

Exploring migration experiences of Irish emigrants of minority ethnic backgrounds

December 2022



**IRISH DIASPORA
SUPPORT PROJECT**

cross  care



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Table of Contents

3 Summary

4 Introduction

6 Methodology

8 Survey Results

18 Findings

21 Conclusion

23 References

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge and thank all the respondents for sharing their experiences as part of this research, and all those who helped promote the survey to their networks across the world.



We extend our thanks to individual members of our Steering Group for providing their invaluable expertise and support throughout the development of this research: Dr Colletta Dalikeni, Grace Odumosu, Alphonse Basogomba, Dr Fidèle Mutwarasibo, Kathleen-Anne Boswell, Professor Mary Gilmartin, Sarah Meaney, and Dr Piaras Mac Éinrí.

We also thank our former colleagues, Danielle Mc Laughlin and Riyad El-Moslemany.

Finally, we acknowledge and thank our funders, the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme and our parent body Crosscare.

Summary

Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project is an Ireland-based, non-governmental organisation that provides information and advocacy support to Irish emigrants at the pre-departure, pre-return, and post-return stages of their migration journeys. Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project was previously part of Crosscare Migrant Project providing help and support to Irish emigrants and returning emigrants for over fifteen years, thanks to funding from the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme.

The report contributes to the knowledge base on contemporary Irish migration, and is the first study to explore experiences of Irish emigrants of minority ethnic backgrounds - including Irish Travellers, Black Irish, Asian Irish, Irish people of mixed ethnicity, and other minority ethnic groups.

The research offers a glimpse into the experiences of Irish emigrants of various ethnic backgrounds, before, during, and after their emigration from Ireland. This includes people who have since returned to Ireland. By capturing personal experiences, this research aims to expand the limited knowledge of this underrepresented, but growing, part of Ireland's diverse diaspora. It also strives to identify areas for future research and inform efforts to engage and support Irish people of minority ethnic backgrounds within the diaspora.

Introduction

Ireland has a long and consistent history of migration. The migratory flow of both Irish and non-Irish nationals into and out of Ireland varies. Since 2000, there have been significant changes in migration patterns to and from Ireland (Gilmartin, 2013). *Global Ireland, Ireland's Diaspora Strategy (2020 – 2025)*, states that Ireland will work with its diaspora to promote Irish values abroad and '**celebrate the diversity of our diaspora.**'

One of the key goals of *Ireland's Diaspora Strategy 2020-2025* is to '**Increase outreach to traditionally underrepresented groups such as Irish Travellers and Irish of mixed heritage among the diaspora.**' It is therefore important to identify and recognise the experiences of Irish citizens of minority ethnic backgrounds who are part of the Irish diaspora.

Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project's client work with returning emigrants, particularly those in crisis, and our previous research (CMP, 2017, 2018, 2019) along with academic literature, revealed a research and knowledge gap regarding representation among Irish emigrants from minority ethnic backgrounds and the unique experiences they may have.

This research aims to specifically examine the migration experiences of Irish citizens of minority ethnic backgrounds, including Irish Travellers, Black, Asian, and other ethnic minority groups, and those of mixed ethnic background. In this study migration experiences refers mainly to migration decisions and lived experience before, during, and after migration.

The research provides insights into the emigration experiences of Irish emigrants of various ethnic backgrounds who are currently living abroad or have recently returned from living abroad. The research findings expand on the current limited knowledge around this group, their migration motivations, and their experiences while abroad. Additionally, the research identifies areas for future research oriented toward advancing efforts to engage and support underrepresented groups within Ireland's diverse diaspora.

Methodology

BACKGROUND

The study is largely a phenomenological study as it attempts to generate knowledge about the ‘lived experience’ of Irish emigrants of minority ethnic backgrounds who have emigrated from Ireland, to understand and describe participants’ experiences. We employed the systematic methodology of grounded theory to collect and analyse data. The convenience sampling approach was deployed as the best approach to obtain data from a ‘hard to reach’ group who meet the specific criteria of Irish citizen, minority ethnic background, and experience of moving abroad. Participants were also based in various locations globally and may or may not be associated with any Irish groups or associations.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

A move from Ireland was a key inclusion criterion for participants. A move back to Ireland was also of interest (i.e. Ireland – abroad – Ireland). Migration experience includes pre-migration (before leaving Ireland), migration itself (the journey), post-migration (arrival and time spent in the destination country, and return to Ireland). The main inclusion criteria was that participants must be Irish citizens, proficient in the English language, and 18 years old or older. Irish emigrants from minority ethnic groups in this study refers to Irish citizens who identify as Irish and – Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, mixed heritage/ethnicity, naturalised Irish citizens and Travellers/Mincéirí.

SAMPLE AND ETHICS

For grounded theory, a sample size of 20 – 50 participants is suggested (Morse, 1994; Cresswell, 1998). The survey achieved a total of 40 qualifying participants through a convenience sample, recruiting participants in Ireland and abroad directly, and through representative organisations. In an attempt to address bias inherent in convenience sampling by defining the target population and sampling frame, attempts to use elements of probability sampling were employed, with the online survey designed to be as short and accessible as possible. The bias of online surveys towards more educated participants, those who have internet access, and are IT-literate must however be recognised.

This research is based on a quantitative survey which included both closed (e.g. tick-box) and open-ended (e.g. comment box) questions. Survey questions were adapted from the Household Survey and Jobsfair Survey in the Emigre report (Glynn et al, 2013).

Using SurveyMonkey, the survey was circulated online between 16th March to 9th August 2022:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/minorityethnicirishemigrants

Data was then collated and organised for analysis using SurveyMonkey.

As this research is not formally associated with any Higher Education Institution in Ireland, no formal ethical approval was sought, however a dedicated Steering Group advised on the development and ethical implications of the work.

Survey Results

RESPONSE RATE

There were a total of **83 responses** to the survey, which ran from 16th March to 9th August 2022. Of these, there were **21 complete responses** and a further **19 partial responses**. More than half of all responses (**43**) **were disqualified** for answering 'No' to Question 1 or 2 (see below), which resulted in the survey logic preventing them from continuing past Page 1 / Question 4.

Responses filtered by questions:

Question 1

Are you an Irish citizen of minority ethnic background (e.g. black, Asian, mixed ethnicity, Irish Traveller)?

- Of 83 respondents, **44 answered 'YES.'**
- However, **39 were disqualified for answering 'NO.'**

Question 2

Have you ever lived in Ireland?

- **76/83 answered 'YES.'**
- The **7 who answered 'No' were disqualified**, 4 of whom had already answered 'No' to Question 1.

As the primary objective of this research was to investigate the *'emigration experiences of Irish emigrants of various ethnic backgrounds who are currently living abroad or have recently returned from living abroad,'* and *'a move from Ireland (after spending significant time or time where Ireland was home)'* was a key inclusion criterion for participants, we discounted these 43 responses from our analysis.

On reviewing the 19 partial responses, we found that they offered useful insights. As they had answered ‘Yes’ to both Questions 1 and 2, we included these in our analysis although they had not completed the survey in full.

This number, added to the 21 complete responses, left a total of 40 responses for analysis. It must be noted that not all questions required a response, and respondents could choose which questions they responded to.

INITIAL FINDINGS

Of the 40 responses we reviewed, we found that 80% (32) of respondents were still living abroad, with just eight respondents indicating that had returned to Ireland in the last five years [Q3]. Of the respondents, 55% (22) had lived abroad for over 10 years, followed by 35% (14) who had lived abroad for up to five years [Q4, Q5].

The rest of the questions were not mandatory, and therefore participants could choose to skip questions if they so wished.

Before Leaving

The main reason given for leaving Ireland was to work (10), travel (5) or study (3), with 10 skipping the question [Q6]. A further 10 indicated ‘Other’ reasons including relationships and family both as push and pull factors, as well as ‘lack of Catholic education’ and ‘to get away from the hate’. More respondents (20) stated that they left Ireland because they ‘wanted to’, with a further 10 stating they left Ireland because they ‘had to’ [Q7].

The majority of respondents were either working full-time (15) or were students (9) before they left [Q8]. Two indicated that they left as minors, but most left between age 18 and 24 (15). None were over age 44 when they left [Q9]. Most had completed a university degree (10), further education (6) or a master's (2) prior to leaving Ireland. Three had only completed primary school, and six had just completed secondary school [Q10].

16 left Ireland alone and 8 with family). Four left with a friend [Q11]. 11 said they did not know people in the place they moved to [Q12].

Post-Arrival Experience

On a scale of one to five, respondents were on average more satisfied with life after they left (3.6 weighted average) Ireland than before (2.9 weighted average) [Q13, Q14]. More (20) moved to traditional destinations for Irish emigrants (11 UK, 5 Australia, 3 USA, and 1 Canada). Four went to non-traditional destinations (1 South Africa, 1 Czech Republic, 1 Mexico, and 1 Japan) [Q15].

While living abroad, 21 were employed either full or part-time. One was a student, another was unemployed, and two stated they spent periods of time working and either 'holidaying loads' or studying [Q16]. Seven stated their job was organised before their arrival, six stated it took them less than a month to find work, and five stated it took them less than a week to find work [Q17].

Most who reported being employed (17) did not receive help from their contacts to find a job abroad. Of the five who indicated that their contacts helped them to find a job abroad, one stated that they transferred abroad with their Irish employer, two were assisted by Irish people they met in the country they moved to, and a further two received assistance from family and friends in Ireland (1) and abroad (1) [Q18].

Those who moved outside the EU stated that they had a working holiday visa (6), a fixed term visa (3), permanent residence (3), and a fiancé visa (1) [Q19]. Of the seven respondents who made changes to their immigration permission whilst abroad [Q20], four gave further details [Q21] confirming that they ‘became a citizen’, ‘got married’, ‘changed from a working visa to a student visa’, or renewed their work visa before gaining permanent residency.

11 respondents stated that they had lived in multiple countries, in addition to Ireland and the country they initially moved to [Q22], including one person who had lived in 5 countries, three people who lived in 3 countries, and two people who lived in two countries [Q23].

When asked about their social activities, 22 respondents gave further details [Q24] –

- 14 stated that they never or rarely participated in organised Irish community activities such as Irish sport, music, and culture. Six said they did so sometimes, and two said they did so very often.
- Nine stated that they never or rarely participated in organised community activities which were not specifically Irish. Seven stated that they did so sometimes, six reported they did so often or very often, and three said they did so rarely.

- 12 shared that they socialised with people of similar ethnic background either often or very often. Seven said they did so sometimes, and three said they did so rarely.
- Eight stated that they often or very often socialised with Irish people. An equal number (8) said they did so rarely or not at all, and six said they did so sometimes.
- 15 stated that they socialised with people from the country they moved to, with a further five saying they did so sometimes. Three said they did so rarely or not at all.
- 13 stated that they often or very often socialised with non-Irish immigrants. Seven said they did so rarely or not at all. Two said they did so sometimes.
- 13 stated they kept in contact with friends in Ireland. Seven said they did so rarely or not at all, and two said they did so sometimes.
- 16 stated that they were often or very often in contact with family in Ireland as opposed to four who stated that they were never or rarely in contact.

More respondents (18) reported having family connections or other associations with the country they moved to, than not (4) [Q25]. Of those who specified the nature of those connections [Q26], four mentioned cousins, three mentioned siblings, two mentioned parent's siblings (aunts/uncles), and two mentioned their partner or spouse. Other family connections mentioned included children, grandchildren, and extended family.

When asked if they had any **negative experiences because of their ethnicity while living abroad**, thirteen said no and nine said yes [Q27]. Of the nine who answered yes:

- All but one were still living abroad [Q3]
- Five had been living abroad for over 20 years [Q4]
- Four said they left Ireland because they had to [Q7]
- Seven were between the ages of 18 to 24 when they left Ireland [Q9]
- Five left Ireland alone [Q11]

- Five had contacts in the country they moved to (including immediate and extended family, and friends) [Q12]
- Overall they were slightly more satisfied abroad than in Ireland (weighted average of 3.89 versus 3) [Q13 & Q14]
- Five emigrated to the UK [Q15]
- Four emigrated more than once [Q22]
- All had family connections or other associations with the country they moved to [Q25]
- All said that they returned to Ireland at least once every five years prior to the pandemic, with five stating that they returned several times a year [Q29]
- Only one planned to return to live in Ireland in the next five years [Q30]
- Five identified as female, four identified as male [Q31]
- Three described their ethnic identity as 'Irish', with the other six describing themselves individually as 'Irish/Caribbean,' 'Caucasian,' 'Celtic,' 'Irish Traveller,' 'Black,' and/or 'Mixed Race' [Q32]
- Seven were born in Ireland, one was born in Northern Ireland, and one was born in England [Q33]
- Three had dual citizenship [Q34]

Of those who said they had negative experiences abroad, eight gave further details [Q28] as follows:

Was called half breed. Told "you don't look Irish"

Sectarianism and anti-Irish racism

When looking for a place to live a landlord hung up on me when I confirmed I was Irish

UK 94/97 saw a lot of animosity towards Irish because of the IRA and I was subject to quite a bit of comment

In the beginning, travelling with British people, there was always a 'look down on the Irish' vibe

Irish bars here recognize me as a Traveller sometimes and refuse me access, I used to often go into an Irish pub near me and they had no problem when they didn't know I was a Traveller, my mother visited from Ireland and I took her to that bar and we were refused, told we couldn't come in. I get called dirty pikey, it's not nice, sometimes I feel there can be more discrimination from Irish people here than other people, they recognise me as a Traveller quicker.

I lived in the USA for many years so use your imagination on how Blacks are treated there!

I'm mixed (white Irish and Indian) and have sometimes not felt welcome in South Asian spaces, due to the fact I'm mixed and because I am culturally more Irish than I am Indian

The Question of Return

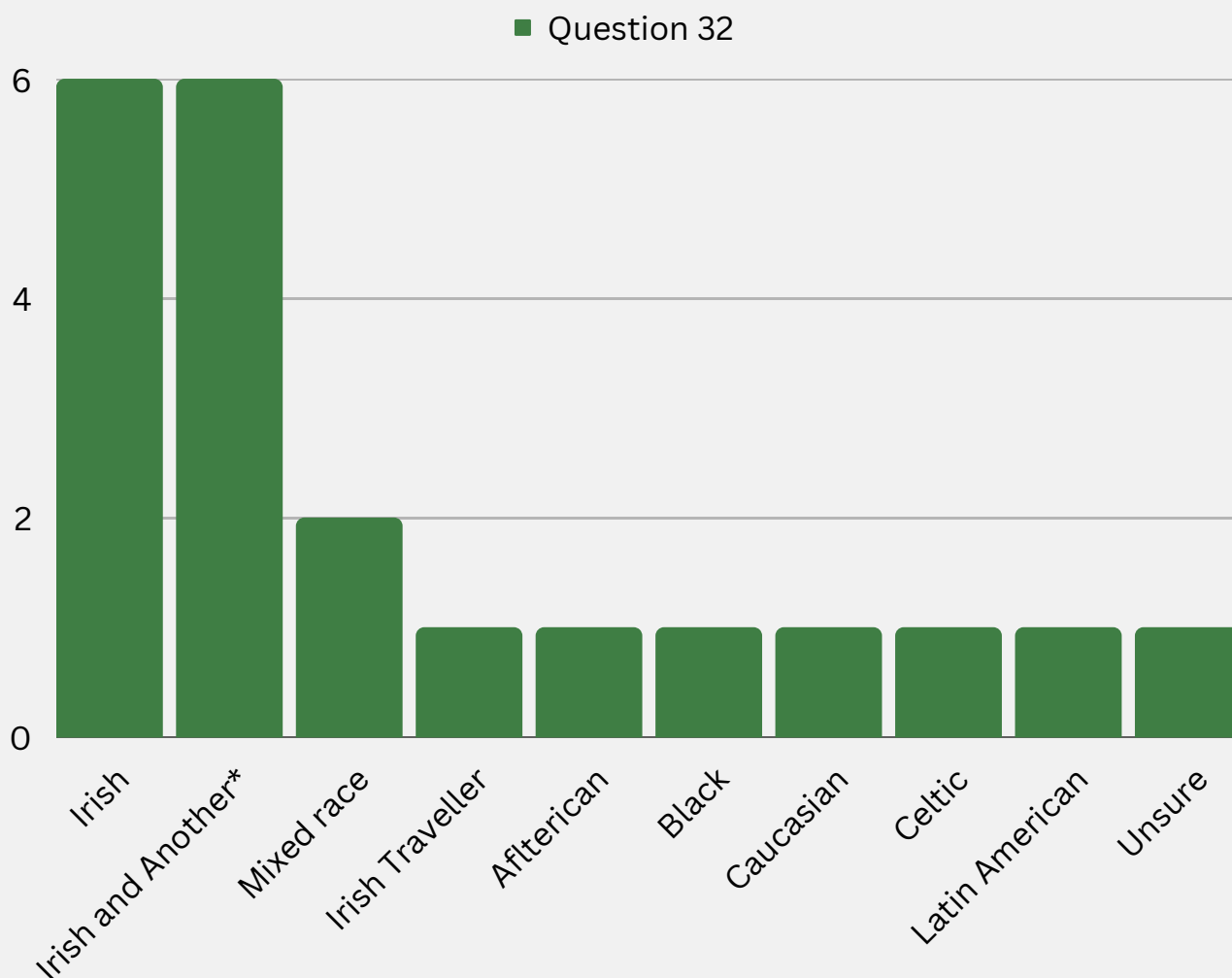
When asked how often they returned to Ireland prior to the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, just one respondent reported never returning. Most (10) said they returned several times a year, with a further six stating they returned once every five years. Three stated that they returned every two or three years, and two stated that they returned once a year [Q29].

More respondents (9) stated that they intended to continue living abroad than those who said they would be returning to Ireland (4) within 1 to 5 years. Migration to another country was mentioned by another, and two others had already returned to Ireland. A further six stated they did not yet have plans for this period [Q30].

Background and Identity

12 respondents indicated that they identified as female, nine indicated they identified as male, and one indicated they identified as non-binary [Q31]. Two of the respondents who identified as male elaborated further, with one stating they are an *'Irish Lebanese gay man with a Muslim background large family with too many opinions'* and the other stating that they are an *'Afro Irish Black Male.'*

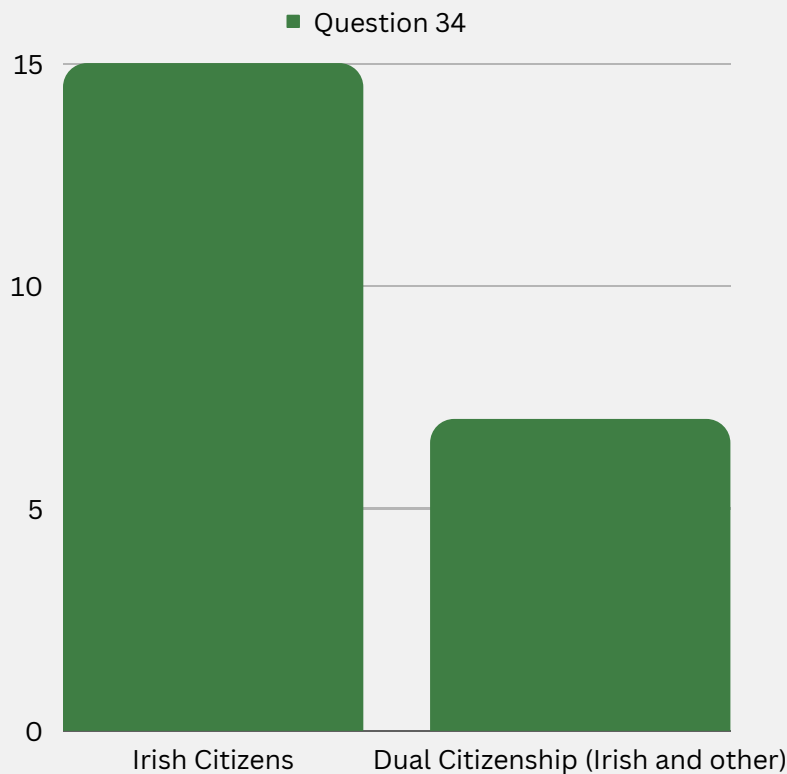
In **describing their ethnic identity** [Q32], thirteen mentioned 'Irish' and five mentioned 'Mixed'* in their free text responses. The 21 responses were as follows:



INCLUDING: 'IRISH/EGYPTIAN,' 'IRISH/CARIBBEAN,' 'IRISH AND JAMAICAN,' 'IRISH OF MIXED NIGERIA ANCESTRY,' 'MIXED IRISH AND SOUTH ASIAN,'* AND 'MIXED IRISH & ASIAN (THAI).'

In response to the question of where they were born [Q33], most (10) said they were born in Ireland with four born in Dublin, two born in Cork, one born in Mayo, one born in Galway, and one born in Tipperary. Of the four respondents who were born in England, three were born in London and one in Southampton. Two respondents specified that they were born in Northern Ireland, including one who stated that Belfast as their place of birth. Other birth places included Lebanon (1), Mexico (1), Nigeria (1), and Netherlands (1).

15 respondents said they were citizens [Q34], and an additional seven said they had dual citizenship of Ireland and Nigeria (1), British Guyana (1), Holland (1), Mexico (1), the UK (1), Australia (1), USA and a third unspecified nationality (1).



In terms of respondents' ages, more (13) were over the age of 35 (5 were 45 to 54, four were 55 to 64, 3 were 35 to 44, one was over 65). Another eight indicated that they were between the ages of 25 to 34 [Q35]. Just one was 18 to 24.

Survey and Contact Details

A number of respondents made additional comments that were not captured elsewhere in the survey [Q38], including –

To be honest, I find mixed race Irish day offensive. I realize the good intent behind this

Born in London, moved to Ireland as a child. Growing up in Galway as a brown person was extremely difficult. I love being in London because it's so diverse and I don't experience racism like I do at home

*Whether participants left Ireland as a result of their ethnicity or racism
Though I would like to return to Ireland due to majority of family being there,
it would be impossible for my 3 children to settle due to their varying
disabilities and that Ireland doesn't have as good resources for them that I
took years to setup and advocate for them in Australia*

I would like more support for Irish Travellers living abroad

Though I am very very proud to be Irish and from Ireland, I experienced far more virulent racism growing up there than I ever experienced after I had left.

Eleven respondents left their contact details and confirmed they would be willing to discuss their experiences in more detail [Q37].

Findings

CHALLENGES ENCOUNTERED IN RESEARCH

Whilst the research achieved the suggested sample size for grounded theory (20 – 50 participants) as detailed in the methodology, the **survey response rate was low**. This was despite having the survey live for almost five months, sharing it via targeted email to varied Diaspora and minority ethnic groups and networks in both Ireland and around the world, and promoting it on online via website, newsletter, and social media channels. As a result, the survey findings are not representative or indicative of broader trends in Irish migration.

In addition to the challenge of recruitment, **difficulties were encountered in securing responses from intended target group** of Irish citizens of minority ethnic background. This was best illustrated by the number of respondents who indicated that they were either not Irish citizens of minority ethnic background, or that they had never lived in Ireland. This raises the **general question of how Irish people abroad see themselves in relation to citizens of the country they reside i.e. as a member of a minority group**.

Though it was possible to publish a large scale report which we had initially intended to produce, we believe that this area would **benefit from further, academic-led research**. To this end, the findings of this report will offer useful lessons and information for others conducting future research into this area. In particular, the narrative sections of the survey provide key insights into the experiences of Irish emigrants of minority ethnic background, and identify key areas for further investigation as detailed in the ensuing pages.

KEY FINDINGS

HARD TO REACH

- Irish citizens of minority ethnic background are extremely diverse and those living in or formerly living in the diaspora can be hard to reach. As a result, engagement with these constituencies require extensive and multifaceted approaches.

IDENTITY

- Efforts to reach out and engage Irish citizens of minority ethnic background within the diaspora can be complicated by the fact that many Irish citizens abroad view themselves as a minority ethnic group in their country of residence.
- There is a high level of variance in the terms people use to describe their ethnicity. How a person self-identifies is also extremely personal. Efforts to engage must therefore be sensitive to these factors - for instance the term 'mixed race' may be viewed as offensive by some.
- How a person views their own ethnicity may differ from the main culture with which they identify, or indeed their nationality. An example of this was best articulated by a respondent who stated, *'I'm mixed (white Irish and Indian) and have sometimes not felt welcome in South Asian spaces, due to the fact I'm mixed and because I am culturally more Irish than I am Indian.'*

CONNECTIONS

- Irish emigrants of minority ethnic background may be more likely to socialise with people from the country they moved to, as well as non-Irish immigrants and people of similar ethnic backgrounds, than with other Irish emigrants. This raises a question with regards to engagement within Irish diaspora focused spaces—including cultural, social, sporting, and welfare supports.

RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

- Irish citizens of minority ethnic backgrounds reported encountering racism and discrimination abroad both as a result of their Irish nationality as well as their ethnicity.
- Experiencing racism and discrimination in Ireland was a motivating factor for leaving Ireland for some.
- Irish Travellers in the diaspora can experience discrimination, including from fellow Irish citizens living abroad.

Conclusion

As the first report to explore the emigration experiences of Irish citizens of minority ethnic background, this research presents unique insights, albeit from a small sample.

The report's key findings hint at the very diverse Irish citizens of minority ethnic origin living in the diaspora. These findings also raise the general question of how Irish people in the diaspora view their identity in the context of migration and local populations in destination countries. Indeed how individuals view their own ethnic identity is extremely personal, and may differ from the culture they most closely identify with.

Though further research into this area is required, this research indicates that some Irish people of minority ethnic background may be less likely to engage with other Irish emigrants. Fostering engagement therefore requires creative solutions and multifaceted approaches to connect outside of traditional 'Irish diaspora' networks.

Negative experiences relating to racist attitudes and anti-Irish sentiments may be experienced abroad. In some cases, negative experiences in Ireland can contribute to individual's decisions to emigrate from Ireland. Additionally, in some instances Irish emigrants of minority ethnic backgrounds may experience discrimination from fellow Irish emigrants.

Overall, the findings suggest that there is scope for further investigation into this area. This may be best suited to a larger scale study, possibly following in the footsteps University College Cork's seminal Emigre report (Glynn et al, 2013). Exploring the experiences of a cohort of respondents over a number of years would help to capture the length and breadth of emigration experiences amongst Irish citizens of minority ethnic backgrounds.

Challenges encountered in engagement would need to be considered and addressed in any future research efforts; however, it is apparent that Irish emigrants of minority ethnic origin would benefit from enhanced engagement as well as efforts to proactively promote access to Irish social, cultural, sporting and welfare supports available to the diaspora.

References

- Bazeley, P. (2009). Analysing qualitative data: More than 'identifying themes'. *Malaysian Journal of Qualitative Research*, 2(2), 6-22.
- Central Statistics Office (CSO) Population and Migration Estimates (April 2022) www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2022/
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Crosscare Migrant Project (2017). *Home for Good? A report on the experiences of recently returned Irish emigrants*.
- Crosscare Migrant Project (2018). *A Hundred Thousand Welcomes? Habitual Residence and access to social welfare for returned Irish emigrants*
- Crosscare Migrant Project (2019). *Coming Home in Crisis – Experiences of Irish emigrants returning in crisis situations*.
- de Haas, H. (2021). A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework. *Comparative Migration Studies* 9, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40878-020-00210-4>
- Gilmartin, M. (2013). Changing Ireland, 2000–2012: immigration, emigration and inequality. *Irish Geography*, 46(1-2), 91-111.
- Global Ireland - Ireland's diaspora strategy 2020 – 2025. Government of Ireland
- Global Irish, Ireland's Diaspora Policy, 2015. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.
- Glynn, I., Kelly, T., & MacÉinrí, P. (2013). *Irish emigration in an age of austerity*. Cork: Department of Geography & Institute for the Social Sciences in the 21st Century, University College Cork.
- Hickman, M. J. (2002). 'Locating' the Irish diaspora. *Irish Journal of Sociology*, 11(2), 8-26.
- Morse, J. M. (1994). *Designing funded qualitative research*.
- Paerregaard, K. (2010). *Peruvians dispersed: a global ethnography of migration*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Ryan, L (2015). "Inside" and "Outside" of What or Where? Researching Migration Through Multi-Positionalities. *Forum Qualitative Social Research*, 16(2), Art. 17
- Thomas, M., Gillespie, B., & Lomax, N. (2019) Variations in Migration Motives over Distance. *Demographic Research*, 40 (38), 1097-1110 https://www.researchgate.net/publication/332589913_Variations_in_Migration_Motives_over_Distance

Thank You



This report was made possible by generous funding from the Government of Ireland's Emigrant Support Programme and our parent body, Crosscare.



Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project
2 St. Mary's Pl N, Dublin 7, D07 Y768
+353 (0)1 873 2844
irishdiasporasupport@crosscare.ie
