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IRISH MEN AND WOMEN IN SAME-SEX PARTNERSHIPS IN THE UNITED STATES



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Irish government has announced its intention to enact a civil partnership law that would for the first time offer formal legal recognition to same-sex couples in the Republic of Ireland. The 2006 Irish Census revealed that there were 2,090 same-sex cohabiting couples in the country. Analyses of data from the United States Census Bureau suggest these are not the only couples who might avail themselves of civil partnership:

- More than 1,200 Irish-born men and women are living with a same-sex partner in the United States.
- They are predominantly female and highly educated. One in seven reports raising children.
- Civil partnership legislation could provide economic benefits to Ireland, enticing some of these talented same-sex couples to relocate back to Ireland and making the country more competitive in the global creative economy.

Irish-born individuals in same-sex couples living in the United States

The 2006 Census in the Republic of Ireland found that there were 2,090 same-sex couples living in Ireland.¹ An estimated 1,173 same-sex couples in the United States include at least one Irish-born partner.² Added to the figures from the Irish Census, U.S.-based couples would account for more than a third of these couples.

Table 1. Same-sex couples in Ireland and same-sex couples with Irish-born partners in the United States.

	Republic of Ireland (2006)	United States (2004-2006)		
		One Irish-born partner	Two Irish-born partners	Total
Individuals in same-sex couples	4,180	1,218		
Same-sex couples	2,090	1,128	45	1,173

In total, 1,218 men and women born in the Republic of Ireland are currently living as part of a same-sex couple in the United States. The vast majority of these individuals have a non-Irish partner. An estimated 1,128 same-sex couples in the United States include one partner born in Ireland and another born somewhere else (most of the partners are American). Only 45 couples include two individuals born in Ireland.

US citizenship status

Irish-born individuals in same-sex couples who are not US citizens (presumably Irish citizens) are perhaps the most likely to return to Ireland to take advantage of a civil partnership.³

Table 2. Same-sex couples with an Irish-born partner in the US, by US citizenship status.

	Partnered with...		
	Irish-born	Non-Irish	
Irish-born partner	Non-US citizen	US citizen	Non-US citizen
US citizen	45 (4%)	619 (53%)	28 (2%)
Non-US citizen	-	310 (26%)	171 (15%)

An estimated 526 same-sex partners are Irish-born and not US citizens. Of these, 310 are partnered with non-Irish US citizens and 171 have non-Irish partners who are also not US citizens (see Table 2). The remaining 45 are partnered with an Irish-born US citizen.

Both partners are US citizens in more than half (619 couples) of US same-sex couples that include an Irish born partner. There are 28 couples where an Irish-born US citizen is coupled with a non-Irish partner who is not a US citizen.

Demographic characteristics

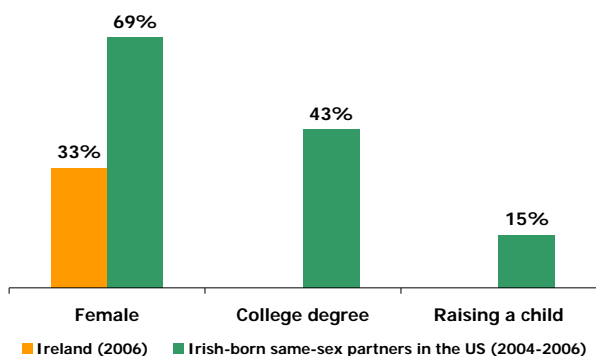
Nearly two-thirds of those in same-sex couples in Ireland are male. The pattern is quite different among Irish-born same-sex partners living in the

US, where more than two-thirds of them are female (see Figure 1).

Other demographic characteristics of Irish-born same-sex partners living in the US include:

- They are highly educated—more than four in ten (43 percent) have a college degree.
- More than one in seven couples that include an Irish-born partner (15 percent) are raising children.

Figure 1. Demographic characteristics of same-sex couples.



Policy Implications

US Census Bureau data make it clear that many Irish-born individuals who might take advantage of a new civil partnership law in Ireland are living outside of the country.

Civil partnership legislation could provide an incentive for Irish emigrants to consider relocating back to Ireland. Such moves might be beneficial to the Irish economy given the high levels of education among Irish-born same-sex partners living in the US.

Irish same-sex partners are among the most educated Irish emigrants in the US. While 43 percent of them hold a college degree, only 29 percent of other Irish-born men and women in the US have the same level of education.

Urbanist Richard Florida, author of the best-selling book *The Rise of the Creative Class*, suggests that gay-supportive legal and social climates have consequences beyond simply making places attractive to lesbians and gay men. In a 2004 report, he states that “Ireland stands out as an up-and-coming nation, with significant growth in its Creative Class and its underlying creative capabilities since 1995.” Countries that “do the best job of tapping the diverse creative talents of

the most people gain a tremendous competitive advantage.”⁴

In Florida’s view, recognition of same-sex couples offers a strong signal to gay and non-gay people alike that a country welcomes diversity. This welcoming attitude attracts the broadest possible creative workforce that he considers vital to Ireland’s economic future.

Economic benefits of legal recognition of same-sex couples go beyond Florida’s views regarding diversity. Civil partnerships can also have very practical economic consequences for countries like Ireland, where global corporations play an important role in the nation’s economy.

Same-sex partner recognition can make it easier for global companies to move lesbian and gay employees, their partners, and families from one country to another without risking the economic penalties and logistic challenges associated with non-recognition of their relationships. For example, in the absence of legal recognition, partners of gay and lesbian employees may find it more difficult to obtain work permits and may have difficulties establishing parental rights.

Data from the US Census Bureau suggest that Irish policymakers might want to look beyond their shores as they consider the social and economic impact of civil partnership legislation for same-sex couples.

¹ See Central Statistics Office Ireland. 19 July 2006. “Preliminary Report: Commentary”, Cork, Ireland. (<http://www.cso.ie/census/documents/PDR%202006%20Commentary.pdf>)

² Data are drawn from the combined US Census Bureau’s 2004, 2005, and 2006 American Community Survey Public Use Microdata Samples. Same-sex couples are those in which a same-sex adult in the household is identified as the “husband/wife” or “unmarried partner” of the respondent. “Irish-born” only includes those born in the Republic of Ireland. An additional 22 individuals with a same-sex partner report being born in Northern Ireland.

³ Since Irish law provides citizenship to all individuals born in Ireland, it seems highly likely that most of these Irish non-US citizens are current Irish citizens.

⁴ See Richard Florida and Irene Tinagli. February 2004. “Europe and the Creative Age,” Carnegie Mellon Software Institute, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and Demos, London (http://creativeclass.com/rfcqdb/articles/Europe_in_the_Creative_Age_2004.pdf)

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