

# Migration and Fertility. Polish Migrant Families in Ireland and Non-Migrant Families in Poland: A Comparison of Fertility Plans and Behaviour

Łukasz Klimek\*

*This study analyses and compares the fertility behaviour and childbearing plans of Polish migrant families in Ireland and those of their counterparts – families in Poland. The study has a comparative and explanatory character and applies both quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis is based on the author's own data collected from an online survey of Polish family units in Ireland in 2014 and compared with secondary data on families in Poland retrieved from the 2011 Gender and Generation Survey (GGS). My research reveals fertility postponement and fewer families with children among migrant families; nonetheless, migrant parents have more children than their counterparts in Poland. The results highlight the significance of socio-economic and institutional contexts. The study also reveals a dichotomisation of fertility strategies within the migrant population, with distinct differences in the number of children, transition age to parenthood, and further fertility intentions between migrants who became parents in Poland and those who did so after the move. The results also provide insights into the childbearing motivations and fertility patterns of recent Polish migrants and contribute to the discussion of migrants' fertility in general.*

*Keywords: Polish migration; family migration; fertility; migrant fertility; childbearing plans*

## Introduction

A move from one society to another is usually accompanied by a rapid change of socio-economic and cultural context and may introduce many modifications in migrants' life, including changes in fertility behaviour and childbearing strategies (Glusker 2003). Migrants' fertility behaviour and plans usually differ from those of the main population in the receiving society and, at times, also from those in the sending society (Kulu 2005). In the majority of studies, the population in the destination country constitutes the main comparison group when

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\* University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Poland. Address for correspondence: luke.klimek@gmail.com.

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analysing migrants' fertility patterns. Nonetheless, in this paper I apply a different perspective and compare the fertility patterns of migrants with those of non-migrants ('stayers') in the country of origin. Such an approach may provide a useful framework in which to understand the role of different socio-economic and institutional contexts on fertility behaviour and childbearing motivations. The main aim of this paper is therefore to compare the fertility patterns of Polish migrant families in Ireland and non-migrants in Poland and, consequently, to explore mechanisms of macro-structural settings which could possibly influence these patterns. The study contributes to the debate on family behavioural changes in post-modern societies and to research on Polish post-accession migration within the European Union, and may also be informative for family policy-makers.

The article starts with a presentation of Polish migration to Ireland and the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. In addition, I include contextual information about fertility patterns in the main Polish and Irish populations. I then present a short review of selected theories of migrant fertility, followed by a description of the research methods I applied in my study. The central sections contain the quantitative results of an online survey enhanced by insights from my in-depth interviews. I conclude with a discussion of the relevant findings.

### **Polish population in Ireland**

For centuries, Ireland was a country of entrenched emigration. However, in the mid-1990s the state, for the very first time in its modern history, turned from being a traditional emigration country to being one of immigration (Loyal 2011). Since then, immigration has become one of the most important economic, social and cultural issue faced by the Irish state and society (Immigrant Council of Ireland 2005). Referring to the 2016 census, the Irish population stands at approximately 4.7 million people – the highest number since the pre-famine years of the mid-nineteenth century. It is estimated that two-thirds of the recent population growth was fuelled by immigration. Over a 25-year period, the population of foreign-born people living in Ireland rose from 6 per cent in 1991 to over 17.3 per cent in 2011 – with 810 406 residents born outside the country (CSO Ireland 2012).

Polish migrants make up the largest non-Irish group there, with a total number of 122 515 people (CSO Ireland 2012), the overwhelming majority of whom arrived in the country after May 2004, when Poland joined the European Union. The Polish population in Ireland can be characterised as largely young, well-educated and gender-balanced. These characteristics are found to be common descriptions in various studies on Polish post-accession migrants to other EU states (Jończy 2009; Kaczmarczyk 2014; Salt and Okólski 2014). The age distribution of Poles in Ireland represents a typical structure found in countries where labour migration is the dominant form of migrant influx, with an over-representation of people in the productive age range – nearly every second Pole there is aged between 25 and 34 years old. The second-largest age group is children aged 0 to 14, followed by adults aged 35 to 44 – making these groups total 18.1 and 14.6 per cent of the population respectively. The proportion of men and women in the population – is almost equal, with 51.7 and 48.3 per cent of males and females respectively. In terms of educational background, one in three Poles has some kind of tertiary-level education, followed by 37 per cent with an upper-secondary qualification (holding the *matura* – the equivalent of the Irish leaving certificate). In terms of employment status, nearly seven out of ten Polish migrants aged over 15 were employed (CSO Ireland 2011). Despite their relatively high level of education, Poles tend to occupy low-paid employment, often in the hospitality, retail or construction sectors (Krings *et al.* 2012).

Polish post-accession migration within the EU, including the flows to Ireland, is typically viewed as economically motivated (Kaczmarczyk 2014; Radiukiewicz, Bieliński and Larkowska 2006). Nonetheless, a closer analysis of migrants' history and migratory motivations suggests that many of these moves could also

be classified as family-related, a category which includes family reunification, intact family relocation and marriage migration. Furthermore, the family-formation phenomenon has recently emerged on a large scale among Poles in Ireland. The 2011 census in Ireland showed a 20 percentage point increase in families with children over the 2006–2011 period, significantly changing the age structure of the population – the proportion of those aged under 20 more than doubled from 9.9 per cent in 2006 to 21.2 per cent in 2011. This increase is due, firstly, to the large number (8 928) of Polish children born there in that period (CSO Ireland 2012) and, secondly, to the family reunification process in which migrant individuals, after an initial stay abroad, brought the rest of their family members over to join them in Ireland.

The family-formation phenomenon recently observed among Poles in Ireland and in other new EU destination countries, could be explained in terms of migrants' demographic characteristics and natural life-course transitions. The majority of Poles who emigrated from Poland after 2004, including those going to Ireland, were in their 20s and were often single and with no children (Jończy 2009). Ten years later, at the time of this study, many have either started a family or are expected to do so in the next few years. The family-formation process and the transition to parenthood provokes the question of whether or not their fertility behaviour will differ from that observed in those who remained in Poland. This interest has led to my study and has become its main research question.

### **Fertility in Ireland and Poland**

Ireland has often been associated with 'traditional', multigenerational and large families. Nonetheless, this assumption, which was partly relevant until the 1970s (Hannan and Katsiaouni 1977; Humphreys 1966), has been superseded and today's Irish family has standardised around a norm of two or three children per family. An analysis by Lunn, Fahey and Hannan (2009) of national statistics on family structures between 1986 and 2006 reveals a mixture of stability and change. While a 'standard' path of family formation – composed of sequential transitions from singlehood to marriage and then to parenthood – remained as the dominant pattern of life-course events, the number of very large families, three-generational households or households comprised of adult unmarried siblings drastically declined. The Irish family, similarly to other European societies (Sobotka and Toulemon 2008), is now moving promptly beyond the traditional model, with new forms of diversity in family life – such as single parenthood, births outside marriage, couple cohabitation or same-sex couples – becoming more common there (Lunn and Fahey 2011; Lunn *et al.* 2009). Most importantly, however, researchers report an increasing number of Irish nationals delaying union formation and childbearing, a fact which contributes to the large decline in marriages and birth rates observed since the 1980s.

Irish census data show that, in recent decades, the total fertility rate (TFR) decreased rapidly from 3.21 at the beginning of the 1980s to 2.11 at the start of the 1990s. Since then, it has oscillated around the replacement fertility rate of 2.1. Despite the drop, Ireland still remains one of the EU countries with the highest fertility rates (OECD 2016). Irish public health service figures for 2013 show that the average Irish woman gives birth to 2.06 children over her childbearing period. The birth rate in the country stood at 16 children per 1 000 population (Healthcare Pricing Office 2014). In Poland, in comparison, the fertility and birth rates are considerably lower.

Poland, like Ireland and other European countries, has been experiencing changes in family behaviour, including a delay in union formation, a decrease in the fertility rate and fertility postponement (Philipov 2002; Sobotka and Toulemon 2008). For instance, the total fertility rate (TFR) dropped from 2.07 in 1989 to 1.4 in 2005 and has remained at this level ever since. In 2012, it stood at 1.3 children born to the average woman, with a birth rate of 10 children per 1 000 population (CSO Poland 2014). Consequently, over the course of three decades, Poland moved from the group of high-fertility countries to that of countries with the lowest

fertility rates. This situation is, firstly, a consequence of the decrease in the number of births among the post-war baby-boom generation – who were no longer in the most fertile age range after 1983 – and, secondly, due to the very complex economic and socio-cultural changes which followed the 1989 political transformation in Poland (Kotowska, Józwiak, Matysiak and Baranowska 2008: 800).

The second most important change in family behaviour observed among many European countries, including Poland and Ireland (CSO Poland 2014; Healthcare Pricing Office 2014) is fertility postponement. In 2013, the average age of first-time mothers in Poland was 27. Nearly two decades earlier, in 1995, the mean age at first childbirth was 22.5 (Stańczak, Stelmach and Urbanowicz 2016). Nonetheless, despite the continuous pattern of increase in age for first-time mothers in Poland, these women are still among the youngest mothers in the EU (OECD 2016). In comparison, in Ireland in 2013, the average age of a first-time mother was 30.3, up from 27 years of age in 1995 (CSO Ireland 1999).

Acknowledging the two national settings and the different fertility behaviours there, I now raise the question of whether migrants' fertility behaviour and plans reflect the patterns of those in their home country, or whether the migration context establishes a specific fertility pattern among newcomers. Similar questions have been asked on many different occasions and in various national frameworks. As a result, there are several theoretical perspectives and models addressing this problem, some of which are presented in the following part of the paper.

### **Theories on migrant fertility: the effect of migration on childbearing**

There are various theories concerning migrants' fertility behaviour – all of which broadly refer either to pre- or post-migratory factors. I focus on four widely recognised perspectives: selection, socialisation, adaptation and disruptive.

The *selection perspective* assumes that migration is a selective process whereby only a specific subset of a population migrates. Migrants are usually self-selected and thus represent a non-random sample against the main population of the sending country. Migrants differ from non-migrants in respect of their demographic and socio-economic characteristics such as age, gender, level of education, life-course events, marital status, employment status and housing situation. Subsequently, the differences in migrants' characteristics may translate into their fertility behaviour and intentions (Kulu 2005). The selectivity hypothesis implies that migrants will usually have smaller families compared to non-migrant families in the country of origin (Majelantle and Navaneetham 2013).

The *socialisation perspective*, like the selection perspective, refers to the society of origin and the pre-migratory factors that may influence the fertility patterns of migrants. It suggests that migrants' childbearing and procreation plans reflect the fertility behaviour and attitudes towards it internalised during childhood socialisation (Kulu and Milewski 2008). The desired number of children, therefore, is influenced by family model in which individuals were brought up and, additionally, through the cultural norms and values associated with family structure and organisation in the home country. The socialisation model assumes that the norms and preferences with regards to fertility remain quite stable over the lifecycle. Following this line of reasoning, no significant differences should be observed between the fertility behaviour and childbearing intentions of migrants compared to those who remained in the country of origin.

The next perspective the *adaptation model* – in contrast to the selection and socialisation approaches – refers to post-migratory factors and emphasises migrants' adaptation processes in the destination country. The model assumes that migrants adapt to the dominant fertility behaviour of non-migrants in the receiving society and that, sooner or later, their fertility level will begin to resemble that of the host-society population

– an adjustment process which does not usually require an entire generation to pass (Kulu and Milewski 2008; Majelantle and Navaneetham 2013).

The *disruptive perspective*, like the adaptation model, refers to post-migratory factors and suggests that migration disrupts fertility and leads to its reduction or postponement (Kulu 2005). Fertility-disruptive factors are primarily associated with the initial adaptation process of migrants to new socio-economic and cultural contexts in the host country. Commonly, the low fertility level is observed among migrants immediately following their move. The disruptive hypothesis assumes that the low fertility of migrants is only temporary and that the initial interrupted childbearing is followed by a phase of increased fertility in which migrants try to ‘catch up’ with their original and postponed fertility plans (Milewski 2010).

Commonly, migrant fertility is seen as an indicator of assimilation, adaptation or integration processes. Acknowledging the fact that I compare migrants’ fertility patterns to those of their compatriots who remained in the home country, and not to those of the native population in the host society, I refer to a notion of ‘home dissimilation’. Baykara-Krumme and Milewski (2017) define it as the process of adopting behaviour that differs from that prevalent in the home context. I assume that the change of socio-economic and institutional context resulting from migration impacts on the fertility and childbearing plans of Polish migrants in Ireland. In my explorations, I investigate two mechanisms that may have some effect on migrant fertility patterns. The first one refers to the selectivity and disruption approaches and assumes that childbearing is postponed among migrant women, due to which there are fewer families with children among migrants or they are smaller than among stayers. The second mechanism refers to socialisation theory and assumes that the number of children born to and planned by migrants does not differ to that of families in Poland.

## Method

The main research question is whether or not there are differences between the fertility behaviour and childbearing intentions of Polish migrant families in Ireland and those of families in Poland. To address this problem, a comparative study was designed and carried out within two sample groups, the primary one of which was composed of representatives of Polish migrant families in Ireland, and the second – the comparative sample – made up of those of non-migrant families (‘stayers’) in Poland. It is important to note that the term ‘migrant families’ in this paper always refers to Polish migrant families in Ireland, whereas the term ‘non-migrant family’ or ‘stayers’ refers to the comparative sample in Poland. A sequential quantitative and qualitative mixed-methods strategy (Ivankova, Cresswell and Stick 2006) was applied to collect data in both countries, through an online survey as the first step, followed by semi-structured in-depth interviews.

The quantitative part of study was based on two data sources: the primary data on migrant families were collected through an online survey in the first quarter of 2014, while data on stayers were extracted from the first wave of the Gender and Generation Survey (GGS) carried out in Poland in 2011. The online survey carried out in Ireland was partly based on questions from the GGS, which facilitated a comparative analysis of answers from respondents in both countries.

Taking into account the selectiveness of the migration process (Chiswick 1999) it was important to identify the study samples in Poland and Ireland in order to ensure that they closely resemble the entire population of Polish migrants in Ireland. Thus, to minimise sampling bias, I applied a strata sampling procedure based on information on the Polish population derived from the 2011 Irish census.

Three independent variables were chosen to identify the various types of migrant family in Ireland and to build strata reference matrix, namely having children, marital status and family life-course stage. The combination of the first two variables allowed identification of five types of migrant family: (1) marriages with children; (2) childless marriages, (3) cohabitating couples with children; (4) childless cohabitating couples;

and (5) single parents. Additionally, referring to the third independent variable – family life-course stage – families with children were further categorised into five age groups, based on the age of the eldest child in the family unit: 0–4 years, 5–9 years, 10–14 years, 15–19 years and 20+ years.

Once the independent variables had been selected, a share/stratum of each specified family type in the entire Polish population in Ireland was established based on data from 2011 Irish census. The strata served as the reference points by which to choose the study sample in Ireland and the comparative sample of stayers in Poland (Table 1). Respondents in both countries were randomly selected within each stratum and only those in reproductive age range (18 to 49 years) were included in the final samples.

**Table 1. Types of family unit in the Polish population in Ireland and in the study samples**

Type of family unit	Age group of the eldest child in years	Polish population in Ireland		Sample in Ireland		Sample in Poland	
		n	%	n	%	n	%
Husband and wife without children		6 616	17.7	43	14.5	40	4.1
Cohabiting couple without children		7 128	19.1	67	22.6	185	19.1
Husband and wife with children	0–4	7 315	19.6	57	19.4	212	21.9
	5–9	3 834	10.3	30	10.1	113	11.7
	10–14	2 620	7.0	19	6.3	86	8.9
	15–19	1 769	4.7	14	4.7	63	6.5
	20+	844	2.3	9	3.0	45	4.6
	Total	16 382	43.9	129	43.6	520	53.6
Cohabiting couple with children	0–4	2 727	7.3	22	7.3	80	8.2
	5–9	649	1.7	5	1.7	24	2.5
	10–14	371	1.0	3	1.0	16	1.7
	15–19	238	0.6	2	0.7	10	1.0
	20+	77	0.2	1	0.3	6	0.6
	Total	4 062	10.9	33	11.1	136	14.0
Single parents	0–4	883	2.4	9	3.0	25	2.6
	5–9	618	1.7	3	1.0	18	1.9
	10–14	567	1.5	6	2.0	16	1.7
	15–19	546	1.5	1	0.3	15	1.5
	20+	503	1.3	6	2.0	15	1.5
	Total	3 117	8.4	24	8.1	89	9.2
Total family units		37 305	100.0	296	100.0	970	100.0

Source: Author's calculation based on 2011 census data received from CSO Ireland.

The final sample of migrant families was composed of 296 family units (selected from 560 completed questionnaires) and 970 non-migrant family units – chosen from a pool of more than 24 000 GGS respondents in Poland. The basic socio-demographic characteristics of my study participants are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of study participants in two samples**

Variable	Ireland n=296		Poland n=970	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Age of female in a couple	31.70	5.42	34.31	8.09
Age of male in a couple	33.97	5.85	31.74	7.21
Full-time employment for males (1=yes)	.81	.40	0.83	.37
Full-time employment for females (1=yes)	.53	.50	0.49	.50
Any employment for women (1=yes)	.70	.46	0.57	.49
Dual-earner households (1=yes)	.65	.48	0.52	.50
Tertiary-level education for female (1=yes)	.46	.49	.39	.49
Tertiary-level education for male (1=yes)	.32	.46	.29	.46

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

The quantitative analysis of fertility behaviour and childbearing intentions was enriched by the qualitative input from 40 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with family members, carried out in the two countries between 2014 and 2015. The interviewees in Ireland were selected from the pool of survey respondents who had agreed to take part in the qualitative part of the study, whereas my informants in Poland were recruited mainly through social media websites and via the personal networks of the interviewers. Like the survey respondents, the interviewees in both countries were of reproductive age and represented the five types of family mentioned earlier. Interviewees varied in terms of their educational level – from lower-secondary to postgraduate – and of their principal economic status – ranging from postgraduate students to stay-at-home parents to full-time employees.

### Study results

This part of the paper presents my findings from the survey and focuses on two key themes: *fertility behaviour* and *fertility intentions*. In demography, *fertility behaviour* is defined as the observed fertility and the observed birth calendar in a population (Okólski and Fihel 2012). Observed fertility is commonly measured by two parameters: (1) the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which is the average number of all children born to a woman over her procreation period (in Poland and Ireland, defined between 15 and 49 years of age) and (2) the Birth Rate or Crude Birth Rate (CRB) – the number of live births per 1 000 heads of population in a given year. The birth calendar is considered as the distribution of births over the lifetime of a woman and is usually measured by the average age of first-time mothers as well as the time between a woman's first and any subsequent births. *Fertility intentions* are defined as the preferred number of children and the preferred birth calendar – in other words, the number of children that a person or a couple plan to have during their lifetime, born within the ideal timeframe.

In this study, fertility behaviour was measured with the use of three parameters: (1) total fertility rate (TFR), (2) the number of children in a family unit and (3) the woman's mean age at first childbirth (MAC). Then, the childbearing plans were measured by the intended number of children. The plans were further explored by identifying several of the most important factors affecting these plans.

*Fertility behaviour*

It is important to note that the fertility behaviour of migrant women who transited to motherhood prior to migration was certainly affected by circumstances in Poland. Therefore, in order to answer the research question, the main focus is on the fertility behaviour of those who became parents *after* the move. Nonetheless, I also present the fertility parameters for those who had children *before* the move, as analysis of the data discloses significant differences in fertility behaviour between these sub-populations, suggesting a dichotomisation of fertility patterns. The fertility parameters for migrant and non-migrant mothers are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3. Fertility behaviour parameters for migrant and non-migrant women**

		<i>P value</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
<b>Total Fertility Rate</b>					
	Non-migrant families			1.19	.98
	Migrant families	$p < .05$		1.03	.94
<b>Mean number of children for mothers</b>					
	Non-migrant mothers		726	1.55	.77
	Migrant mothers	$p < .05$	185	1.62	.74
	Became mothers in Ireland		106	1.41	.58
	Became mothers in Poland	$p < .001$	79	1.90	.82
	Have more children after the move		25	2.48	.71
	Have no more children after the move	$p < .001$	54	1.65	.73
<b>Mean age at first childbirth</b>					
<i>Gr. A</i>	Non-migrant mothers	$p_{AB1} < .001$	726	25.1	4.7
<i>Gr. B</i>	Migrant mothers		179	25.3	4.5
<i>Gr. B1</i>	Became mothers in Ireland	$p_{B1B2} < .001$	105	27.3	3.9
<i>Gr. B2</i>	Became mothers in Poland	$p_{B2A} < .001$	74	22.5	3.8

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

*Families with children*

The data show that the proportion of families with children is greater among stayers than migrants and stood at 76.8 per cent ( $n=745$ ) and 62.8 per cent ( $n=186$ ) respectively at the time of the study. This corresponds with higher *total fertility rate* (TFR) for women in Poland than for those in Ireland – at 1.19 and 1.03 respectively. The lower fertility rate for migrants is understandable considering that 37.2 per cent ( $n=110$ ) of them had not yet transited to motherhood at the time of the study. However, when the focus is shifted to women with children, we see that mothers in Poland had fewer children than their counterparts in Ireland – with the mean number at 1.55 and 1.62 respectively.

Migrant mothers have transited to motherhood either prior to and after the move. Once the fertility parameters are analysed separately for these two sub-populations, further discrepancies in fertility patterns are revealed. Nearly six out of ten migrant mothers had their first child born in Ireland and had fewer children than those mothers who transited to first birth before the move, with the mean number of children at 1.4 and 1.9 respectively. I have also asked whether those who came to Ireland as mothers had more children born after the move. The data show that only one third of them transited to the next birth while in Ireland. However, that



group achieved the highest mean number of children, which increased from 1.28, measured at the time of the entry to Ireland to 2.48 at the time of the study.

Analysis of the mean age at first childbirth confirms the childbearing postponement among migrant women, supporting the disruptive theory of migrant fertility. First-time mothers in Ireland were, on average, two years older than their counterparts in Poland, with the average age of 27.3 years compared to 25.1.

Interestingly, the migrants who transited to first birth before the move were, on average, three years younger than non-migrant first-time mothers. Consequently, the age gap between migrant mothers who transited to first birth before and those who transited after the move is nearly five years. This, once again, suggests a dichotomisation of migrant families' fertility behaviour. On the one hand, we see a large group of migrant women (around 40 per cent), who transited to first birth in Poland at a relatively young age ( $M=22.5$ ) and migrated to Ireland with children ( $M=1.46$ ) or were reunited with them after the move. On the other hand, we see migrant women whose transition to first birth was postponed on average for two years and who had fewer children compared to first-time mothers who remained in Poland.

The analysis of the family size shows that, although the one-child family was the most common biological type in both samples, the proportion was higher in Poland and accounted for 57 per cent ( $n=425$ ) compared to 50.5 per cent ( $n=94$ ) in Ireland. Correspondingly, the share of families with two or more children was greater among respondents in Ireland. Table 4 presents the share of families by the number of children in migrant and non-migrant families.

**Table 4. Number of children in migrant and non-migrant families**

Number of children	Ireland						Poland	
	Childbearing started prior to migration		Childbearing started after migration		Total for migrant families		n	%
	n	%	n	%	n	%		
1	27	33.8	67	63.2	94	50.5	425	57.0
2	38	47.5	36	34.0	74	39.8	255	34.2
3	11	13.8	2	1.9	13	7.0	50	6.7
4+	4	5.0	1	0.9	5	2.7	15	2.0
Total	80	100.0	106	100.0	186	100.0	745	100.0

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

Understandably, those migrant families who transited to parenthood before the move were larger than those who did so in Ireland. While the one-child family predominated (63.2 per cent,  $n=67$ ) among the latter sub-population, those who went to Ireland already as parents had two or more children (65.3 per cent;  $n=53$ ). This result obviously corresponds with fertility postponement among first-time migrant mothers.

The study shows that, in both countries, the most common marital status for families with children was marriage (around 69.5 per cent;  $n_{Ireland}=129$ ,  $n_{Poland}=520$ ), followed by cohabitating couples (around 18 per cent;  $n_{Ireland}=33$ ,  $n_{Poland}=136$ ) and single parents (around 8.5 per cent;  $n_{Ireland}=24$ ,  $n_{Poland}=89$ ). Among childless couples, cohabitation was the most popular status, followed by marriage (see Table 5 for more information on the marital status of migrants and stayers).<sup>1</sup>

**Table 5. Marital status of families with and without children in two samples**

	Ireland			Poland		
	n	% within	% total	n	% within	% total
Families with children						
Marriage	129	69.4	43.6	520	69.8	53.6
Cohabitation	33	17.7	11.1	136	18.3	14.0
Single parent	24	12.9	8.1	89	11.9	9.2
Sub-total	186	100.0	62.8	745	100.0	76.8
Families with no children						
Marriage	43	39.1	14.5	40	17.8	4.1
Cohabitation	67	60.9	22.6	185	82.2	19.1
Sub-total	110	100.0	37.2	225	100.0	23.2
Total	296	100.0	100.0	970	100.0	100.0

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

#### *Families with no children*

In line with the results above, families without children were more common among migrant than non-migrant families – 37.2 per cent (n=110) and 23.2 per cent (n=225) respectively. These families may fall into three groups – those who have not yet had children (pre-child couples), those whose children have left the household (post-child couples) and couples who had chosen to remain childless. Taking into account that the samples consisted only of those of reproductive age, the majority of the couples analysed were in pre-child stage of the family life-course. Nearly nine out of ten migrant families with no children (89.4 per cent; n=84) declared that they had childbearing plans, of whom 75 per cent intended to have children in the next three years. Among those who remained in Poland, the proportion of those with such plans was lower at 80.6 per cent (n=166), three quarters of whom (n=123) also hoped to become parents within three years. The remaining proportion of respondents in couples without children – 11 per cent in Ireland and 19.4 per cent in Poland – either refused to answer this question, were undecided or did not intend to have children at all.

Referring to the evidence from the research literature, couples without children are becoming the more common form of family in developed and post-modern societies (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Slany 2008). Nonetheless, among all family types in both samples, the proportion of those who consciously chose never to have children was relatively small and accounted for 5.1 per cent (n=15) among migrant and 3.2 per cent (n=32) among non-migrant families.

#### *Fertility plans*

This part of the article explores respondents' childbearing plans, firstly by identifying those who do or do not plan to have (more) children and secondly by measuring the intended number of children. The data indicate that there were more respondents with no further fertility plans in Poland (49.3 per cent, n=433) than in Ireland (39.8 per cent, n=99),  $p < .05$ . This difference is comprehensible in the light of previously presented findings showing the higher proportion of migrants than of stayers who have not yet transited to parenthood or who have done so but later than those in Poland. A closer look at migrant families then shows that the majority (77.1 per cent, n=70) of those who transited to parenthood prior to their migration declared their childbearing complete, compared to 40 per cent (n=83;  $p < .001$ ) of those whose first child was born after the move.

Respondents were also asked when (after how many children) they considered their childbearing to be complete. The commonsense assumption – confirmed in both samples – was that families with several children are more likely not to plan another child than those who do not yet have any or who only have one child. The correlation coefficient analysis showed strong negative relations between the number of children and further fertility plans, with  $r_s = -.61$ ,  $p < .001$  for migrants and  $r_s = -.54$ ,  $p < .001$  for stayers.

Interestingly, the most profound difference with regards to further childbearing intentions was observed between one-child families in both countries. One in four one-child migrant families (26.7 per cent;  $n=20$ ) did not plan to have more children compared to more than one third of those in Poland (36.9 per cent;  $n=136$ ;  $p < .05$ ). The majority of two-child or larger families in both samples did not want to have more children. The analysis of numbers of children and further fertility plans is presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Number of children in families by further fertility plans**

Number of children		Ireland			Poland		
		Procreation finished	Procreation not finished	Total	Procreation finished	Procreation not finished	Total
0	% within	12.5	87.5	100.0	19.4	80.6	100.0
	% of total	4.8	33.7	38.6	4.6	18.9	23.4
	n	12	84	96	40	166	206
1	% within	26.7	73.3	100.0	36.9	63.1	100.0
	% of total	8.0	22.1	30.1	15.5	26.5	42.0
	n	20	55	75	136	233	369
2	% within	85.5	14.5	100.0	82.6	17.4	100.0
	% of total	21.3	3.6	24.9	22.6	4.8	27.4
	n	53	9	62	199	42	241
3	% within	84.6	15.4	100.0	89.6	10.4	100.0
	% of total	4.4	.8	5.2	4.9	.6	5.5
	n	11	2	13	43	5	48
4 or more	% within	100	0	100.0	100.0	0.0	100.0
	% of total	1.2	0	1.2	1.3	0.0	1.3
	n	3	0	3	15	0	11
Total	% of total	39.8	60.2	100.0	49.3	50.7	100.0
	N	99	150	249	433	446	879

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

The second aspect of my fertility plans analysis was to investigate the intended number of children. Only those families who still planned to have (more) children were asked this question. However, there was no significant difference between migrant and non-migrant families, nor between migrant families who transited to parenthood either prior or after migration. The majority of families in both countries intended to have two children, with a mean number of children oscillating around 2.15 (Table 7).

**Table 7. The number of children planned in migrant and non-migrant families**

	<i>n</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Non-migrant families	874	1.98	.91
Couples with no children	225	1.88	.57
Migrant families	235	1.96	.83
Couples with no children	88	1.87	.68
Became parents in Ireland	80	2.11	.64
Became parents in Poland	67	2.22	.79

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

Interestingly, families in the pre-child life-course stage planned to have fewer children than those who were already parents, with the mean number of intended children hovering around 1.97 and 2.15 respectively. The pattern converged for migrant and non-migrant families. This may suggest that the change of national context does not interfere with the intended or ideal number of children in Polish families, which may suggest the relevance of socialisation theory on fertility patterns.

### **Childbearing motivation and rationale**

In this part of the article I investigate respondents' motivations and rationales for their childbearing plans. The descriptive analysis of the survey answers is accompanied with information gathered from in-depth interviews. Fertility decision-making is performed by couples or an individual at micro- and, simultaneously, at macro-level settings and is commonly analysed from these two perspectives (Philipov, Thévenon, Klobas, Bernardi and Liefbroer 2009). The micro-level approach usually refers to life-course events and the psychological or socio-economic characteristics of the individuals involved in this process (Miller 1994), whereas the research implementing the macro-level approach refers to socio-economic and cultural changes and trends influencing a person's childbearing strategies. In this paper, I focus on the macro-level factors and their role in the childbearing plans of Polish families, seeking whether or not they influence childbearing intentions in different ways in the two socio-cultural and national contexts.

Studies which have investigated the correlation between economic situation and childbearing have shown that changes in fertility rate may occur alongside or against the economic downturns (Becker 1960; Hotz, Klerman and Willis 1997; Sobotka, Skirbekk and Philipov 2011). Nonetheless, one factor – women's participation on the labour market – lies at the heart of most explanations of fertility patterns in developed and developing countries (Brewster and Rindfuss 2000), yet the clear relationship between women's employment and childbearing remains elusive.

Other economic factors, related to the financial status of households, were also found to be important in the fertility decision-making process. For instance, the type of housing (Kulu and Vikat 2008; Vignoli, Rinesi and Mussino 2013), home-ownership or the housing market (Mulder and Billari 2010) were found to be reliable fertility predictors. In this case, childcare accessibility and its costs plays an important role in families' childbearing strategies (Galloway and Hart 2015; Rindfuss, Guilkey, Morgan and Kravdal 2010).

Family behaviour patterns, including changes in the fertility rate, were extensively studied in the context of potential socio-demographic and cultural influence. This approach in fertility research in general focuses on individuals' attitudes and norms towards union formation, marriage, gender relations or parenthood roles (Philipov *et al.* 2009). As much as it is difficult to separate the effect of culture from the socio-economic and institutional environment, Fernandez and Fogli (2009) managed to do so and showed that the culture of the

country of origin plays an important role in explaining the large variation in migrant women's work patterns and fertility behaviour in the USA. The impact of cultural norms and social expectations on childbearing were also highlighted by researchers in Europe. Mynarska (2007) in Poland and Perelli-Harris (2005) in Ukraine, for instance, found that age norms concerning the transition to parenthood translate into social pressure put on women to get married and have children at a relatively young age. Nonetheless, Sobotka and Toulemon (2008) questioned the role of cultural changes and showed that the shift in family behaviour connected with cultural change is not always systematically associated with low fertility at the individual level.

Nor could the institutional and political contexts be overlooked by fertility researchers. This field of interest focuses on the complex mechanisms which link family policies and demographic outcomes. The results of the empirical literature indicate that state support for families, including the creation of workplaces for females and accessible and affordable childcare systems, may translate into a higher fertility rate, timing of fertility or family size (Billari and Kohler 2004; Brewster and Rindfuss 2000; Finch and Bradshaw 2003). Nonetheless, the impact of family policies on childbearing often remains unclear as the same or similar policies can result in dissimilar effects in the different national contexts (Neyer 2006; Ulrich Mayer 2004). Furthermore, as Gauthier (2007) observed, higher fertility levels could persist in some countries, despite the absence of or limited state support for families.

I believe that most of these factors, along with individuals' characteristics and their life-course stage may influence their fertility plans. In the case of migrant families, the fertility decision-making process is even more complex, as it is embedded in two socio-economic and cultural contexts. Thus, there could be a myriad of possible combinations of factors operating in the origin and destination societies that contribute to respondents' childbearing strategies. Furthermore, we need to bear in mind that the transition to parenthood is not always a deliberately planned or entirely controllable process (Brown and Eisenberg 1995).

In my study, respondents answered six questions about the role of selected factors in their fertility plans. The questions concerned: (1) the household's financial situation, (2 and 3) the female's and male's employment status in the household, (4) their housing conditions, (5) the availability of parental leave and (6) childcare. The answers to these questions did not differ much between migrants and stayers. In other words, they attributed the same or a very similar level of importance to the same factors in their childbearing plans (Table 8). The only one factor that differed significantly between the two samples was the employment status of men. More migrants than stayers assigned a high level of importance to this factor, at 56.6 per cent (n=107) and 45.6 per cent (n=357) respectively.

**Table 8. Factors influencing respondents' fertility decision**

	Ireland				Poland			
	Yes		No		Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Financial situation	125	57.3	93	42.7	496	58.1	357	41.9
Male's employment status	107	56.6	82	43.4	357	45.6	426	54.4
Female's employment status	98	52.4	89	47.6	421	55.1	343	44.9
Availability of childcare	91	49.5	93	50.5	371	43.5	482	56.5
Housing conditions	98	48.0	106	52.0	431	50.7	419	49.3
Availability of parental/care leave	76	40.9	110	59.1	317	39.7	482	60.3

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

To allow me to probe further into the role of these factors, respondents were asked how having a child in the next three years would change the various aspects of their life. The questions concerned possible changes in respondents' economic situation, opportunities on the labour market and lifestyle. The descriptive analysis of these answers revealed several significant differences between migrant and non-migrant families and, together with the information gathered through interviews, shed more light on the mechanisms influencing respondents' fertility strategies and childbearing intentions.

#### *Economic motivation and childbearing*

Not surprisingly, in both countries, the economic situation of the household was reported to be the most important factor in respondents' fertility strategies. More than half of the examined populations declared that their further childbearing decisions depended on their household's finances – 58.1 per cent (n=496) and 57.3 per cent (n=125) respectively (Table 8). Nonetheless, fewer migrant respondents (49.4 per cent; n=132) worried about the worsening effect of having a child on their finances than did stayers (76.1 per cent; n=654). Correspondingly, more migrant respondents than stayers assumed that their household's finances would not change much after having a child – 46.8 per cent (n=125) and 23.1 per cent (n=198) respectively;  $p < .001$ .

Interestingly, analysis of the answers by gender reveals that females worried more often than males about the strain on the household's finances if the couple had another child. However, the proportion of women in Poland who expressed such a concern was nearly 30 percentage points higher than for those in Ireland – 76.1 per cent (n=654) and 50.3 per cent (n=132) respectively;  $p < .001$  (Table 9).

**Table 9. Effect on household finances of having a child within three years, expressed by men and women**

Effect	Ireland			Poland		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Much better	n	0	5	0	0	0
	%	0.0	2.4	1.9	0.0	0.0
Better	n	4	1	3	4	7
	%	6.8	0.5	1.9	0.8	0.8
Neither better nor worse	n	27	98	95	103	198
	%	45.8	47.1	46.8	26.9	20.4
Worse	n	21	84	211	285	496
	%	35.6	40.4	39.3	59.8	56.3
Much worse	n	7	20	44	114	158
	%	11.9	9.6	10.1	12.5	22.5
Total	n	59	208	353	506	859
	%	100	100	100	100	100

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

The data from my interviews also confirm the crucial impact of household finances on family childbearing intentions. Interviewees in both countries were frequently bringing the subject of finances to the table when talking about their fertility strategies. They usually referred to the various child-raising costs – the day-to-day expenses, the cost of education and the cost of childcare.

Informants who mentioned day-to-day expenses rarely referred to the cost of products for children – such as baby food, clothing, toys, toiletries and care products. Instead, they often referred, for instance, to the high cost of properties or of rented accommodation, their unstable employment situation or the state's family policies. Kasia, from Sieradz, in Poland, a 31-year-old mother of two children aged 4 years and 18 months, explained when asked why she does not want to have more children:

*Finances of course! And I don't mean that I would not be able to afford a banana for my children if they asked for it. People don't have more kids because they can't afford it. I mean you should be able to provide a prosperous life and a good future for them and I am not talking about all of these one-off social welfare benefits for young families. I mean... you should be guaranteed some kind of stability. I mean financial freedom for mothers, so they can afford to go on a longer maternity leave if they wish, and then to have some kind of assurance that she can go back to work after maternity leave.*

Clearly, migrant interviewees contextualised their household's financial situation in the settings of the sending and receiving country simultaneously, frequently engaging in cost comparisons between them. Several informants argued that the relative cost of living and of bringing up children in Ireland is lower than in Poland. Marcin, from Dublin, the 35-year-old father of two children aged 7 and 3, brought up this subject when asked about his family plans to return to Poland. This may suggest that the household's financial situation is centred not only around fertility plans but also around return plans or other spheres of their everyday life. Marcin said:

*You have to agree with me. It is cheaper to live here. This is what still holds us here from going back there. I can afford more here. It can be said that the wages are very similar in Poland and here, say the average is 1 500 euro or 1 500 zloty, as I say... Take the petrol cost, for example. It is 1.2 euros here now and it is still around 5 zloty there. So it is nearly three times more expensive there. Then, take the price of nappies, for example, or anything else. You can live a normal life here, not struggling to make ends meet at the end of every month. This is the main reason we are still here.*

Secondly, it was noteworthy that informants in both countries often referred to the cost of children's education as an influential factor in their childbearing decisions. Interestingly, informants in the two groups tended to focus on different aspects of the cost of education. For instance, interviewees in Poland – more often than those in Ireland – talked about the importance of extracurricular activities and their high cost. Commonly, parents in Poland perceived extracurricular training as crucial for their children's professional careers and economic success in the future. They often referred to the concept of 'a prosperous life', which was believed to be partly determined by children's educational capital, to a large extent based on extracurricular activities and practical skills. Foreign-language lessons, sports training or art classes were commonly sought after for often very young children in Poland.

This should not suggest that migrant parents did not recognise extracurricular activities as important for their children future and did not invest in them. For many migrant parents, however, living in a multicultural and transnational context was already perceived to be a particular educational and cultural investment in their children's future. Daria (26), the mother of an 18-month-old son, highlighted the importance of children's language acquisition while abroad. She wanted her son to go through both the Irish and the Polish educational systems in Ireland, so that he would have better 'life opportunities' compared with children brought up in Poland.

*The most important thing for me is that my son will learn English here and will be able to speak in two languages. (...) You know, children who learn the language (English) in Poland do not really speak it very well. It is completely different here. See, children here start school when they are only four or five years old... I want my son to have good English. I also want him to go to Polish school here. Everyone knows that if they go back (to Poland) it would be really difficult for them to catch up in Polish schools. That is why most parents send their children to Polish schools here at the weekend. I know it's more difficult for them as they have to learn two programmes simultaneously. But on the other hand, it is good, it is a great training for their future. I would like him to be an ambitious child. I think all of these could be a great advantage for him and would open many doors for him in the future.*

The above citation, as well as many other similar statements, suggests that the group of reference for many migrant parents is not Ireland and Irish families but Poland and families there. This may also be associated with interviewees' unspecified plans to settle down in Ireland, as the survey data showed that every third respondent (33.3 per cent, n=98) had no specific plans either about staying in Ireland or returning to Poland.

On the other hand, most of the interviewed migrant parents, rather than focusing on extracurricular training and its cost, were often concerned about the cost of third-level education in Ireland, which is not fully subsidised by the Irish state as it is in Poland. This was the case especially for those with long-term or permanent settlement plans. Marcin, cited earlier, explained that he has no further fertility plans, saying that *two [children] is enough, we could not afford to send three of them to a university here, it's too expensive.*

Other settled migrants indirectly referred to educational costs by considering moving to more affluent neighbourhoods, usually within a city or a county, in order to gain access to more desirable and prestigious schools. Adam, a 33-year-old father of two girls aged 2 and 5, moved from one of Dublin's disadvantaged neighbourhoods to the outskirts of the city once his eldest daughter was about to reach the school age. This is how he rationalised the move:

*Now, when you have kids, you need to find a better place to live. I know it is more expensive to find a new place and live in a decent location, but we had to move out from there. I didn't want my children to go to any of the local schools there. I didn't want them to come back home one day with that strong Dublin 8 accent. You know what I mean? All these kids from the flats [social housing] are not great material for your kids' friends.*

Such a strategy – like the investment in extra-curricular activities observed among stayer families – could be interpreted as a long-term plan in which migrant parents seek to invest in their children's educational capital. Furthermore, this could also be interpreted as their lifestyle or social-class mobility aspiration within the structure of Irish society.

#### *Employment status, labour-market opportunities and childbearing*

The second most important factor in my respondents' childbearing plans was the employment status of both them and their partners. Interestingly, the respondents in the two groups attributed different degrees of importance to the job status of men and of women in their reproductive strategies. The employment status of women was more often rated as an important factor by stayers than by migrants. In Poland, it was the second-highest-rated factor, after household's finances, whereas the male's employment held fourth place, achieving a lower rank than housing conditions (see Table 8). In Ireland, on the other hand, the man's employment was the second most important factor, closely followed by that of the women.



Like financial worries, more respondents in Poland (47.6 per cent;  $n=763$ ) were concerned about their job opportunities if they had a child in the next three years than were migrants (33.3 per cent;  $n=166$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Understandably, the position of women with young children on the labour market was seen as more vulnerable than men's in both samples. However, this was more often expressed by stayers – nearly three quarters of them (73.1 per cent;  $n=598$ ) were concerned or very concerned about it, compared to every second migrant (49.8 per cent;  $n=128$ ;  $p < .001$ ) (Table 10).

**Table 10. The hypothetical effect of having another child on partner's job opportunities**

Job opportunities	Ireland						Poland					
	For men		For women		Total		For men		For women		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Much better	4	1.7	6	2.3	10	2.0	3	.4	0	0	3	.2
Better	6	2.5	2	.8	8	1.6	7	.9	5	.6	12	.7
Neither	193	80.1	121	47.1	314	63.1	610	77.7	215	26.3	825	51.5
Worse	29	12.0	76	29.6	105	21.1	121	15.4	398	48.7	519	32.4
Much worse	9	3.7	52	20.2	61	12.2	44	5.6	200	24.4	244	15.2
Total	241	100.0	257	100.0	498	100.0	785	100.0	818	100.0	1 603	100.0

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

My analysis of respondents' employment status, presented in Table 11, may support some interpretations of why respondents in Poland were more often concerned about the woman's opportunities on the labour market after transiting to a first/next birth.

First, there were more dual-earner households among migrants than among stayers – 65.2 per cent ( $n=161$ ) and 51.7 per cent ( $n=434$ ) respectively. This could be partly explained by the fact that Polish migration to Ireland is labour migration (Grabowska 2005; Krings, Moriarty, Wickham, Bobek and Salamońska 2013). Consequently, referring to the selection model of migration (Borjas 1987), labour migrants have particular skillsets which differ from those of stayers. Therefore the employment rate for economic migrants is usually higher than for those in the sending country.

**Table 11. Employment status of study participants in two samples**

	Ireland $n=296$		Poland $n=970$	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Dual-earner households	161	65.2	434	51.7
Man as the only breadwinner	59	23.9	311	37.1
Men in employment	229	88.4	758	88.7
Women in employment	195	70.1	543	57.5
Women in part-time employment	51	17.2	88	9.1
Women holding permanent job contract	157	83.1	359	65.0

Source: Author's analysis of own data and 2011 GGS data (Wave 1 Poland).

Second, migrant women were more often employed than their counterparts in Poland – 70.1 per cent ( $n=195$ ) and 57.5 per cent ( $n=543$ ) respectively. However, they worked on average 2.5 fewer hours ( $M = 36.4$ ;

$SD = 11$ ) than their counterparts in Poland ( $M = 38.8$ ;  $SD = 9.4$ );  $p < .001$ . Correspondingly, more migrant than non-migrant women had a part-time job – 17.2 per cent ( $n=51$ ) and 9.1 per cent ( $n=88$ ) respectively, with  $p < .05$ .

Although flexible working hours and part-time jobs are facilitated by institutions and employers in both countries, such arrangements were more popular among migrant families, which may partly explain why they were less often worried about worsening the female's job opportunities after transiting to the next birth. As learnt from interviewees and observations, part-time jobs were particularly common among migrant mothers with pre-school- and school-age children. Many of my informants considered it a useful strategy to find a balance between their professional career and their family life. For instance, Joanna, a 37-year-old mother of two boys aged 6 and 4 living in a small town outside Dublin, said:

*When I had my second boy, I asked my manager to change my contract to two or three days per week only. That was not a problem for her and since then I only work at weekends, every so often I do evenings. I stay with the boys from Monday to Friday and my husband takes care of them at the weekend. I know it's not a perfect solution but at least I can keep my job and earn some money.*

This arrangement enabled Joanna and other women in similar circumstances to stay active on the labour market, contribute financially to the household's income and simultaneously provide care for their young children. The need for part-time work arrangements was also highlighted by several female informants in Poland. Natalia, a 30-year-old mother of two children aged under 3, mentioned that she would like to be able to work part-time in order to care for her children but this was not feasible with her current employer.

*This is my aim – not to work as much as I was working before my maternity. I was doing anything between 40 and 60 hours per week – regular job and some extra work at weekends. It is my dream to have part-time work as a therapist in a school. But this is not possible now. I would love to spend more time with the kids and work from home.*

Another reason for migrants having more positive feelings towards having a child could be associated with their job contract and the assurance that they may return to work with no problems after their maternity leave. The data show that more migrant women than their counterparts held permanent employment contracts – 83.1 per cent ( $n=157$ ) and 65.0 per cent ( $n=359$ ) respectively, with  $p < .001$ . In this way, the sense of job security was higher among migrant than non-migrant women – with 77.4 per cent ( $n=168$ ) and 68.2 per cent ( $n=375$ ;  $p < .001$ ) being satisfied or very satisfied. The correlation between having a permanent job contract and the sense of job security was confirmed for both groups of women but, interestingly, with a stronger relationship among female stayers, with  $r_s = .35$ ;  $p < .001$  and  $r_s = .24$ ;  $p < .001$ , respectively. Furthermore, the data also show that female stayers more often than migrant women work in the profession for which they are qualified. Migrant women, effectively, usually work below their educational level and tend to occupy low- or middle-income labour employment, such as in hospitality or the retail sector in which it is relatively easy to find a new job or change to another one, which may also explain why women in Poland were more concerned about losing their job after having a child.

Thirdly, migrant women's more positive attitude towards having another child could relate to their partner's employment. As mentioned before, the male's employment status was the second most important factor in migrants' childbearing plans and only the fourth most important for those in Poland. In essence, as I learnt from my interviews and participant observation, migrant families more often said that they 'would easily manage financially only on one salary' while, in Poland, the conviction that families would be unable to survive

on one salary was more prominent. Magda, from Hajnówka, aged 43 and the mother of two teenage children, said: *When one partner in a couple becomes unemployed here, the family situation changes dramatically, from a middle-income one – a family living normally, to a low-income one living on the verge of poverty.*

### *Childcare and its costs*

The availability and cost of childcare was the next and fourth most important factor in fertility plans for migrants and the fifth most important one for stayer families. As the childcare systems in the two countries differ considerably, I outline them briefly below.

In Poland, after the political transformation of 1989, the management and funding of social services – including crèches, playschools, primary schools and high schools – were moved from state control to that of local authorities. Thus, in the 1990s, public early-childcare services suffered from budget cuts and a lack of other resources (Heinen and Wator 2006). Furthermore, most of the extracurricular activities such as foreign-language lessons, art classes or sports training, as well as meals, were no longer free of charge and the cost of these was moved from local governments to parents. The cutbacks resulted in a shortage of public childcare institutions in many parts of Poland. This situation attracted business investors and, since 2000, the number of private crèches and playschools has been gradually increasing, especially in large towns and cities. This, however, did not solve the problem as access to formal childcare remains limited – firstly, due to the insufficient number of places available in public institutions and, secondly, due to the high cost of private crèches and playschools. Consequently, many parents of children under school age, which is 6 or 7 in Poland, try to arrange informal childcare for their offspring.

Moving to the Irish care and education system, formal childcare for pre-school-age children is run by private bodies only. Free national childcare provision for infants and toddlers aged three and under is available only for the most financially disadvantaged families. For children aged between three and five, the government partly subsidises pre-school educational programmes in the form of three hours per day of free care. The cost of any additional time in childcare must be covered by the parents. After this, the Irish legislation on schools requires all children from the age of five to receive a formal education. Primarily and secondary schools are free of charge. Nonetheless, as classes for younger pupils have usually finished by noon to early afternoon, many children – particularly in dual-earner families – stay in after-school care, which is yet again run by private organisations and is not subsidised by the government. The fee for a child in full-time care, including crèches, playschools or after-school facilities, may consume up to half of an average monthly wage, especially in large cities like Dublin, Cork or Galway. Thus, as in Poland but mainly for financial reasons, access to formal childcare is limited not only for many migrant families but also for Irish families. The data from my interviews confirm that the cost of childcare is a crucial part of Polish migrant families' expenses and may directly or indirectly influence their further fertility plans. The cost and availability of childcare, in particular, were raised by interviewees who already have children. Tadeusz, the 32-year-old father of two daughters aged 4 and 2, referred to the high cost of childcare in Dublin, saying:

*Our older daughter went to a crèche when she was 12 months old; my wife returned to work then. But we did not send our second daughter to the crèche. There was no point. I mean moneywise it was the same whether we sent them both [to the crèche] and pay two fees or if she [the wife] resigned from work and stayed with them. We were losing a monthly wage anyway. So the choice was easy, she [his wife] decided to take an unpaid career break for a year to take care of them. Just to spend more time with them. If you have more than two kids, it is too expensive. You either stay home yourself or pay someone else to take care of them, say a nanny, grandmother or someone else.*

Migrant families' limited access to formal childcare was commonly compensated for by informal childcare arrangements, both short- and long-term in nature. The most common arrangements involved the help of grandparents, other close or distant relatives, neighbours, friends or nannies. Childcare provided by grandparents, however, was the most common form of help for Polish families in both countries.

### *Housing and motivations for childbearing*

The housing situation was the third most important factor for respondents in Poland and the fifth for those in Ireland. This result is puzzling when we analyse the data on the home-ownership status of respondents, data which show that the majority of migrant households lived in rental accommodation (85.5 per cent,  $n=230$ ), with only a marginal proportion of them owning a dwelling in Ireland (8.3 per cent,  $n=25$ ). The situation was different for respondents in Poland, where the majority either owned a property (58.3 per cent,  $n=567$ ) or lived with family (9.8 per cent,  $n=95$ ).

The importance of suitable housing conditions in respondents' childbearing plans was again revealed by interviewees in both countries. A lack of sufficient space and financial difficulties preventing them from buying or renting adequate accommodation were reported as reasons which may postpone, change or cancel the realisation of fertility plans. Interestingly, interviewees in Poland more often than migrants prioritised the purchase of a house or a flat before making the decision to have a child.

The migrants, on the other hand, rarely considered a property purchase in Ireland and, instead, were more likely to talk of changing their rented accommodation before deciding to have a child. This could be due to several reasons. First, Poles in Ireland, together with other migrant minorities, may be disadvantaged on the housing market due to their lower income (Barrett and Kelly 2010). Second, only a third of migrant respondents (33.3 per cent,  $n=101$ ) planned to stay in Ireland permanently, while the same proportion had unspecified settlement plans. Accordingly, many of them limited their housing choices to rented accommodation and talked about the need either to rent a more spacious dwelling or to move to a more convenient location. For instance, 32-year-old Karolina, the mother of two girls under 4, justified her family's recent move to a larger rented house outside Dublin, saying:

*We really had to move to a larger place. With the amount of stuff we already have and the third baby coming soon, there was no way we could live in a two-bedroom apartment any more. Also, after living for so many years in the city centre, we missed the green spaces and a garden.*

### *The availability of parental leave and childbearing motivations*

The least important factor in their childbearing plans for both groups, surprisingly, was the availability of maternity or parental leave. Below I present the main differences between the maternity-leave policies in the two countries, which may help to understand interviewees' rationalisation of their childbearing decisions and parental or maternity leave.

All employed women in Ireland, providing they had paid sufficient social insurance (PRSI) contributions, are entitled to 26 weeks' paid maternity leave. At the time of the study, women were eligible for around 230 euros of maternity benefit per week from the Department of Social Protection. Employers are not obliged to pay women on maternity leave. Nonetheless, they may wish to contribute to the maternity benefit paid by the state, so their female employees receive a full salary during the first 26 weeks of maternity leave (Citizens Information Board 2016). After this period, women may opt to stay for a further, this time unpaid, 10 weeks

of maternity leave, after which they either have to return to work, take unpaid parental leave where possible, or terminate their job contract.

In Poland, on the other hand, employed women are eligible for 12 months' maternity leave paid by the Social Insurance Office (*Zakład Ubezpieczeń Społecznych*). The monthly benefit payment covers 80 per cent of the full wage (or 100 per cent during the first six months and 60 per cent thereafter). After this period women (or men) may take unpaid parental leave for a certain amount of time, always specified in their job contract.

Fathers' right to paternity or parental leave also differ significantly in the two countries. Fathers in Poland are entitled to two weeks' paid paternity leave in the first 12 months after their child's birth. In addition, after the first 14 weeks of maternity leave, women in Poland may transfer their leave to their partners. In Ireland, in contrast, paternity leave was not recognised in employment law until September 2016; before this date, fathers were not eligible for it unless it was granted in their employment contracts. However, this was usually no longer than three days immediately after the birth.

It was interesting that respondents in both samples, despite the substantial differences in maternity and parental policies in the two countries, did not treat it as a priority factor in their childbearing plans. This was mentioned by several female migrant and stayer interviewees who, rather than planning their childbearing around maternity and parental leave policies, worked around them and tried to take full advantage of them.

Maternity allowance, for example was appreciated and considered as beneficial but not crucial to their household's overall income. For instance, Marta, from Dublin, while pregnant with her third child, decided to return to work from an unpaid career break earlier than she had originally planned in order to make a sufficient number of social insurance contributions to be eligible for maternity benefit when her third child was born. She explained her strategy as follows: *I had to go back to work so I didn't lose my maternity benefit. To have it or not makes a big difference.* But when asked whether she would decide to have another child knowing that she is not eligible for benefits, she answered: *Of course I would [have another child], we would manage financially only on my husband's wage. We did it last time for two months. We have always wanted to have three [children].*

Similarly, Alicja, from Cracow, the mother of two children aged 6 months and 2 years, highlighted the importance of 12 months of maternity leave saying: *It is great now with a year-long paid maternity leave. Unfortunately, it was not there when I was pregnant with my first child, but I guess, I wouldn't wait, even if I knew it was coming [the policy change].*

Remarkably, Alicja and several other usually well-educated females in Poland, apart from the positive aspects of a year-long maternity leave, highlighted the potentially negative aspects of such a long career break. Natalia (28), a psychologist and mother of two children aged under 3 from Lodz, spent the last three years on maternity and parental leave and was concerned about the impact of this on her professional skills, as she explained:

*I would completely drop out of the labour market and professional life if I had another child. I have already forgotten about work two or more years ago... It must be hard to go back to work after such a long break, especially after having two children nearly every year like we had. Honestly, you drop out from the labour market. First, you forget what it is like to work full-time, then you also forget much stuff you did before, you lose experience and knowledge.*

This may shed light on the fact that the recent Polish family policy introducing a 12-month maternity leave, although highly appreciated, may not serve as encouragement for couples to have more children but, instead, may create certain disadvantages in terms of a loss of human capital, especially for highly skilled and educated

women in dual-earner households. Instead, family policies should be reinforced by employment policies, focusing on more-secure and flexible working arrangements for mothers with young children, as well as on implementing an affordable and accessible formal childcare system.

## **Conclusions**

The main goal of this comparative study was to explore whether the migration context influences the fertility behaviour and childbearing plans of Polish families in Ireland. To do this, I measured a number of fertility indicators of migrant families who transited to parenthood while abroad (the main sample) and compared them to those of families in Poland (the comparative sample). My findings show, firstly, that migration may have a delaying effect on the transition to first birth and, secondly, that a household's economic and employment situation may influence their further childbearing intentions.

Analysis of my survey data supports assumptions of migration being a disruptive element in migrants' fertility, which predicts the postponement of fertility among migrants compared to couples in the country of origin. Indeed, Polish migrant first-time mothers were, on average, two years older than their counterparts in Poland. This result is understandable considering that a large proportion of migrant families had yet not transited to parenthood. Consequently, there were fewer family units with children in my migrant sample than in the comparative group. However, the migrant mothers had more children than mothers in Poland.

The study also identifies the dichotomisation of fertility patterns within migrant families – strictly speaking, among those who transited to a first birth before the move and those who become parents after coming to Ireland. The childbearing patterns observed in these two sub-populations are embedded in two distinct migration trajectories – the first shaped in the context of family-related migration, including family reunification and the relocation of the entire family unit and the second relating to migrant family formation (the formation of new family units in the migrant population).

The results show, firstly, that the families who came to Ireland with children are usually larger than those with children born abroad. Secondly, migrant women who transited to first birth before the move became mothers on average two years earlier than first-time non-migrant mothers and five years earlier than first-time mothers in Ireland. For families with children who relocated to Ireland, migration could be interpreted as a common livelihood strategy (White 2011) in which they decided to move abroad to improve the household's overall economic situation. Many of these families continued to have children after the move, as I learned from my several migrant interviewees, the improvement in their economic and employment situation after the move helping them to decide to have another child while there.

The second childbearing pattern was observed among those who became parents after the move. The family formation process and fertility patterns of those involved can be interpreted as a natural transition to the next life-course stage and closely relates to the age structure of the Polish population in Ireland, where the overwhelming majority is of reproductive age. The fertility parameters among this sub-population clearly show the older age of first-time mothers and the lower number of children born to these mothers, indicating the postponement of fertility. The most important finding, however, is that a substantial proportion of them declared that their childbearing plans were not yet complete and they still planned to have children. This, together with the fact that many migrant families have not yet transited to parenthood, suggests that the fertility patterns of this group are still evolving. This provokes a further research question concerning whether migrant families will try to 'make up for lost time' and have more children than their counterparts in Poland or complete their fertility intentions soon, with the average number of children below that of stayer families.

The second part of the study sought differences in the fertility motivations of migrants and stayers by investigating the factors influencing their childbearing plans. The data showed strong similarities between the

two groups in terms of the intended number of children and childbearing determinants. Not surprisingly, economic factors, in particular the employment status, were reported as the most important rationale for these plans in both countries. Nonetheless, analysis of respondents' answers about the consequences of having a/another child in the next three years disclosed prominent differences between migrant and non-migrant families – respondents in Poland were far more concerned about the negative effects of having a/another child on the household financial situation as well as on their labour-market opportunities. This was particularly relevant for female respondents there. Analysis of the women's employment in both samples strongly suggests that migrant women, although commonly working below their educational level, are in a more secure employment situation and have greater job opportunities after maternity leave than their counterparts in Poland. Furthermore, migrant women more often worked part-time, with flexible working hours and held permanent contracts. The employment status and conditions, as I learnt from many female interviewees in Ireland, in contrast to those in Poland, first enabled them to reconcile family and work life and, second, gave them a greater sense of job and financial security. Then, my findings on childcare confirm that an accessible and affordable formal childcare system has also been important in plans to have children; however, the lack of formal help, in both countries, is substituted by informal childcare arrangements usually based on extended family networks. In conclusion, more-secure and flexible employment arrangements for women and access to affordable childcare may reduce the fear of transition to first or next childbirth among families in Poland and could possibly have a positive impact on fertility rates and their further childbearing plans.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> Marital status and having children were two out of three independent variables chosen to build a strata reference matrix, thus there were no significant differences between the samples with respect to these variables.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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