economist 2004). With this transformation Ireland has become known as the ‘Celtic Tiger’, analogous to the ‘East Asian Tigers’ during their period of rapid growth in the 1980s and 1990s. Net immigration has replaced large-scale emigration. A severe infrastructural deficit is in the process of being reduced. Massive job creation and a low tax regime have supported living standards comparable to those enjoyed in the wealthiest of European states. It is not surprising then that Ireland boasts high levels of life satisfaction and optimism (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions 2004).

Accession to the European Community in 1973 had had an impact: the economic and cultural life of Ireland was slowly transformed and national confidence was enhanced as a result. But before Ireland entered the Celtic Tiger period in the late 1980s the country was on the verge of bankruptcy, unemployment rates were the highest in Europe and large numbers of young people emigrated on leaving school. Capital infrastructure was in a poor condition and social services were under-developed.

Key factors in Ireland’s success have been, foreign direct investment by multinational companies; an expanding well-qualified labour force; and a social consensus<sup>2</sup> on pay policy designed to improve efficiency and competitiveness (OECD 1997a). Foreign investment has been concentrated in computers, semi-conductors, office equipment, software, pharmaceuticals,

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medical technology, electrical engineering and soft drinks concentrates. Foreign investment has been attracted by the low 10 percent corporate tax and the low standard rate of employers' social security taxes, reduced to 12 percent in 1996. The Government, through the Industrial Development Authority (IDA) offers generous grants to new companies to cover installation costs and training; the Irish Financial Services Centre, established in 1987, acts as a base for international banking, insurance, leasing and fund-management; and there is a good supply of a low-cost, well-qualified English-speaking labour force, as a result of the education and training policies of successive governments. For international investors Ireland's position as a 'gateway to Europe' and a bridge to North America was a particular attraction.

However, the Celtic Tiger period may also be characterised in terms of the widening gap between rich and poor (Nolan, et al. 2000; UNDP 2005). Housing inflation has delivered dividends to property investors, but development has been over-concentrated on the east coast, around the capital city Dublin, and homelessness has increased. In some areas the standards of public services have not kept pace with increasing overall prosperity and there is evidence of a creeping privatisation in education, health and utilities. The downside of the unprecedented economic development has been referred to as the 'Celtic Cancer' (Cullen 2004). The principal argument forwarded by Cullen is that social capital and personal health suffer due to pressures of time and money, especially in two-income families. The demands of a rapidly expanding labour force have accelerated existing negative trends in relation to values and society, family and community (Kennedy 2001; Cullen 2004). Other accounts emphasise the inequitable social impact of economic growth, in particular the enrichment of a small elite and the relatively worse off position of the majority (Allen 1999, 2000); the reliance on mobile multinational capital, the growth in low-paid service jobs and regressive fiscal policies (O'Hearn 1998; Ó Riain 2004). To some the connection between economic success and social failure is evidenced in part by a rise in the Irish prison population (Kirby 2002; Cullen 2004). Even 'social partnership', Ireland's corporatist national planning arrangements, including triennial national pay agreements, is criticised for concentrating political power in the hands of small elites and organised interests (Ó Cinnéide 1998; Kirby 2002).

## **Socio-Economic Security**

Socio-economic security is defined for the purpose of this study as the extent to which individuals have sufficient resources over time. Ireland's

recent economic growth has undoubtedly led to higher living standards overall, even after taking account of the significant rise in the cost of living. However, not unexpectedly, not everyone benefits to the same extent; indeed perhaps not everyone benefits at all. There is a growing body of evidence indicating increased inequities within Irish society. The results for the socio-economic security domains show certain vulnerable groups to be experiencing consistent and real disadvantage.

Since 1986 there have been surveys of income distribution in Ireland, and estimates have been arrived at of the extent of poverty on the basis of consistent definitions. The incidence of poverty has been falling steadily from 15.1 percent in 1994 to 5.2 percent in 2001, which has been attributed to rising employment and the impact of a flat rate social welfare system. However, in the same period the extent of *relative income* poverty, the proportion of the population falling below 60 percent of median income, has increased from 15.6 percent to 22.1 percent.

### *Housing and Environment*

There is a high level of owner occupation in Ireland's housing market, approximately 80 percent in recent years (CSO: Quarterly National Household Survey 2003). Although security of tenure for owners is provided for in Irish law, concerns exist about the level of debt first-time buyers carry to cope with house price inflation. A dramatic influx of migrant workers has fueled growth in the rental sector. The distribution of types of occupancy is shown in Table 1.

The level of outright home ownership increases with age and income; purchase from local authorities is most common amongst the older age groups. Demand for housing has greatly outpaced supply. *The Economist* magazine (2004) estimated that house prices increased by 181 percent between 1997 and 2004. It is estimated that over 48,400 households (Department of the Environment cited in Focus Ireland) are on the wait-

**Table 1** Percentage of private dwellings in permanent housing units classified by nature of occupancy, 2002

Owner occupier with loan/mortgage	37.9
Owner occupier without loan/mortgage	36.0
Being purchased from a Local Authority	3.5
Rented Local Authority	6.9
Private rented unfurnished	2.0
Private rented furnished or part furnished	9.0
Occupied free of rent	1.7
Not stated	2.9

Source: CSO Statistical Yearbook, 2004

ing list for Local Authority housing. A limited voluntary housing sector - (non-government social housing) has emerged in very recent years, providing for low-income families and vulnerable groups with special needs. Private rented accommodation is poorly regulated and viewed as an insecure, short term housing option. The boom in house prices has resulted in a comparable boom in the value and extent of the private rented sector.

Since we are discussing housing it is appropriate at this point to refer to certain data relating to the ‘Social Inclusion’ domain. With regard to homelessness, a survey conducted by the Department of the Environment (cited in Simon Community) over a week-long period in March 2002 based on returns sent by each local authority recorded 5,581 homeless people throughout the country, an increase of over 100 percent on the results of an earlier survey in 1996. The Simon Community, a service and campaigning body for homeless people in Ireland, challenges the accuracy of these figures and estimates that about 10,000 people experience homelessness each year.

The issue of affordable social housing is contentious, with the recent upsurge in house prices exacerbating the problem. On the one hand local authorities are seeking to withdraw from the provision of housing while the State is encouraging private investment in social housing by imposing a quota (20 percent) for social housing as part of newly approved private housing projects. Little progress has been made on this initiative, with the local authorities citing a lack of clarity with regard to the operation of the quota and the private sector offering resistance. Housing is a particular concern for Irish Travellers (an indigenous nomadic people experiencing discrimination), for historical and cultural reasons.

### *Environmental Conditions (Social and Natural)*

The difficulty in speaking about the numbers of victims of crime is that most reporting and analysis is concentrated on the acts of crime themselves, and not necessarily their impact. Per capita figures on serious crime are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2** Per capita figures on crime in Ireland, 1999 (1,000)

Assaults	2.47
Burglaries	5.73
Car thefts	3.69
Rape	0.05
Murder	0.00
Manslaughter	0.00
Robberies	0.60

Source: UN Survey of Crime Trends and Operations of Criminal Justice Systems, covering the period 1998–2000

According to figures released by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform the number of headline crime offences for the first quarter of 2004 fell by 4 percent, with the lowest number of murders for ten years. This followed a decrease of 3 percent in 2003.

In relation to environmental status the international environmental protection network Friends of the Earth (cited in Healy 2004) has the following to say:

Ireland has the highest number of European complaints per head of population on environmental issues; Ireland is the most car dependent country in the world, with carbon dioxide emissions increasing by 124% between 1990 and 2002; greenhouse gas emissions will exceed Kyoto limits by almost 40% in 2010; some 25 fish species are in decline and 18 native wild bird species are endangered; widespread illegal dumping; government subsidies for aviation are causing major environmental damage; GM crops have failed to reduce pesticide use; two new peat stations planned will burn about 1,500 hectares of peatlands every year for the next 15 years; only 5.6% of household waste was diverted from landfill in 2001; per capita production of household waste increased by 17% between 1998 and 2001.

### *Health and Care*

Approximately 26 percent of the population is without private health coverage and rely completely on the public health services. Those covered by private health insurance typically experience shorter waiting lists or do not have to wait at all. A report for the Economic and Social Research Institute (Watson and Williams 2001) examined the health status of the adult population. The incidence of health problems is only slightly higher among females than males. However, health problems do increase dramatically with age. Those living in Dublin are more likely to have a health problem than those in the rest of the country. There is also a link with household income, with those having lower incomes experiencing more health problems.

Those defined for health care purposes as having low incomes, are entitled to free public health care. In the 1970s the proportion of the population in this category was just below 40 percent: now it is 28.5 percent. Until recently, anyone whose only income was a social welfare payment would qualify for a medical card. This is no longer the case: while social welfare payments have increased in recent years, the limits for qualification for free health services guidelines have not kept pace. This means that some of the people who would have qualified in the past no longer qualify now.

### *Care services*

There is a strong tradition in Ireland of informal care by family members. However there are no comprehensive registers of informal carers in Ireland. A pilot study conducted by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in 1999 estimated that per week:

- 35,000 people provide more than fifty hours unpaid personal care
- 17,000 people provide unpaid personal care for twenty to forty-nine hours
- 79,000 provide unpaid personal care for up to nineteen hours

The Census of Population (CSO 2002) shows that women on average contribute significantly more hours than men. Most informal care is un-remunerated. Carers covered by social insurance who meet the contribution requirements, a small minority, can avail themselves of 'Carers' Benefit' for a period of fifteen months. In July 2002, 450 people were claiming this benefit, 96 percent were female (Comhairle 2002).

### *Work*

The Terms of Employment (Information) Act 1994 states, an employer must provide employees with notice of changes to the terms and conditions of work no later than one month before the change comes into effect. An employee can then decide whether to accept these changes; in some cases employees may apply to be compensated for changes to terms and conditions. This Act implements EU Council Directive 91/533/EEC on an employer's obligation to inform employees of the conditions applicable to the contract or employment relationship.

Ireland falls below the EU-15 average for the proportion of its labour force employed on a fixed term basis (Eurostat 2002: 46). Legislation has recently been implemented requiring equal treatment for employees on a fixed term contract and those on a permanent contract. This Act implements the EU Directive on fixed term workers (Directive 1999/70/EC) and incorporates all aspects of the employment contract from compensation and benefits to training and development. (No formal data are gathered on fixed term employees in Ireland.)

### *Education*

The age at which compulsory education ends in Ireland is 16 years. The proportion of early school leavers is inferred from participation in education rates (Eurostat 2003: 30). Table 3 offers a comparison between Ireland and the EU-15 average.

**Table 3** Percentage participation rates in education by ages, 2000/01

Age	Ireland	EU-15
16	93	93
17	81	84
18	79	74

Source: Eurostat, Living Conditions in Europe, 2003

Educational disadvantage is closely linked to poverty (Smyth and Hannan 2000). Early school leaving amongst the Traveller community is especially high. The incidence of males in Ireland leaving school without a qualification is significantly higher than for females. Table 4 provides data on participation rates by gender, comparing Ireland to the average for the EU-15.

**Table 4** Percentage participation rates (16–18 year olds) by gender, 2000/01

	Ireland	EU-15
Male	77	82
Female	93	85

Source: Eurostat, Living Conditions in Europe, 2003

## Social Cohesion

Analysis of this conditional factor shows Ireland to be characterised by good social cohesion, reflected in high levels of trust, in the importance of social and familial networks and in the delivery of informal care. However, as more people enter the labour market on a full-time basis and are less capable of providing informal care there is increased pressure on weaknesses in Irish public services, e.g. in health, education, child-care and transport. Rising house prices, which mean that many people cannot afford to purchase houses close to the parental home, weaken the strength of local networks and inhibit the ability of families to provide informal care and support to family members. Increased commuting distances inhibit local cohesiveness as individuals have less time to develop relationships with neighbours.

### *Trust*

The European Values Survey (EVS) 1999–2000 asked respondents a question on trust, providing a choice of two responses – ‘most people can be

**Table 5** Irish trust in national institutions, 2001

Trust in	Below average	Average	Above average
Elected Representatives	✓		
Armed Forces			✓
Legal System		✓	
Media			✓
Trades Unions			✓
Police			✓
Religious		✓	
Civil Service			✓
Major Companies	No data		

Source: Eurobarometer Report 56

trusted’ and ‘one cannot be too careful’. In Ireland 35.2 percent of people said ‘most people can be trusted’, which is slightly lower than the figure of 37 percent for the EU-15.

While Irish respondents record higher levels of institutional trust than their EU-15 counterparts as a whole, it is important to acknowledge decreasing levels of institutional trust in Ireland over time. In the past Irish ‘social institutions have been highly authoritarian’ and while it can be argued that ‘most remain substantially so today’ (Schmitt 1973 quoted in Chubb 1982) a series of scandals involving the institutions of Church and State have led to reduced trust and loyalty. Data from the Eurobarometer (EC 2002) are presented in Table 5.

### *Personal Contacts*

The importance of personal contacts and family ties in Irish society is evidenced in the results of the EVS 1999/2000. Respondents were asked to rate the importance of ‘family’, and ‘friends and acquaintances’, with a choice between four response being provided.

Ireland places higher than average importance on ‘family’ and on ‘friends and acquaintances’. The importance of politics is less than the average when compared to EU-15 respondents as a whole.

The most popular areas of interest for Irish volunteers are sports and

**Table 6** Importance of family

	Ireland	EU-15
‘Very’ and ‘quite’	98.9	97.9
‘Not’ and ‘none at all’	1.1	2.1

Source: EVS 1999/2000 Q. 1B

**Table 7** Importance of friends and acquaintances

	Ireland	EU-15
'Very' and 'quite'	97.3	92.8
'Not' and 'none at all'	2.7	7.2

Source: EVS 1999/2000 Q. 1C

recreational, church organisations, and youth work. The history of voluntary activity in Ireland has been influenced both by a lack of resources available to the Irish State in its early years and the pre-eminence of the Catholic principle of subsidiarity. The role of trade unions in Ireland in the development of social service provision has been limited compared to other European countries (Curry 2003: 10).

### *Tolerance*

Large-scale immigration is a new experience for Ireland; in the past, Irish people were forced to emigrate in large numbers due to poor economic conditions and political upheaval. The Traveller community is a small indigenous ethnic minority that has been the subject of discrimination, but is now covered by equality legislation. Immigration and asylum-seekers are the subjects of considerable media attention and social policy debate. The EVS 1999–2000 asked the following question of respondents, providing a choice between five responses: 'How about people from less developed countries coming here to work. Which one of the following do you think the Government should do?' The distribution of responses is given in Table 8 below.

The data indicate that views on immigration in Ireland correspond to those in other European countries: the country is relatively welcoming and tolerant of other cultures. Immigration into Ireland has increased substantially since these data were gathered; anecdotal evidence and media coverage suggests that racism and intolerance are rising. The Irish Government held a constitutional referendum in 2004 on the issue of citizenship for

**Table 8** Views on immigration from less developed countries

	Ireland	EU-15
Anyone who wants to come	8.3	8.3
Come when jobs available	46.7	42.1
Strict limits on the number of foreigners	42.1	44.0
Prohibit people coming here	2.9	5.6

Source: EVS 1999-2000, Q. 74

children born in Ireland to parents who are not Irish citizens. The result of the referendum, in which a majority of approximately 80 percent voted to deprive such children of automatic citizenship, is taken by some to be an indicator of negative attitudes to immigrants. More recently, the Irish Government has embarked on a policy of deportations for failed asylum seekers, in line with EU policy.

### *Social Contract*

To address the question of beliefs on the causes of poverty data from two sources is examined. The EVS 1999–2000 asked respondents a question in two parts:

- ‘Why are there people in this country who live in need? Here are four possible reasons. Which one do you consider to be the most important?’
- ‘And which reason do you consider being the second most important?’

Response to both parts is amalgamated in Table 9 below, and the four possible reasons suggested are grouped under the headings of ‘individual’ and ‘structural’. Table 9 also reports results based on the Eurobarometer Report 56.1; the question asked respondents to consider ‘perceived causes of poverty’, choosing from four options.

Data based on the Eurobarometer Report 56.1 and featured in ‘Social Precarity and Social Integration’ (Gallie and Paugnam 2002) indicates that the incidence of the attribution of ‘laziness’ as an explanation for poverty has changed over time in Ireland. Over a period of increased prosperity the ‘laziness’ explanation has gained in favour and the ‘unfairness’ explanation is less often relied on. This would seem to suggest that Irish people increasingly believe that everyone has had a fair chance to benefit from the recent boom. Irish views are broadly in line with those of EU respondents as a whole.

**Table 9** Beliefs on the causes of poverty, 2001

	Ireland		EU-15	
	EVS	EB	EVS	EB
Individual				
Unlucky	24.2	22.8	21.4	17.5
Laziness/lack of willpower	20.1	17.9	21.1	17.6
Structural				
Injustice of society	27.8	22.9	28.9	31.4
Part modern progress/inevitability	24.2	19.7	24.1	21.9
None of these	3.8	8.4	4.8	5.8

Source: EVS 1999–2000, Q. 11; EB Report 56.1

### *Sense of National Pride*

Eurobarometer surveys have asked about national pride, the data from which is presented in Table 10.

**Table 10** National pride, 1999–2001

	Ireland Very & Fairly proud	EU-15 Not very & Not at all	Very & Fairly proud	Not very & Not at all
Oct/Nov 1999	96	2	83	13
April/May 2000	98	2	83	12
Nov/Dec 2000	97	2	83	14
Oct/Nov 2001	97	2	84	12

Source: Eurobarometer Reports 52, 53, 54 and 56

The data suggests a strong sense of national pride amongst Irish people, significantly above the EU-15 average.

### *Sense of Regional/Community/Local Identity*

Table 11 suggests that in Ireland identification with the local is strong.

**Table 11** Sense of belonging, 1999–2000

	Ireland	EU 15
Locality or town	56.6	47.5
Region of country	15.8	15.9
Country as a whole	24.0	26.8

Source: EVS 1999–2000. Q. 67

## **Social Inclusion**

Analysing this factor provides further evidence of inequity. The indicators suggest, high levels of discrimination towards the Traveller community and some immigrants; high poverty levels amongst the elderly; the under-representation of women in business and politics; and, a significant gender pay gap. Although importance is attached to family, friends and informal social networks the formal institutional mechanisms which impact on inclusion are not protecting those groups most at risk of exclusion.

## *Equality Between Men and Women*

There are several studies, using different methodologies on the level of women's pay as a proportion of men's pay. The standard method of measuring the gender wage gap is to use the percentage ratio of female to male earnings, and the closer this ratio is to one hundred percent the smaller the gender wage gap. The CSO estimates the gap to be at 15 percent (2001). In the Eurostat study (Winqvist, 2000), the 'gender pay gap' is defined as the difference between the average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees and female paid employees as a percentage of average gross hourly earnings of male paid employees. The results are shown in Table 12.

**Table 12** Gender pay gap

	Ireland	EU-15
1999	22	15
2000	19	16
2001	17	16

Source: Eurostat (Winqvist, 2000)

According to the OECD, median full-time hourly wages for females in Ireland are nineteen percent below those of males (2002). As in other EU countries, the gender pay gap in Ireland is still significant. Indeed the study by Winqvist shows Ireland recording a much wider pay gap than the EU-15 average up to the year 2000; the data for 2001, however, shows that gap itself to be reducing.

The data in Table 13 indicates a significant imbalance in representation in local government; women's under-representation politically, particular-

**Table 13** Proportion of women elected to parliament and holding senior positions in private companies

	Male	Female
Local government, 2002		
City	82	18
County	85	15
National Parliament, 2001		
Lower House	87.3	12.7
Upper House	81.7	18.3
Business Proprietors & Managers, 1999		
National	76.4	23.6
South & East	77.1	22.9
BMW Region	73.7	26.3
CEOs of Large Private Sector Firms, 2002	98	2

Source: NDP Gender Equality Unit Statistical Databank (2002)

ly in the lower house of parliament; and, in some instances, marginally higher representation for women in business leadership positions compared with national politics.

Irish women continue to be significantly under-represented in political and business leadership positions. The level of representation at the local government level, widely regarded as the testing ground for future politicians at the national level, is particularly poor. At the national level representation continues to be below the EU-15 average, except in the less powerful upper house, Seanad Éireann. However the representation of Irish women at the European Parliament has increased and is above average for the EU. Both the current President of Ireland and her predecessor are female.

### *Experience of Discrimination*

The Irish Equality Authority was established in 1998 to deal with discrimination complaints, on nine grounds (age, disability, gender, family status, marital status, race, religion, sexual orientation, and membership of the Traveller Community), in the areas of employment and equal status (Employment Equality Act 1998; Equal Status Act 2000). The Authority provides representation in cases deemed suitable. Table 14 offers data on the total number of cases dealt with across the nine grounds.

A number of reports have highlighted the marginalised living conditions of sections of the Traveller community in Ireland. The Irish National Coordinating Committee for the European Year against Racism (1997) summarised these views as follows: ‘Travellers are widely acknowledged as

**Table 14** Cases of alleged discrimination upheld by the Equality Authority

	Employment discrimination		Status discrimination		Total as a percent	
	2001	2003	2001	2003	2001	2003
Age	35	50	57	70	9.9	8.87
Disability	49	90	45	138	10.2	16.85
Gender	104	164	29	55	17.96	16.18
Family Status	2	7	12	17	1.3	1.77
Marital Status	5	6	4	13	0.925	1.4
Race	58	166	33	80	9	18.18
Religion	4	4	5	15	1	1.4
Sexual Orientation	15	14	18	25	3.7	2.88
Traveller Community	6	9	435	327	41.75	24.8
Mixed (New Category 2001)	22	51	23	52	4.16	7.61

Source: Equality Authority Annual Report, 2001, 2003

**Table 15** Answers to the question: ‘Have you ever experienced racism or discrimination?’

	Percent answering ‘Yes’
Irish Traveller	78.6
Black Irish	88.6
European	80.7
Black African	81.8
North African	72.7
South Asian	52.9
SE Asian	79.3
Others	61.5

Source: Racism in Ireland 2001, Amnesty International

one of the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups in Irish society. Travellers fare poorly on almost every indicator used to measure disadvantage: unemployment, poverty, social exclusion, health status, infant mortality, life expectancy, illiteracy, education and training levels, access to decision making and political representation, gender equality, access to credit, accommodation and living conditions’. More recent reports confirm that little has changed since then (Weafer 2001).

Amnesty International conducted research examining the opinions of black and ethnic minorities within Ireland. Levels of discrimination in all categories are given in Table 15.

### *Long-Term Unemployment*

The rate of long-term unemployment has fallen by approximately 80 percent in the period 1996–2001. The rate of male long-term unemployment fell by 79 percent, while the female rate fell by 89 percent, which was accounted for in part by a large increase in service sector jobs. Much of the rise in employment has occurred in the construction and service industries and has benefited immigrant workers, but in these sectors membership of trades unions is low. The data presented in Table 16 below show a significant and steady decline in the rate of long-term unemployment for Ireland.

**Table 16** Percentage of long-term unemployment, 1996–2003

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Ireland	7.0	5.6	3.9	2.4	1.6	1.2	1.3	1.5
EU 15	4.9	4.9	4.4	4.0	3.5	3.1	3.1	3.3

Source: Eurostat

Long-term unemployment rates have fallen for both men and women, but somewhat faster for women. The rate of male long-term unemployment fell by seventy-nine percent, while the female rate fell by eighty-nine percent. This significant difference can be explained by the increase in service type jobs. In the past ten years Ireland has witnessed a significant feminisation of its labour force, particularly in relation to the increased participation of married women.

### *Education*

Compulsory education ends at age sixteen years. Participation rates at most ages are below the EU-15 average, except in the case of females. The proportion of males leaving education without a qualification is significantly higher than that of females; in 2002 the figures were 18.5 percent for males and 10.8 percent for females. Unemployment rates amongst early school leavers have fallen as employers become more willing to train those without formal qualifications.

In the period 1991–2001 Ireland has experienced comparatively higher increases in the number of students in higher education. Participation rates are higher for females; participation rates for students aged over thirty years are below the EU-15 average; Traveller participation rates remain well below national averages. Within the education system new inequalities are still significant. National data show a direct link between socio-economic group and educational qualification. Those involved in manual or unskilled labour do not progress through the education system to the same extent as those in professional, managerial and technical roles. There is a strong correlation between poor literacy and socio-economic disadvantage. Furthermore, a development not caught in the indicators is the rise in recourse to ‘grind schools’, i.e., second-level students wishing to get better examination results for admission to third-level courses attend commercially run schools after ordinary school hours. This option favours children in better-off families.

**Table 17** Percentage increase in number of students in higher education, 1991–2001

	Ireland	EU-15
Females	122	46
Males	54	21
Total	85	35

Source: Eurostat – UOE (UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat)

### *Transport*

Table 18 shows above average reliance on buses and coaches and below average passenger transport by rail.

Ireland has not had the same opportunities as other member states to develop a comparable road and rail infrastructure. The rail network was allowed to fall into disrepair and existing lines were discontinued. EU Structural Funds and recent economic growth have provided the necessary capital for investment in and expansion of the road and rail networks.

**Table 18** Passenger transport (passenger-km per inhabitant)

	Buses and Coaches			Rail		
	1999	2000	2001	1999	2000	2001
Ireland	1571	1607	1624	388	365	393
EU 15	1077	1091	1097	780	804	811

Source: Energy, Transport and Environment Indicators 1999–2001, Eurostat

### *Social Networks*

Table 19 shows Irish people to have regular contact with their neighbours.

**Table 19** Percentage of population aged sixteen and over talking to neighbours, 1999

	Ireland	EU 15
At least once a week	89	81
Once or twice a month	7	10
Less than once a month or never	4	9

Source: User's database version, 2002, ECHP – Eurostat

Table 20 shows Irish people to have above average regular contact with friends.

**Table 20** Percentage of population age 16 and over meeting people at home or elsewhere, 1999

	Ireland	EU 15
At least once a week	97	81
Once or twice a month	3	14
Less than once a month or never	1	5

Source: User's database version, 2002, ECHP – Eurostat

## Family Life

Data relating to unpaid care was first gathered by the 2002 census and may incorporate direct or indirect financial assistance. The data shows that more women than men are likely to act as carers and female carers provide more hours of care in a week than male carers.

## Social Empowerment

Assessing levels of social empowerment in Ireland is difficult as it is the conditional factor for which the least data is available. Broadly speaking Ireland appears to have average to low levels of empowerment. In recent years most opportunities for progression have existed within the private sector in the form of increased employment opportunities. Many state-led initiatives to improve empowerment have also aimed to remove barriers to employment. Much empowerment-related policy is in the early stages of development, such as advocacy and childcare, and it will be a number of years before effectiveness can be measured. It will be very telling to assess whether such structures and institutions will be capable of empowering all members of society.

### *Knowledge Base*

Table 21 shows the results of a study to determine the extent to which social mobility is knowledge-based (formal qualifications). The data indicates a direct link between socio-economic group and educational qualification. Those involved in manual or unskilled labour do not progress through the education system to the same extent as those in professional, managerial and technical roles.

**Table 21** Persons aged fifteen years and over, classified by socio-economic group and highest level of education completed

Socio-economic Group	% of Total	% Non-Degree	% Degree or Higher	% Not Stated
Professional Workers	5.7	5.1	26.3	1.4
Managerial/Technical	24.3	42.4	51.4	6.9
Non-Manual	16.6	24.3	9.6	5.5
Skilled Manual	17.3	12.4	3.4	9.3
Semi-Skilled	11.4	7.7	2.6	6.3
Unskilled	6.1	1.7	0.6	5.3
All Others Gainfully Occupied and Unknown	18.5	6.5	6.1	65.3

Source: Census 2002, CSO

Data pertaining to adult literacy were gathered through the International Adult Literacy Survey (OECD 1997b). This survey showed that 25 percent of the adult population in Ireland were at the lowest levels of literacy, with a further 32 percent at the second lowest. According to the Department of Education White Paper on Adult Education, *Learning for Life* (2000), 30 percent of the adult population has poor literacy skills. This indicator provides evidence of how the system of education in Ireland has an uneven impact on national literacy and numeracy. A 2003–4 report conducted by the Education Research Centre for the Department of Education Inspectorate (ERC 2004) indicates the relationship between poor literacy and socio-economic disadvantage in the Irish context. The report finds that over 30 percent of primary school children in disadvantaged areas suffer from severe literacy problems and that the number of children with serious learning difficulties is three times higher in poorer areas than in others.

### Availability of Free Media

The First World Press Freedom Ranking Index (Reporters Without Borders 2002) was compiled by asking journalists, researchers and legal experts to answer fifty questions about a whole range of press freedom violations (such as murders or arrests of journalists, censorship, pressure, state monopolies in various fields, punishment of press law offences and regulation of the media). The final list extends to 139 countries, with Ireland ranked sixth. The Second World Press Freedom Ranking produced by Reporters Without Borders (2003) ranks Ireland seventeenth out of a total of 166 countries. The report is a snapshot of the situation between 1 September 2002 and 1 September 2003, taking account of press freedom violations. The World Audit Annual Survey of Press Freedom 2002 reflects events of January to December 2001; Ireland is ranked thirteenth out of 187 countries.

### Labour Market

Employees in Ireland have a constitutional right to join a trades union, however there is no legal obligation on an employer to recognise or negotiate with a union. In recent years absolute numbers of those in a trades union has risen but this rise has not been commensurate with the rise in employment and overall density has declined. Much of the rise in employment has occurred in the construction and service industries and amongst female and immigrant workers; 79 percent of the labour force is covered by a collective agreement. Since 1987 the Irish social partners have been working to a developed system of social participation/partnership, feeding

into the content and implementation of national economic and social policies and collective wage agreements. The four groupings or pillars that comprise the ‘social partners’ are employers, trades unions, farmers, and the community and voluntary sector.

### *Back to Work Schemes*

A number of schemes have been brought forward by Irish policymakers in recent years to promote the return to work and education. Many of these schemes emerged when unemployment was particularly high. However, recent attempts by the Irish Government to repeal these provisions have revealed that such measures continue to have a place even when mainstream job creation reaches high levels. This is especially exemplified by the Community Employment Scheme (CE Scheme). The CE Scheme was designed to help the long-term unemployed and others to return to work by offering part-time and temporary placements in positions based within local community services, such as youth work or care of the elderly. In theory the rise in employment levels in recent years reduced the demand for places on these schemes and thus prompted the Government to reduce the number of positions available. However, this logic ignored two important facts: First, while the original aim of the scheme was to provide incentives for people to return to work the services provided by these people have become an integral part of the communities within which these services are located and the withdrawal of these positions has not been compensated for in any meaningful way thus leaving many communities without basic services. Second, while many of those people who took up positions within local services have proved themselves to be of value to their communities it cannot be assumed from this that they would be of equal value in any other setting or that they would wish to work elsewhere. The Government’s own review of the CE scheme recognised it as value for money.

### *Openness and Supportiveness of Institutions*

The Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) reflects a tripartite separation of powers between the judiciary, legislature and executive. A good account of this system and its operational flaws, is provided by the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (2004): ‘Under the Irish political-legal order the main deviation from the tripartite separation of powers is the fused legislature-executive. In theory the Government is elected by and can be removed or replaced by the Dáil,<sup>4</sup> i.e., the legislature is supposed to control the executive; in reality the converse is true. The executive commands a majority in the Dáil and because of the strong party system votes are

invariably cast along party lines and not in accordance with the merits of the proposal put before the parliament. As a result, Ireland's legislative process is flawed in that it provides few opportunities for widespread participation. Political party politics drive and control law and policy making. Opposition party parliamentarians who have been elected to represent the viewpoint of the people, often experience difficulties in understanding the implications of legislation which comes before the Houses of the Oireachtas, because of inadequate resourcing and time constraints. Consultation, if it happens at all, is carefully managed and sometimes rejected if it does not suit the Government's agenda. Public consultation seems to vary widely and consultations can be conducted on the whim of a civil servant or government minister. This is because there is no legal duty on the Government to consult when preparing legislation. In practice, the existence of a fused legislature-executive means a significant proportion of the population has no input into legislative processes.'

Since 1987 the Irish Government has encouraged the neo-corporatist model of social partnership as a basis for the content and implementation of national economic and social policies and collective wage agreements. Under this model certain interest groups play a role in decision-taking and policy-making. In theory the partnership model allows the social partners to enter discussions on a range of issues to reach consensus. The over-riding focus of social partnership has been on collective wage agreements and the economic aspects of development. There have been six national agreements to date and the model is heralded as being central to the emergence of the Celtic Tiger. The Democracy Commission (2004) is amongst others in noting the existence of critical voices that see in the partnership model a creeping corporatism.

Alongside the economic development of the past two decades community development approaches have sought to increase the participation of marginalised societal groups, supported in part through the allocation of EU Structural Funds. The granting of such monies was linked to the establishment of an independent intermediary agency, Area Development Management Ltd. (ADM). Local partnership companies have been established in areas of disadvantage, mirroring the mix of social partners engaged in national wage agreements with a view to promoting both the economic and social development locally. One criticism levelled at these companies is that they by-pass elected representatives. As a way of addressing this and by way of increased co-ordination, the Government has introduced City and County Development Boards, with political representation, to inspect and approve economic and social developments proposed at the city and county level.

### *Support for Collective Action*

The Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs has lead responsibility for developing the relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary sector. This incorporates overseeing the implementation of the 'White Paper on a Framework for Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector' (see Department of Social and Family Affairs 2000). The White Paper commits the Government to providing a range of funding measures over a three-year period for federations, networks and umbrella bodies and for a scheme of funding for training and support in the community and voluntary sector.

The Department of Health and Children has a role because many organisations that are classified as belonging to the Community and Voluntary sector are service providers and therefore require distinct funding. The Department of Health and Children does not provide a breakdown for the expenditure on this sector. The above-mentioned White Paper does contain a commitment on behalf of the Irish Government to quantify the value of the sector and the total funding. This has yet to be implemented.

### *Personal Support Services*

In common with some other EU countries Ireland's labour force was traditionally male, with the responsibility for child-care falling to the mother. In the past ten years Ireland has witnessed a phenomenal increase in female participation in the labour force, particularly bringing married women into paid employment. This development is due in part to an increased availability of jobs, the influence of EU equality measures, and as a response to the increased costs of living associated with economic growth. Therefore, the issue of childcare is a very topical one for Ireland. As it stands, childcare is in the main provided for by the private sector, demand outstrips supply, and childcare costs are exorbitant. The Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform has lead responsibility for the co-ordination of the Government's National Childcare Policy including the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme (EOCP). Priority has been given to the childcare issue in the National Development Plan 2000–6.

The CSO conducted a survey module on childcare included in the Quarterly National Household Survey in the fourth quarter of 2002. Over 73,000 families, or 42.5 percent of all families with pre-school children, regularly rely on non-parental childcare arrangements for minding their children during normal working hours. Couples where both partners were at work had the greatest need for regular non-parental childcare facilities.

Over three-quarters (55,300) had childcare arrangements for their pre-school children and nearly half (50,100) required it for their primary school-going children. Lone parents with pre-school children used non-parental childcare arrangements to a lesser extent than average (42.5 percent), with just over 30 percent (7,600) having regular arrangements. The reverse was true in the case of lone parents with primary school-going children with over 28 percent (12,800) having regular arrangements, compared to the average of 23.5 percent. Almost 23,000 families relied on Unpaid Relatives for minding pre-school children on a regular basis and over 19,000 of these indicated that it was their main source of childcare. In proportionate terms, lone parents were more reliant on Unpaid Relatives.

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## Notes

1. The UN report indicated a GDP per head of €30,384 (\$37,738).
2. The model used to achieve this consensus is referred to as social partnership; the social partners in this context are the Irish Government, business, trades unions, farmers and the community and voluntary sector.
3. By 1997 almost half of school-leavers continued on to third-level, with Ireland producing proportionally the highest number of science and engineering graduates in the OECD (1997a).
4. An Dáil Éireann – the Irish Parliament.