



Migrant-origin children in Ireland: language and reading development in early childhood

DATE

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CASE Social Exclusion Seminar

AUTHORS

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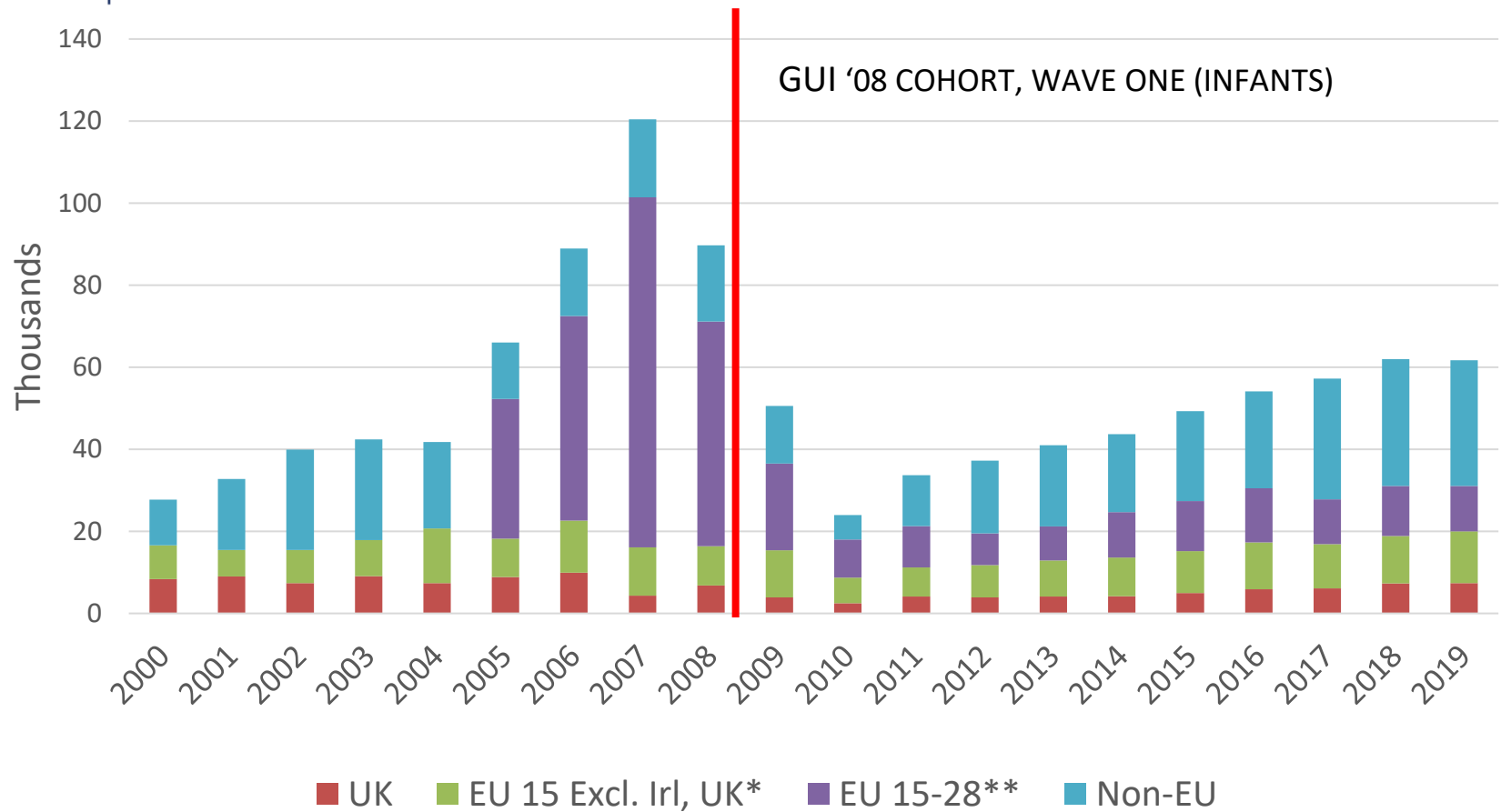
Introduction

- Following almost a century of emigration, rapid migration to Ireland in the late 1990s/ early 2000s led to a rapid increase in the number of adults born outside Ireland - and children born in Ireland whose parents were born abroad
- This paper considers how ‘migrant-origin’ children differ from children with Irish parent(s) in terms of (English) language skills and development in a ‘new immigration country’
- Paper uses a large cohort study (*Growing Up in Ireland*) to examine language skills at age 3,5 and 9 and how these develop
- These children were all born in Ireland: some have one parent born abroad; some have both parents born abroad; diverse in parents origin, ethnicity, language background

Why Language?

- Host-country language proficiency major factor in migrant integration and outcomes of migrant children (Kristen et al., 2016; Isphording, et al. 2016).
- This is true for learning in school and academic outcomes - but also for forming friendships, sports participation etc (Darmody et al. 2016)
- Delay in language acquisition may undermine equality of opportunities – both in childhood and later life (Cavallo and Russo, 2020).
- Language only one, if very important part of children’s lives: report also considers how children see themselves- their **‘self-concept’** – (but not in this presentation)

Immigration to Ireland 2000-2019



Source: CSO, 'Population and migration estimates', up to end April of reference year.

Migrant-origin children: Previous research I

- **Origin effects** (related to country of origin) versus **destination effects** (related to host or destination country) and role of exposure (Jonsson et al., 2018)
- Migrant status or socio-economic position? (Heath & Brinbaum, 2007)
- **Origin: family factors** influencing outcomes of migrant-origin children
 - Parents' country of origin (Flisi, et al., 2016);
 - Parents' ethnicity (Crosnoe and Turley, 2011);
 - Parents' linguistic background (Sierens & Van Avermaet, 2015; Turney & Kao, 2009)
 - One Irish/one migrant parent? (Sprong and Skopek, 2021);

Previous research II (destination)

- **Parents' socio-economic background** - financial and educational resources (Crosnoe, 2007; Heath and Brinbaum, 2007; Bradley et al., 2001).
- **Host-country institutions: Pre-school participation /School-level factors**- school size, socio-economic and ethnic segregation (Levels and Dronkers, 2008); student-teacher relationships (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2009)
- **Development over time** – ‘exposure’ – though exposure to what (host country) and for whom/which groups (segmented assimilation) (Alba and Nee, 2003; Portes and Zhou, 1993)

Research questions

1. How is young children's English language ability in Ireland related to their parents' country of origin, parents' native language & parents' ethnicity?
2. Do family resources – income and education - account for any 'migrant-origin penalty'?
3. Does migrant-origin children's experience of preschool and school in Ireland contribute to differences in language skills observed?
4. How do English-language skills develop over time – do migrant-origin children catch up between 3 and 9 years?

The Growing Up in Ireland '08 Cohort

**WAVE 1 Age
9m**



2008 (11,134)

- Parents interview (face-to-face)
- child physical measures

**WAVE 2
Age 3**



2011 (9,793)

- Parents interview
- Cognitive tests, including vocab (in English)**

**WAVE 3
Age 5**



2013 (9,001)

- Parent interview inc age of school start
- COGNITIVE TEST (in English)**
- Teacher questionnaires

**WAVE 5
Age 9**



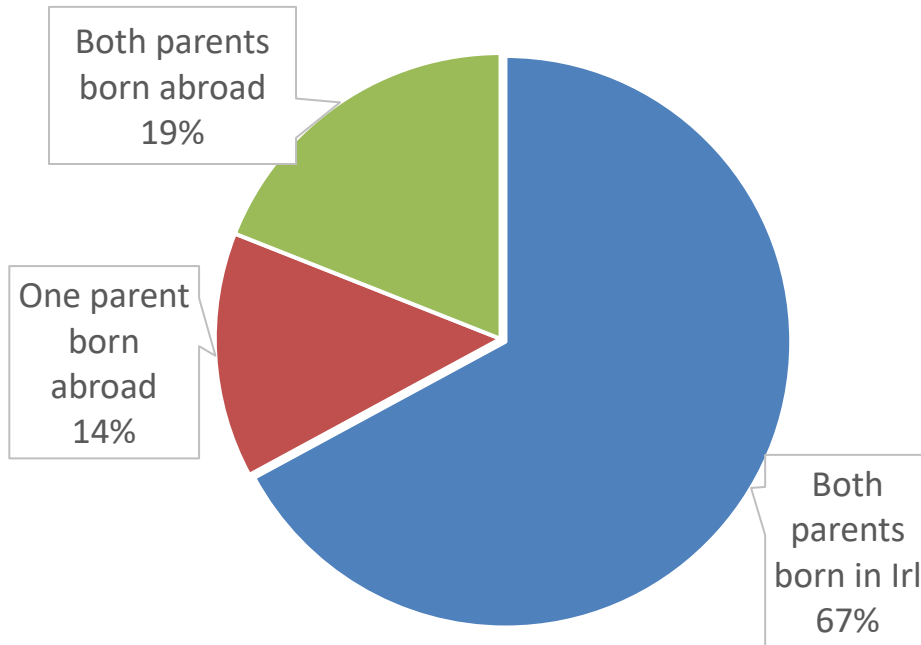
2017 (7,563)

- Parent interview
- Child questionnaire, including **self concept**
- School info
- Child English reading test**

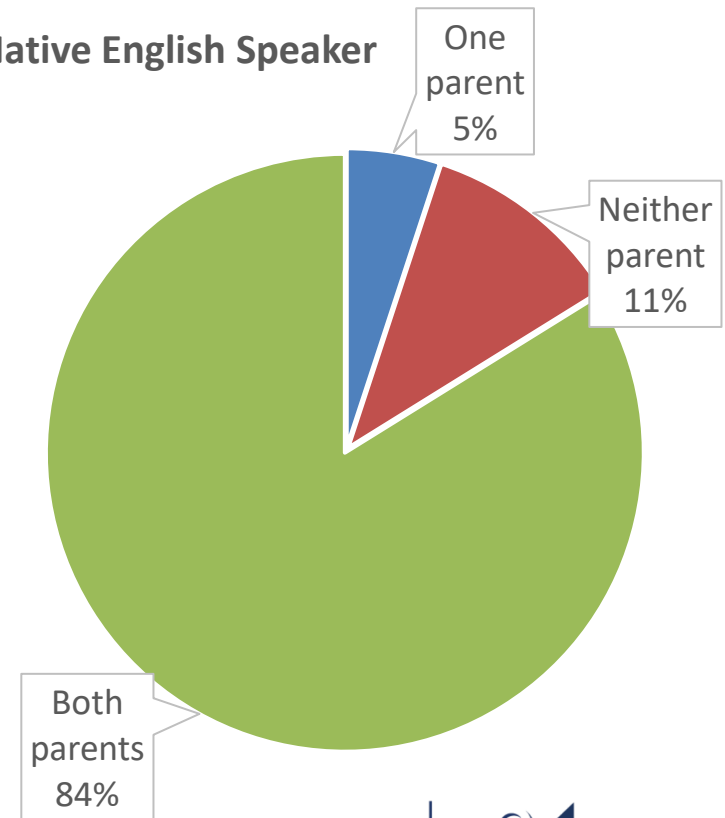
Extensive Info on child, family background, school/creche info

Children of migrants - background

Parents Country of Birth



Native English Speaker



Measurement and Methods

- **Outcomes:** Naming **(English) Vocabulary scale at age 3 and 5** from British Ability Scales (Elliott, et al, 1996)
Drumcondra **(English) Reading Test at Age 9** (close to curriculum)
- **Models** of mean English vocabulary/reading scores (OLS for mean)/ progression over time in language (LDV)
- **Modelling strategy** (1) parental CoB (2) add linguistic background and ethnicity
- (3) Add socio-economic background (4) Add preschool/school (5) Earlier score

3 Socio-economic/ Family factors

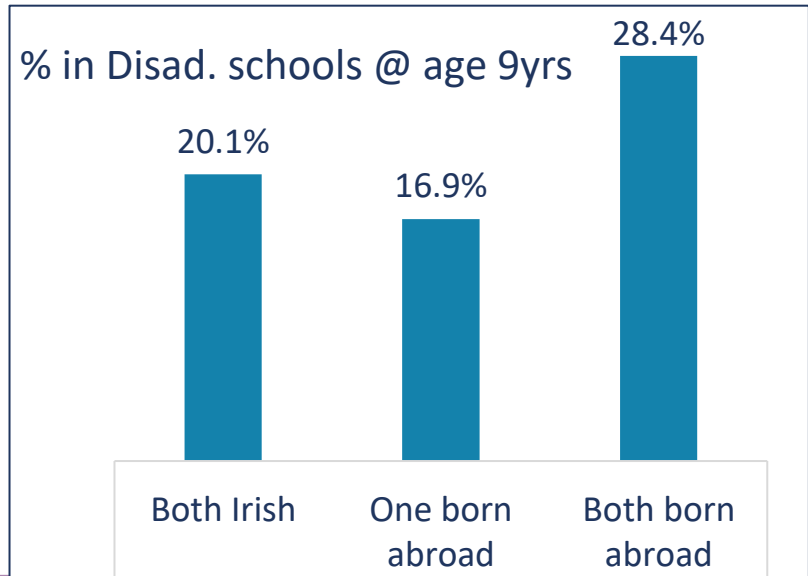
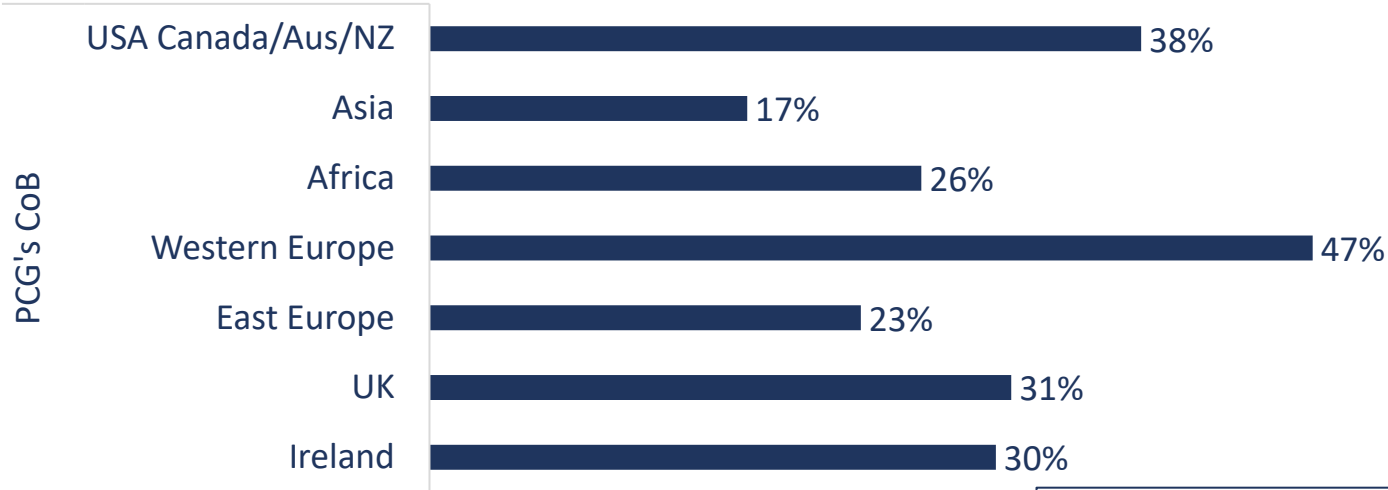
Mother's education
Household income
1 parent or 2?
Child gender, SEN*

4 School/preschool

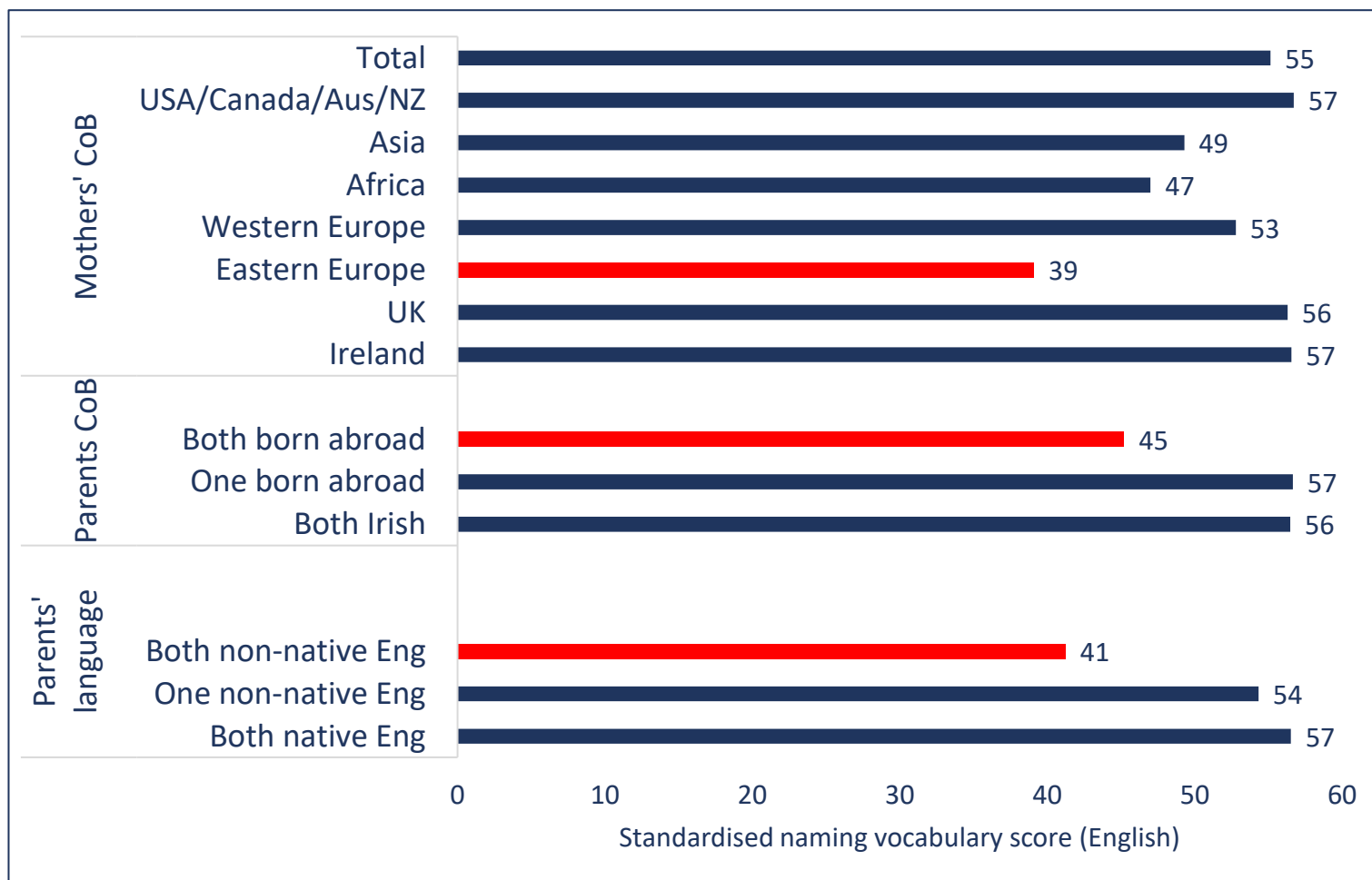
Preschool at 3?
Started school at 5?
School disadvantaged?
School concentration
migrants?

Differences in access to preschool or school type?

% Children in Centre-based Care 3yrs

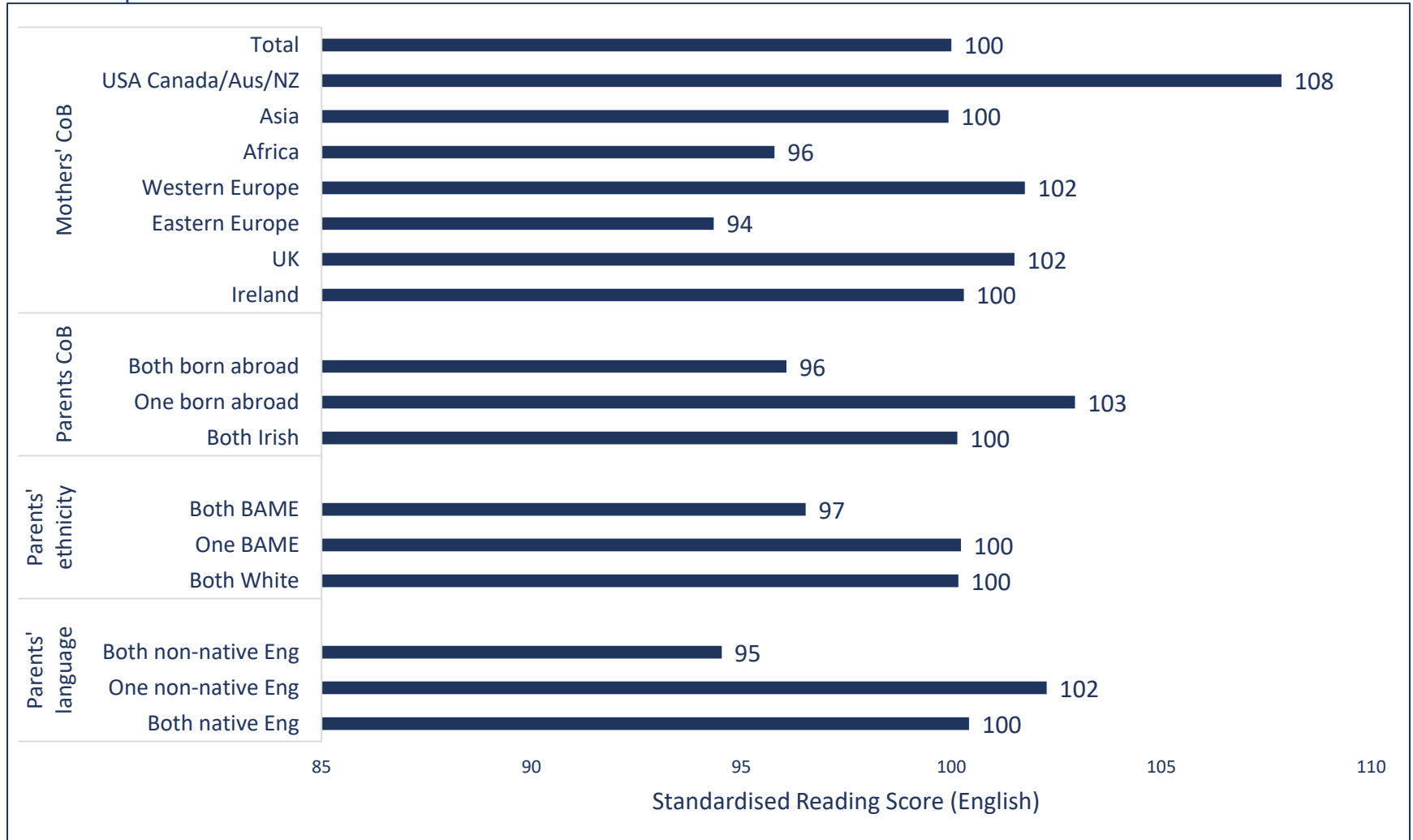


1 Outcome: English vocabulary score (age 5)

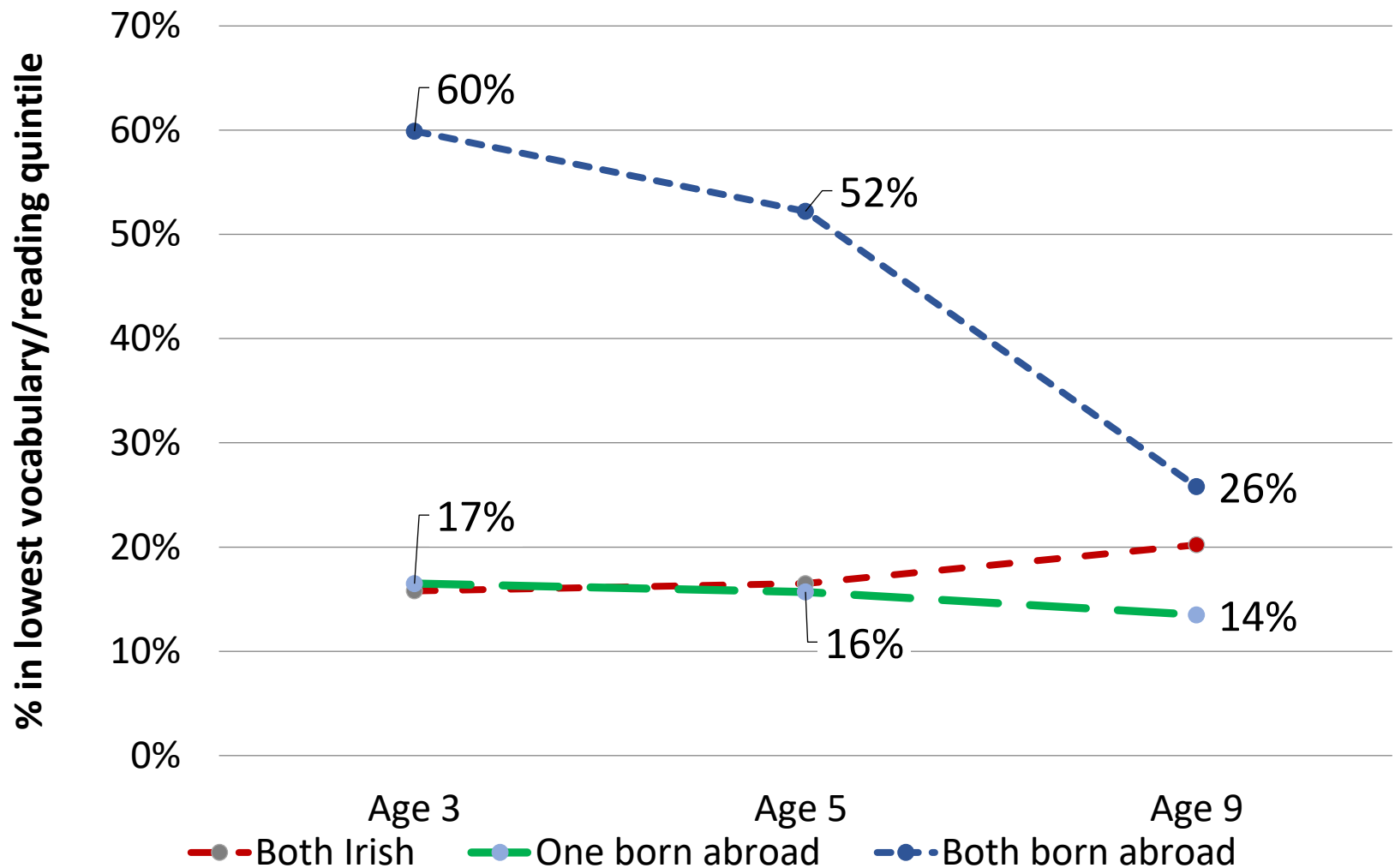


Source: GUI '08 cohort W3, weighted by longitudinal weight.
Note: 'Both' includes single parent families. CoB stands for country of birth.

2. Mean reading scores at age 9



3. Lowest quintile: Narrowing gap in vocab/reading scores from 3yrs to 9yrs



Model (OLS) of English reading at 9

		Parents' birthplace	Add language	Add income ed	+ ECCE/ school	Change (5-9)
MOTHER	UK	1.20 ^	1.23 ^	1.58 *	1.58 *	1.44 *
REF= IRL	E Europe	-3.68 ***	-0.42	-1.48	-1.35	2.70*
	W Europe	0.37	1.12	-0.39	-0.78	0.54
	Africa	-2.11 ^	0.28	0.07	0.15	0.87
	Asia	0.06	3.34 ^	2.29	2.47	1.74
	US, Aus	6.24 **	6.25 **	4.33 *	3.88 *	3.92 *
	'Other'	2.73	5.33	5.25 ^	5.23 ^	4.99 ^
FATHER	UK	-0.19	-0.16	-0.35	-0.7	-0.89
REF IRL	Other	-2.27 **	-0.83	-0.45	-0.61	0.49
	Not resident	-7.19 ***	-6.95 ***	-3.02 ***	-3.26 ***	-2.84 ***
LANGUAGE	1 native Eng		0.23	-0.05	-0.09	0.04
(Ref. Both native Eng)	Both non-native Eng		-5.12 ***	-3.9 **	-4.28 **	-0.95
Ethnicity	One BAME		-0.94	-0.38	-1.09	-1.44
(Ref. Both white)	Both BAME		-0.06	0.25	-0.62	0.32

: *** P < 0.001,
 ** p < 0.01,
 * p < 0.05. ;
 ^ p < 0.1.
 BAME "Black, Asian, and Minority Ethnic".

Mean Score 100
 SD =15

Model (OLS) of English reading at 9

		Parents' birthplace	Add language	Add income ed	+ ECCE/ school	Change (5-9)
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Children's language development between age 3 and 9

- Migrant-origin children progress faster in English language development than Irish peers
- Esp between age 5 and age 9 (at school)
- Migrant origin children move out of the lowest quintile (fifth) – and almost ‘catch up’
- By age 9 much smaller differences, if any, between migrant-origin and Irish children

Some Policy Implications

- Migrant-origin children, in general, are progressing well in English-language skills in primary school, **tho useful to monitor policy effort** for those struggling
- The findings do highlight the importance of **accessing quality learning at pre-school for migrant-origin kids**
- Migrant-origin children more likely to be in disadvantaged schools, so enhanced supports here will benefit them
- Supporting parents' language useful to promote liaison with schools

Limitations & Implications

- English language skills just one outcome - though previous research in Ireland suggests gap lower in maths/science, and report suggests self-concept similar at 9
- Migration is dynamic – future cohorts may differ
- These children are ‘growing up in Ireland’ so children who come as children (eg Ukrainian refugees) may differ
- Previous research in Ireland using an older GUI cohort suggests children who came by 9 OK; though during secondary school more challenging (Smyth et al, 2009)

Key Messages from this research

- Linguistic background greater role than parental region of origin or ethnicity for language skills
- Strong progress in performance in English expressive vocabulary/reading for migrant-origin kids in Ireland between age 5 and 9.
- Despite catch-up, children who have both parents non-native English-speakers are at a disadvantage at nine
- Children with one Irish parent or one English-speaking parent do not differ from children with 2 Irish/English speaking parents

Thanks for listening! Comments welcome

Want to read more:

<https://www.esri.ie/publications/children-of-migrants-in-ireland-how-are-they-faring>

Research on migrant integration:

<https://www.esri.ie/current-research/integration-and-equality-research-programme>

(migrants' housing and family, racial discrimination, covid and migrants in Ireland, integration monitors)

Research on equality/human rights:

<https://www.esri.ie/current-research/human-rights-and-equality-research-programme>