

A young girl with dark hair, wearing a white t-shirt and dark blue shorts, is captured mid-jump in the ocean. She is smiling broadly, and water is splashing around her feet. The background shows a calm sea and a distant shoreline with a small boat.

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Ireland 1992 and 2002 - a Profile



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Population

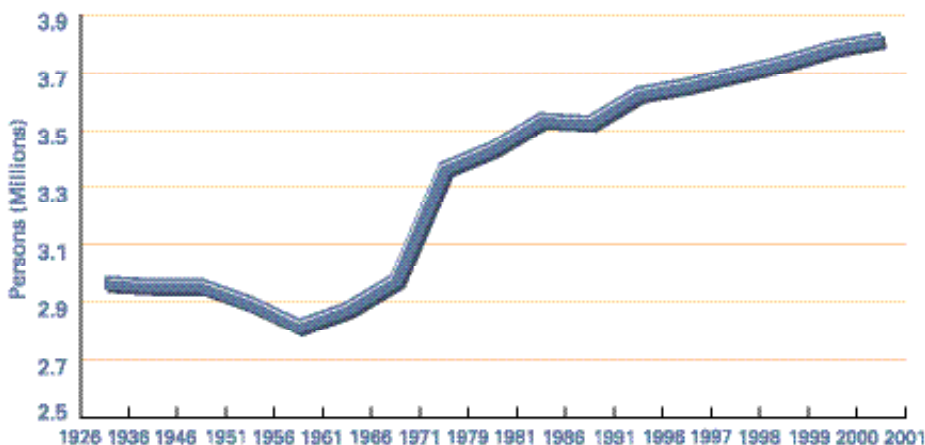
The population of the State as recorded in the 1996 Census was 3.6 million and is now estimated at 3.8 million, an increase of about 8% since 1991. The population of the island of Ireland is now 5.4 million.

The distribution of population between urban and rural areas has undergone a major transformation over the last 70 years. Less than one-third of the population lived in urban areas in 1926. The urban share has increased at each successive census since then, although the rate of increase has been tapering off in recent years. The rate of increase slowed from 33,000 per annum in the 1970s to 10,000 in the 1990s. The 1971 Census was the first in which the urban population exceeded the rural population. By 1996, 58% of the population were living in urban areas; this is estimated to have risen to 60% in 2000.

In 2001, about 1.5 million people lived in the Greater Dublin area - up by 200,000 since 1991. Average population density in Ireland (53 inhabitants per km²) is relatively low; outside Dublin and the eastern part of the country, the population is highly dispersed. Some 52% of the population live within 10 kilometres of the coast.

The Irish population is relatively young (44% of the population is currently under 25) but is gradually ageing, as shown by an increase in the ageing index (over 65 years/under 15 years) from a third in 1960 to a half in the late 1990s. Substantial health improvements have been achieved in recent decades, with a considerable increase in life expectancy at birth. The development of sanitation infrastructure, leading to the elimination of many water-borne diseases, was one of the main reasons for improving public health in the 20th century. However, life expectancy at middle age remains lower than in most other EU member states.

Population 1926-2001



*The figures for 1997-2001 are estimates

Environment

In 1992, at the time of UNCED, Ireland had only just embarked on a programme approach to environmental protection with the publication of the *Environment Action Programme* in 1990; the policy and legislative frameworks for environmental protection and, more broadly, sustainable development were not fully developed; plans for the creation of a specialised agency for environmental protection had not yet reached the implementation stage; industry with significant polluting potential was not subject to an integrated regulatory regime; and, finally, in terms of the economic sectors, there was a view that high standards of environmental protection could impact on competitiveness and reduce Ireland's ability to attract Foreign Direct Investment.

By contrast, in 2002:

- *Sustainable Development: A Strategy for Ireland* has, since 1997, had a significant influence on environment policy and on the environmental dimension of sectoral policies,
- comprehensive policy statements have been made - and are being implemented - in key areas such as climate change and waste management,
- river basin management projects are being established to promote a comprehensive approach to management of all waters (rivers, lakes, estuaries, coastal waters and groundwaters) and water-dependent ecosystems in the context of implementing the EU Water Framework Directive,
- a *National Biodiversity Plan* and a *National Heritage Plan* had been adopted (in 2002),
- the principle of sustainable development is firmly enshrined in land-use planning in Ireland, at both the strategic planning and development consent levels,
- a modern legislative framework for the protection of all the environmental media has been put in place, culminating in the Waste Management Act 1996, the Dumping at Sea Act 1996, the European Communities (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1997, the Litter Pollution Act 1997 and the Wildlife (Amendment) Act 2000,
- there is a strong and widely-respected Environmental Protection Agency
- an integrated pollution control licensing system has been put in place in advance of EU Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) requirements and has delivered major benefits for both the industries concerned and the environment,
- the environmental information service, ENFO, has established itself as a model of best practice with an international reputation,
- a National Sustainable Development Partnership - Comhar - has been in operation for over 3 years, working to advance sustainable development on the basis of dialogue,
- environmental issues are now of greater prominence in the *National Development Plan 2000-2006* (1999) and the associated Operational Programmes,
- substantial progress has been made in establishing formal networks of protected areas for biodiversity with in excess of 1 million hectares now specially protected.

Overall, production within the economy has become more environmentally efficient; there has been a decrease in the energy and material intensities of production (per unit of GDP). But this has not been mirrored in more efficient consumption patterns across society, and resource use in absolute terms continues to rise. The growing pressures now being placed on the environment are detailed in section 5 of this report.

Economy

An economic transformation took place in Ireland in the 1990s which has given rise to a new Irish economy. That economy has been the fastest growing in Europe over the last 10 years:

- the economy almost doubled in size between 1990 and 2000 in terms of GDP, with a 98% increase in that measure of economic output,
- there was full convergence with EU average GDP per capita in 1997 and close to full convergence of GNP per capita by 2000,
- employment increased from just over 1 million in 1994 to 1.7 million in 2001 – a major success story of the “Celtic Tiger”,
- in 2000, unemployment was 4% and had fallen rapidly from 16% in 1993 (with significant reductions in long-term unemployment),
- inflation remained at around 2% until the end of 1999, despite the economic boom, but some acceleration occurred in the following years.

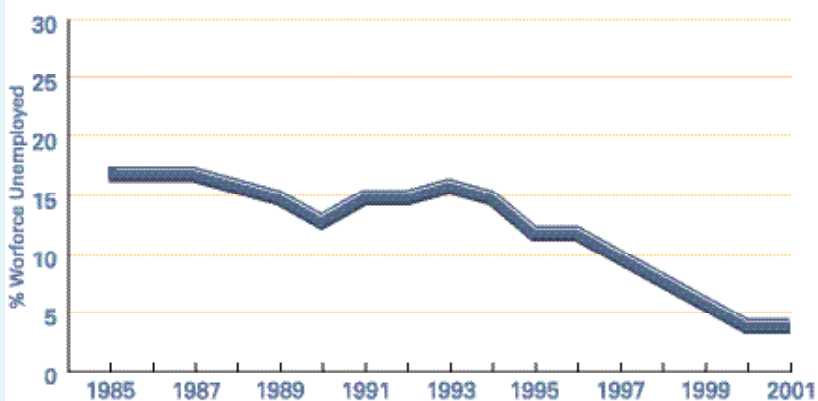
Over the last decade, the share of industry in GDP has increased and now accounts for 38%. Industrial development has been mainly in the form of export-platform manufacturing (Ireland is

an attractive base from which to supply the EU market), particularly of computers, semiconductors, office equipment, software, pharmaceuticals, electrical engineering and soft drinks. Growth has been associated with extremely rapid expansion in a small number of sectors - especially chemicals and electronics. Large numbers of multinational corporations have come to Ireland, predominantly in the information technology, electronics and pharmaceuticals sectors. A large focus of their activities is on producing Information and Communications Technology (ICT) equipment and software, acting as a technology hub serving the wider European market; the country is also host to call and technical support centres and, in recent years, small Irish-owned ICT, particularly software, companies have sprung up.

As a measure of what has occurred, production in the chemicals and electronics sectors rose by 250% and 150% respectively in the period 1995 to 2001; these sectors together accounted for 67% of Ireland's industrial production in 2001, compared to 46% six years earlier.

The share of services has remained high, at around 58% of GDP. Over two-thirds of service firms are in the financial sector, especially following the creation of the International Financial Services Centre in Dublin in 1993. In the 1990s, the number of overseas visitors to Ireland doubled (from 3 million in 1990 to 6 million in 2000).

Unemployment 1985-2001



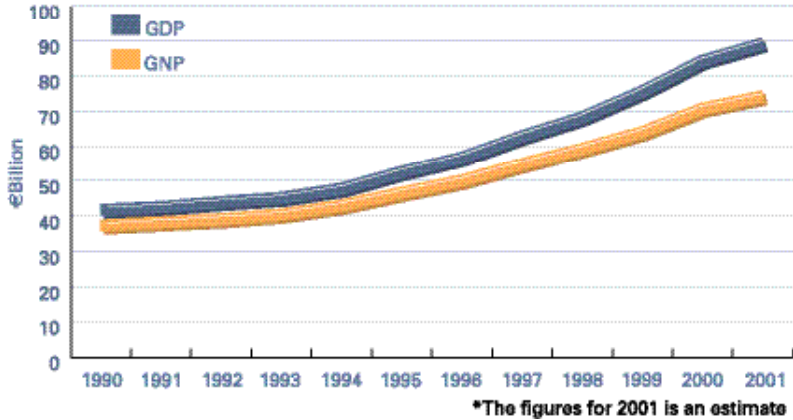
Reductions in unemployment as a result of robust economic growth have served not only to boost demand for labour but also to encourage a reversal of net migration flows, especially in the case of skilled workers, after long years of emigration. Services absorb 62% of the labour force, industry 29% and agriculture the remaining 9%. Agriculture's share of GDP has fallen from 9% to 4% over the last decade but the sector still accounts for a high proportion of total employment by EU standards.

Ireland has an open economy, and its performance as a trading nation has been a remarkable success story. Exports of goods and services contribute 82% of GDP and make a substantial contribution to employment. Over half a million jobs are directly

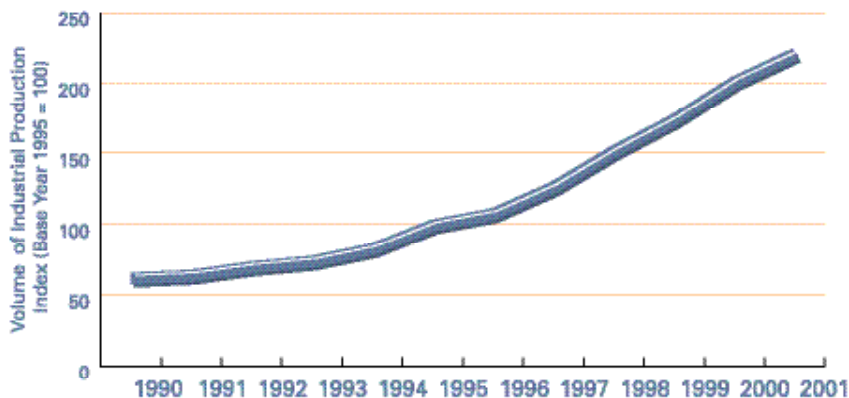
or indirectly related to exports. The level of imports is also high, as shown by its ratio to GDP (72%). The share of agriculture in trade (particularly food and live animals) has declined (from 60% of exports in the early 1960s to 9% in 1998), while industry's share has increased dramatically (particularly chemicals and pharmaceuticals, data processing, machinery and equipment).

Ireland's high growth economy has created bottlenecks in infrastructure which are being addressed in the *National Development Plan 2000-2006* (1999). Improved income levels have led, not only to consumption growth, but also to changing consumption patterns in terms of increased demand for cars, urban expansion, and travel abroad.

GDP and CNP 1990-2001 (constant 1995 prices)



Industrial Production 1990-2001



The remarkable transformation of the Irish economy through the 1990s represented in many respects a catching-up on other European economies which, unlike in the case of Ireland, grew rapidly in the post-war period. The transformation has been associated with the coming together of a range of factors, some of recent origin and others of a more long-term nature. These include:

- major investment in education,
- movement towards a more open economic model,
- EU membership from the 1970s (bringing with it financial transfers and the benefits and disciplines of free trade and the Single Market),
- the social partnership approach adopted from the late 1980s,
- Foreign Direct Investment in high technology sectors (based on low corporate tax rates and effective promotion of Ireland as an industrial location, particularly to investors from the booming US economy),
- a flexible labour market,
- the availability of a plentiful supply of relatively inexpensive labour to provide additional production capacity (initially demand for labour was met from the large numbers of unemployed but, as growth accelerated, increasing numbers of women participated in the labour force and immigration increased to significant levels).

Looking to the future, the *ESRI Medium Term Review 2001-2007* (2001) suggests that, with appropriate domestic policies and in the absence of major external shocks, the economy has the potential to 2010 to grow more rapidly than in other EU member states, albeit at a slower pace than in the last 5 years, before falling to the EU average as the process of economic convergence is completed.

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Society

GENERAL

There has been an increasing recognition in Ireland that the relationship between growth in the economy and the development of a successful and sustainable society needs to be addressed. The National Economic and Social Council in *Opportunities, Challenges and Capacities for Choice* (1999) stated that,

“Citizenship rights encompass not only the core civil and political rights and obligations but also social, economic and cultural rights and obligations which are embedded in our political culture and which underpin equality of opportunity and policies on access to education, employment, health, housing and social services.”

The economic growth of the 1990s made available resources to address a range of long-standing social issues; the period also brought new challenges in terms of issues which had hitherto been of lesser significance in Ireland. Issues on the social agenda through the period included: poverty, increased demand for housing and associated rises in house prices (raising significant issues of affordability for new entrants to the market), immigration, urban and rural disadvantage, increased female participation in the workforce, childcare, health, and equality. Some of the social policy responses are set out below.

POLICY RESPONSES

Social partnership has, since the late 1980s, been an important stimulus to economic growth and a means of addressing social policy issues. The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness* (2000), the latest in a series of agreements between the Government and the social partners, set a number of objectives to tackle social exclusion including, *inter alia*, creating conditions where people can achieve economic independence, addressing the needs of people in poverty, ensuring that there is adequate income, particularly for low paid workers, and improving the poverty proofing of policy initiatives.

The National Minimum Wage Act 2000 was introduced to protect vulnerable employees, particularly women, young people and part-time workers. The Act came into operation in April 2000. At its introduction, the minimum hourly rate was €5.59 per hour. This was increased to €5.97 from 1 July 2001 and will increase further to €6.35 per hour from 1 October 2002. When these increases and changes in taxation provisions are taken in account, there will be a significant increase in income for the lower paid.

Economic growth has led to increased demand for private and public housing. For example, since 1996 the numbers seeking social housing have increased significantly. A statutory assessment of social housing needs was conducted in March 1999: the overall results indicated that a total of 39,176 households were in need of local authority housing compared with 27,427 in 1996 – an increase of 43%.

House completions increased from 22,000 in 1992 to over 52,000 in 2001. The Serviced Land Initiative, introduced in the late 1990s by the Department of the Environment and Local Government (DOELG), accelerated the provision of serviced residential sites in areas of high demand; this was in addition to the normal services provision for new residential development. Under the initiative, 264 schemes had been approved by the end of 2001 with the potential of providing about 172,000 serviced sites. Under Part IX of the Planning and Development Act 2000, 3 locations were designated as Strategic Development Zones covering approximately 12,000 residential sites. Part V of the Act requires that up to 20% of building land must be reserved for the provision of social/affordable housing. This provision has been incorporated into the housing strategies of all local authorities.

The Revitalising Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (RAPID) Programme launched in 2001 targets the 25 most disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods (based on factors such as unemployment, income levels, and family and social structures). A similar programme, CLAR, was introduced in late 2001 in respect of 16 rural communities. The uptake of RAPID was mainly in the major cities. In order to respond to the needs of provincial towns, RAPID II was introduced in 2002 and applies to 20 provincial towns.

NATIONAL ANTI-POVERTY STRATEGY

One of the most important areas in which Ireland's social partnership approach has worked to address poverty has been the development of a *National Anti-Poverty Strategy* (NAPS). The NAPS and associated monitoring and evaluation procedures comprise one of the most significant initiatives introduced in recent years and signifies recognition of poverty as an important issue in Irish public policy. The UN World Summit for Social Development (Copenhagen 1995) provided the backdrop to the development of NAPS, which was launched in 1997.

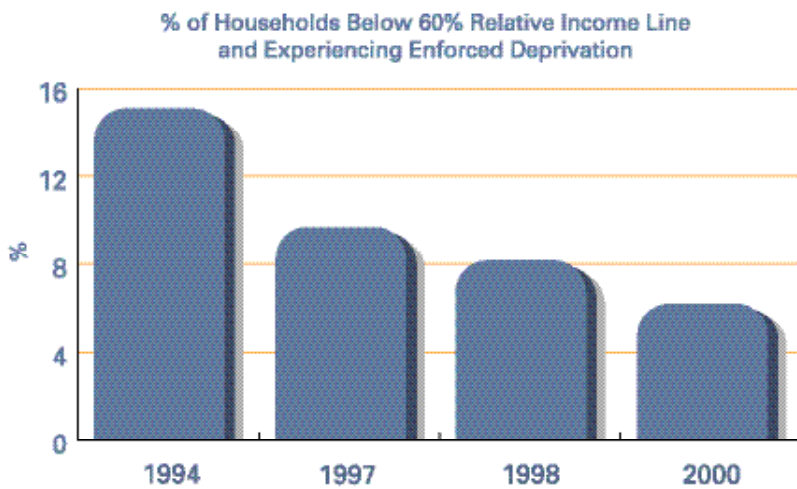
While the Strategy targets the issue of poverty in its broad context, it also examines the issue under various themes, each with its own subsidiary targets and timeframes. The original NAPS themes were unemployment, income adequacy, educational disadvantage, urban disadvantage and rural poverty.

Progress to date has included:

- a reduction in consistent poverty from 15.1% in 1994 to 6.2% in 2000,
- a halving of consistent poverty among children from 17% in 1997 to 8% in 2000,
- a fall in unemployment from 10.3% in 1997 to 4.3%,
- a fall in long-term unemployment over the period from 5.6% to 1.2%,
- an increase in the number of people in employment by over 400,000.

(Consistent poverty - used for the NAPS global poverty target - is defined as having less than 50%-60% of average household income and experiencing enforced basic deprivation - that is, the presence of at least 1 of 8 indicators, such as having recourse to debt to meet ordinary living expenses.)

Consistent Poverty



The significant economic and social progress since 1997 required a re-examination of the NAPS in terms of its content and its objectives. The *Programme for Prosperity and Fairness (2000)* contained a commitment to reviewing and revising the NAPS. It stated that the underlying methodology would be reviewed, existing targets reviewed and revised where appropriate, and new targets considered under the themes of child poverty, women's poverty, health, older people, housing/accommodation, and ethnic groups.

The review of the NAPS, *Building an Inclusive Society*, completed in 2002 after a long and extensive consultative process with the social partners and relevant interests, sets new objectives of:

- reducing to 2%, and ideally eliminating, consistent poverty,
- building an inclusive society,
- developing social capital, particularly for disadvantaged communities,
- eliminating long-term unemployment as soon as circumstances permit, but in any event no later than 2007.

It also sets new targets across a wider selection of themes, including to:

- achieve a rate of €150 per week in 2002 terms for the lowest rates of social welfare to be met by 2007,
- halve the proportion of pupils with serious literacy difficulties by 2006,
- reduce the gap in premature mortality between the lowest and highest socio-economic groups by at least 10 per cent for circulatory diseases, cancers and injuries and poisoning by 2007.

Specific targets also exist for vulnerable groups such as children and young people, women, older people, Travellers, and people with disabilities. On fuel poverty, while past policies have succeeded in reducing its incidence, continued effort will be required to update the housing stock and ensure that modern, economic and environmentally friendly heating systems are available to those on low income, in addition to providing traditional income support measures in order to realise further reductions in fuel poverty in Ireland.

In addition, progress in relation to the proportion of the population falling below relative income lines, particularly for a sustained period, will be monitored over the lifetime of the NAPS and in line with the indicators agreed in the EU Joint Report on Social Inclusion.

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The revised NAPS also includes commitments on new institutional arrangements which will comprise the following:

- a Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion, chaired by the Taoiseach,
- a Senior Officials Group to support the Cabinet Committee,
- a National Office for Social Inclusion, reporting to the Minister for Social and Family Affairs,
- Social Inclusion Units in all key Government Departments and, on a phased basis, in local authorities,
- a Social Inclusion Consultative Group and Forum,
- the Combat Poverty Agency in a supportive role,
- the National Economic and Social Forum in its role of monitoring the social inclusion element of Partnership agreements.

THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S STRATEGY: OUR CHILDREN - THEIR LIVES

The *National Children's Strategy* was published in 2000 following extensive public consultation including contributions from more than 2,500 children and young people as well as a number of expert panels. The Strategy sets out a common vision to work towards an Ireland where children are respected as young citizens with a valued contribution to make and a voice of their own; where all children are cherished and supported by family and the wider society; and where they enjoy a fulfilling childhood and realise their potential.

Six principles are identified to guide all actions to be taken: actions should be child-centred, family-oriented, equitable, inclusive, action-oriented and integrated. The Strategy proposes a more holistic way of thinking about children, a "whole child" perspective, which reflects contemporary understanding of childhood. New structures to implement the Strategy include:

- a Cabinet Committee on Children chaired by the Taoiseach,
- the National Children's Office to support the Minister for Children in the role of co-ordinating the implementation of the Strategy,
- a National Children's Advisory Council,
- an Ombudsman for Children.

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HEALTH STRATEGY - QUALITY AND FAIRNESS: A HEALTH SYSTEM FOR YOU

The Strategy, published in 2001, is based on the 4 principles of equity, people-centredness, quality and accountability. Six frameworks for change have been developed under the following headings:

- strengthening primary care,
- reform of the acute hospital system,
- funding the health services,
- developing human resources,
- organisational reform,
- developing health information.

Implementation of these frameworks and their associated measures will feed into the achievement of 4 national goals:

- better health for everyone,
- fair access,
- responsive and appropriate care delivery,
- high performance.

An action plan for implementation is also outlined in the Strategy. Each goal is broken down into objectives, with specific deliverables, targets and clear delineation of responsibility.

From an environmental perspective, an important commitment has been made in the Strategy to complete a National Environmental Health Action Plan (NEHAP) in 2002. Environmental health comprises all the aspects of human health, including quality of life, that are determined by chemical, physical, biological and social factors in the environment. It also refers to the theory and practice of assessing, correcting and preventing those factors in the environment that can potentially affect adversely the health of present and future generations. *The Proposal for a NEHAP*, published in 1999, identified that the core environmental media were land, air and water. The efficacy of the health, social and economic systems are contingent on these media being protected as an over riding priority.

The proposed NEHAP identifies the principal threats as: pollution from domestic/commercial, industrial/hazardous, agricultural and radioactive wastes; air pollution from vehicles, industry and domestic sources; chemicals; and excess use of pesticides and fertilisers.

EQUALITY

There has been increasing emphasis on equality policy through the 1990s. The goal is to bring about a more equal society by promoting, monitoring, and implementing the right to equal treatment and the accommodation of diversity, through institutional, administrative and legal reforms, and through programmes targeted at particular needs.

A new legislative and institutional framework has been put in place that underpins work towards equality of opportunity in Ireland, including:

- the Equal Status Act 2000,
- the establishment of an Office of Equality Investigations,
- the establishment of a National Disability Authority.

