

Family and Fertility in Ireland: A Human Capital Perspective

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**UCD School of Applied Social
Studies**

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Topics

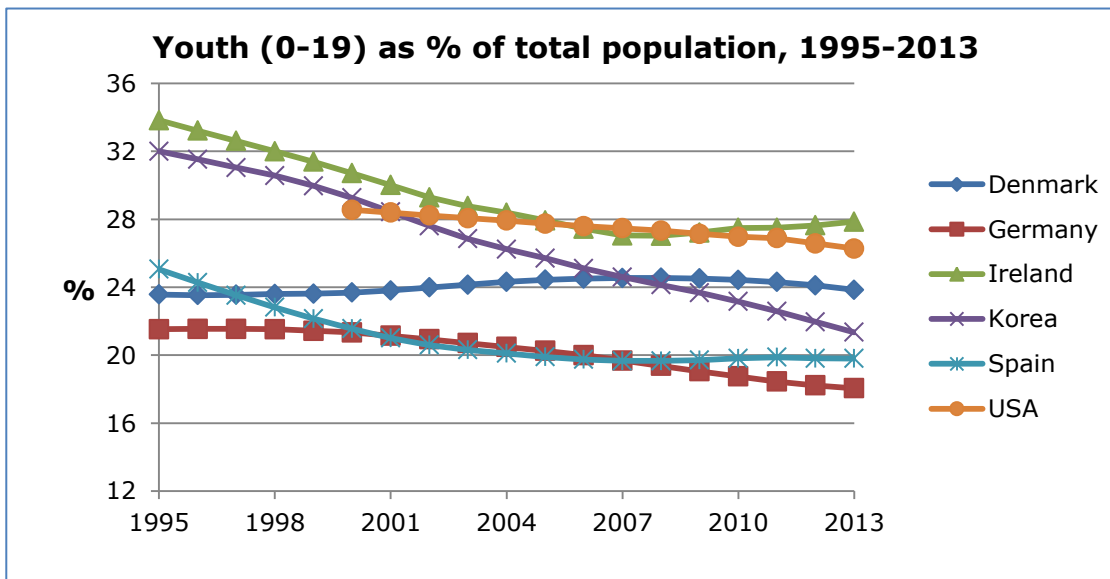
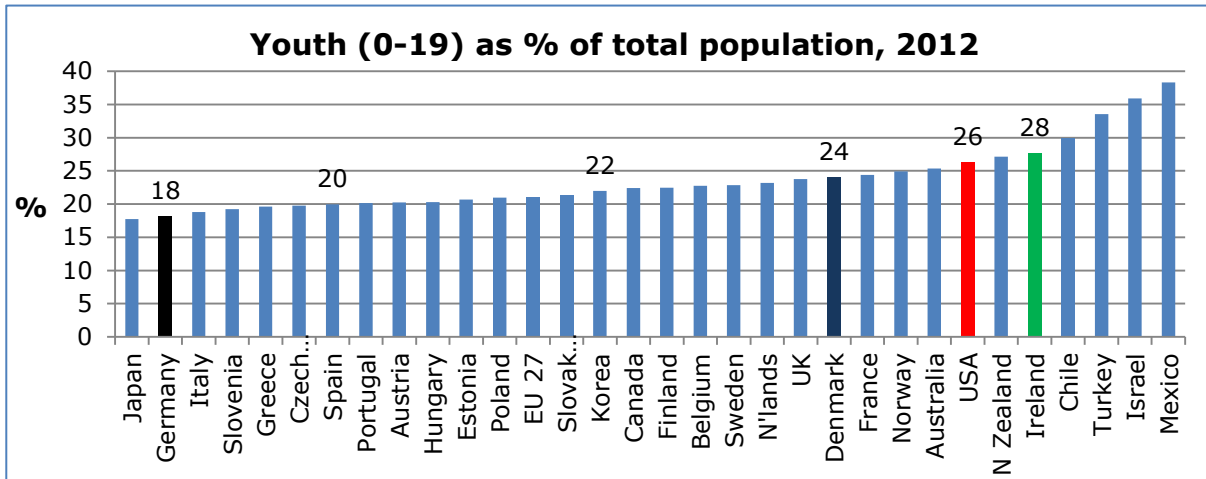
- Ireland's strong human capital record over past 20 yrs
- The contribution of family & fertility patterns to that record
- Some implications for policy

Human Capital: Quantity & Quality among youth & young adults

Human capital: quantity/quality framework

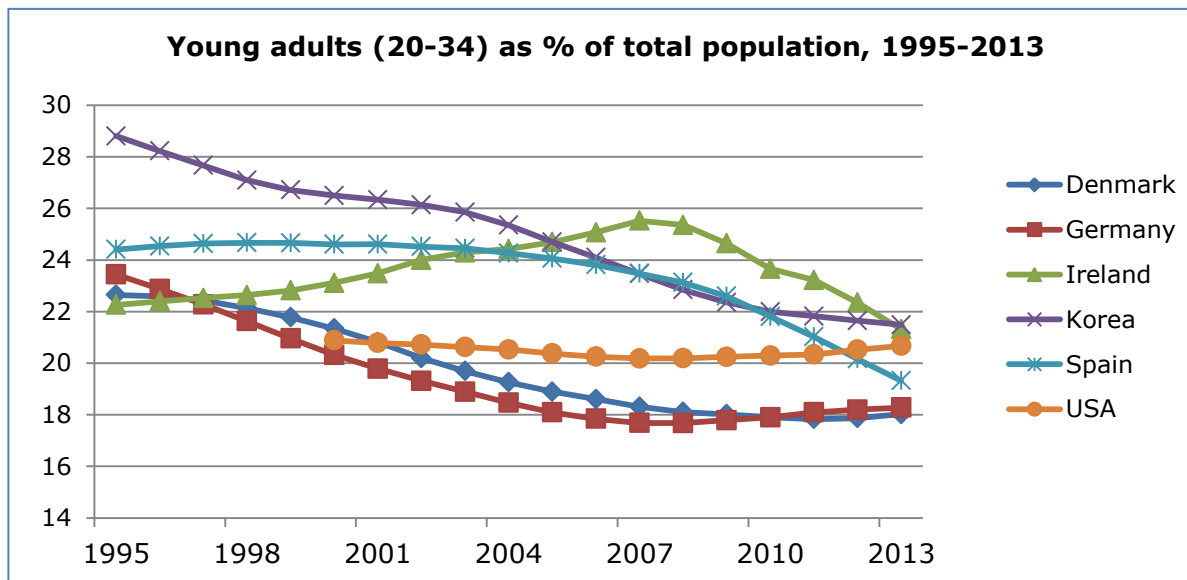
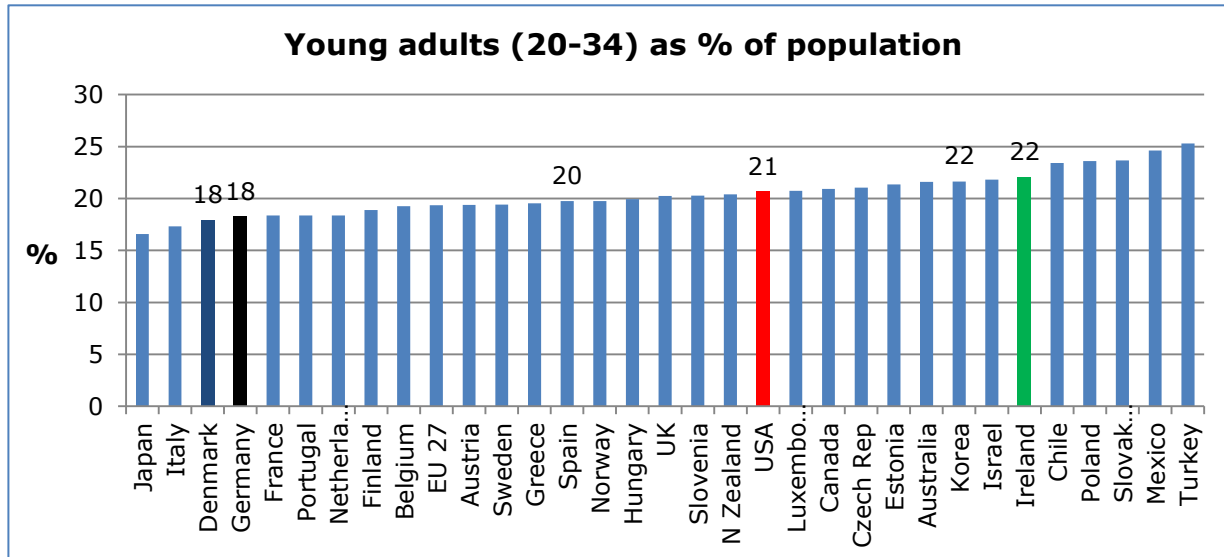
- Simple version:
 - Human capital is a function of population size (quantity) and human capital accumulation per person (quality)
- Future-oriented perspective:
 - Size & educational profile of youth & young adult population
- Ireland in an OECD perspective, esp. compared to:
 - Denmark: Nordic model
 - USA: western world's strongest demographic performer
 - Other countries:
 - Germany: EU's economic powerhouse
 - Spain: Southern European model
 - South Korea: East Asian model

Quantity: youth population



Ireland: largest youth population among the more developed countries, despite decline as a result of fall in fertility in 1980s

Quantity: young adults

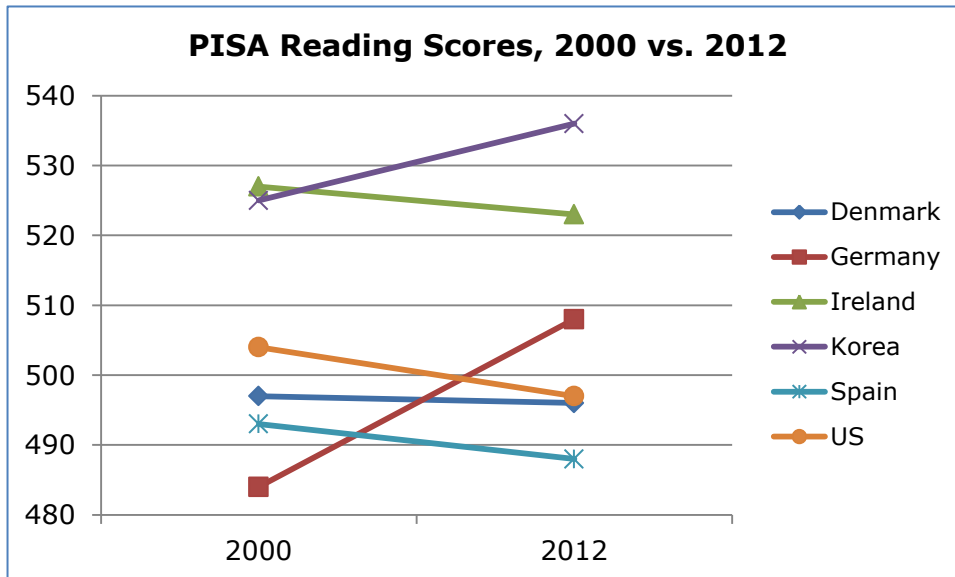
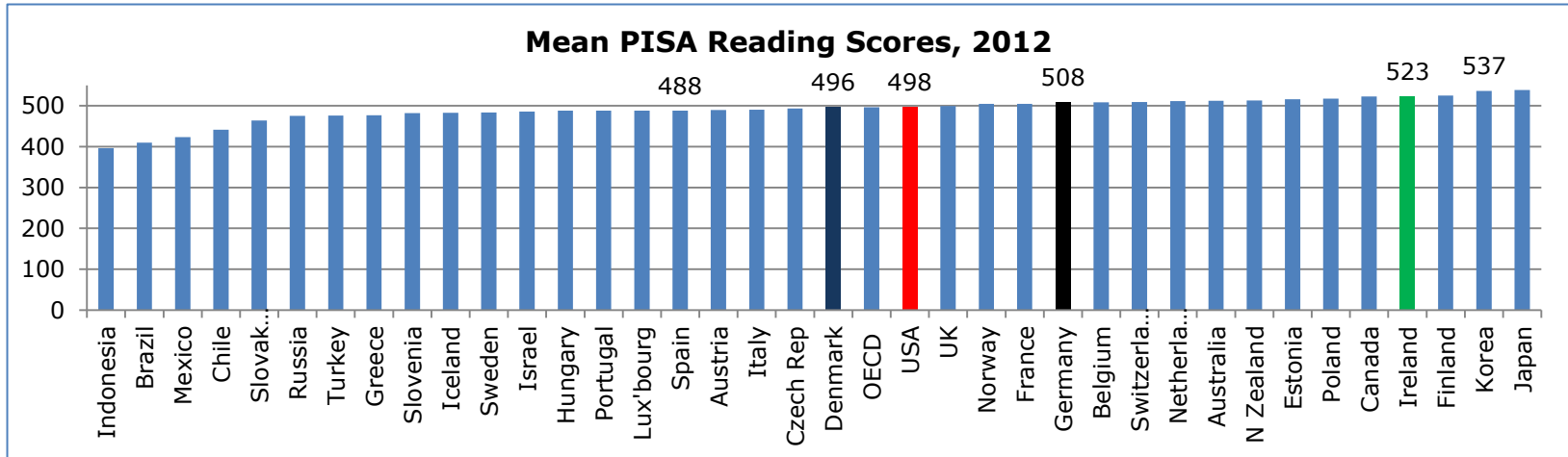


Large young adult population, though heavily reduced by recent emigration

Quality: PISA reading scores

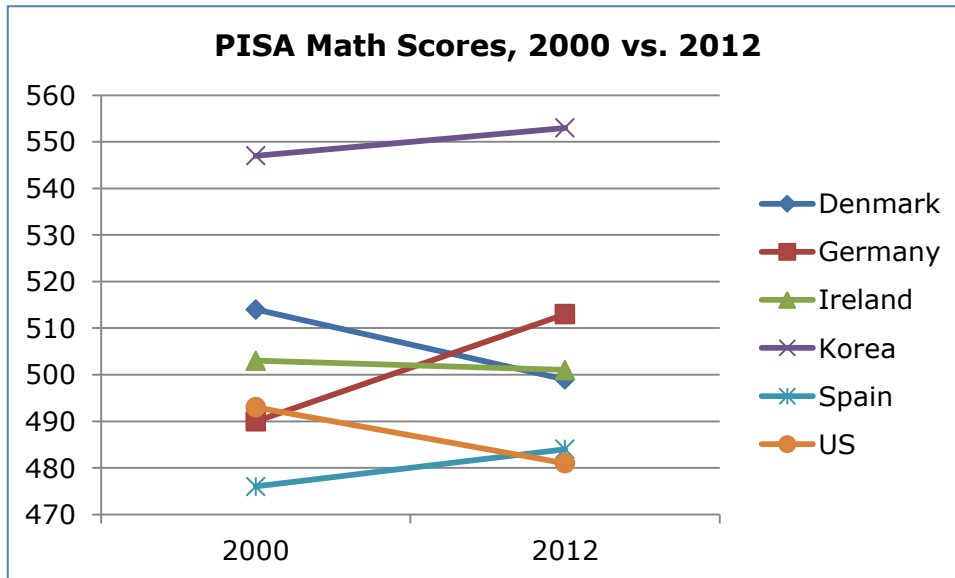
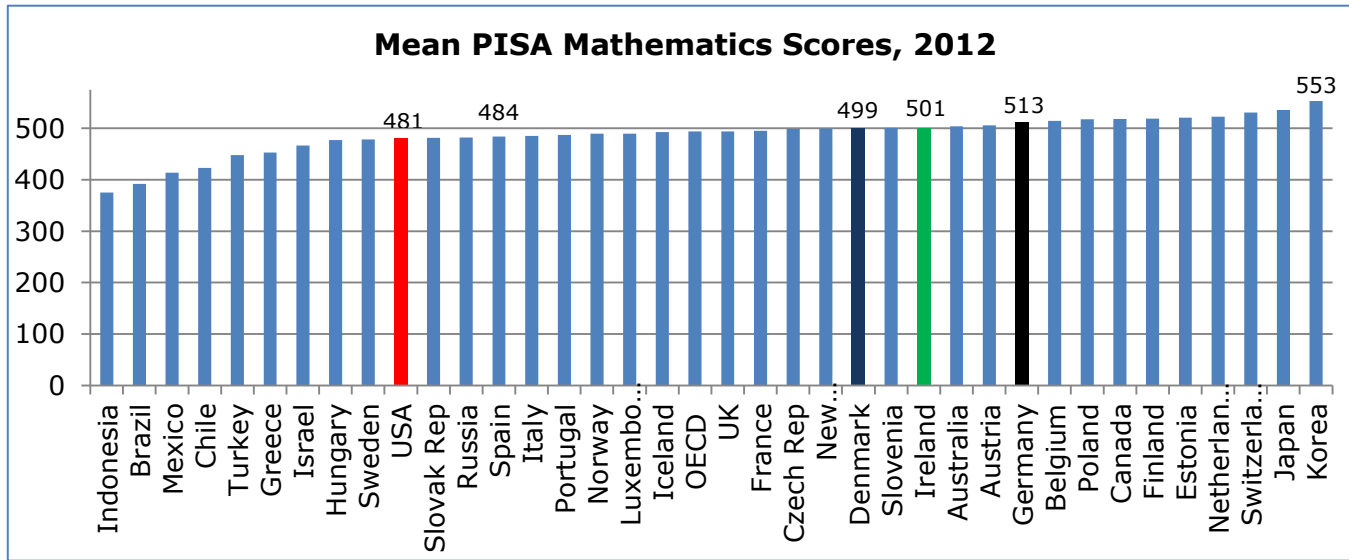
Programme for International Student Assessment

(15 year-olds in OECD countries tested on reading, mathematics & science)



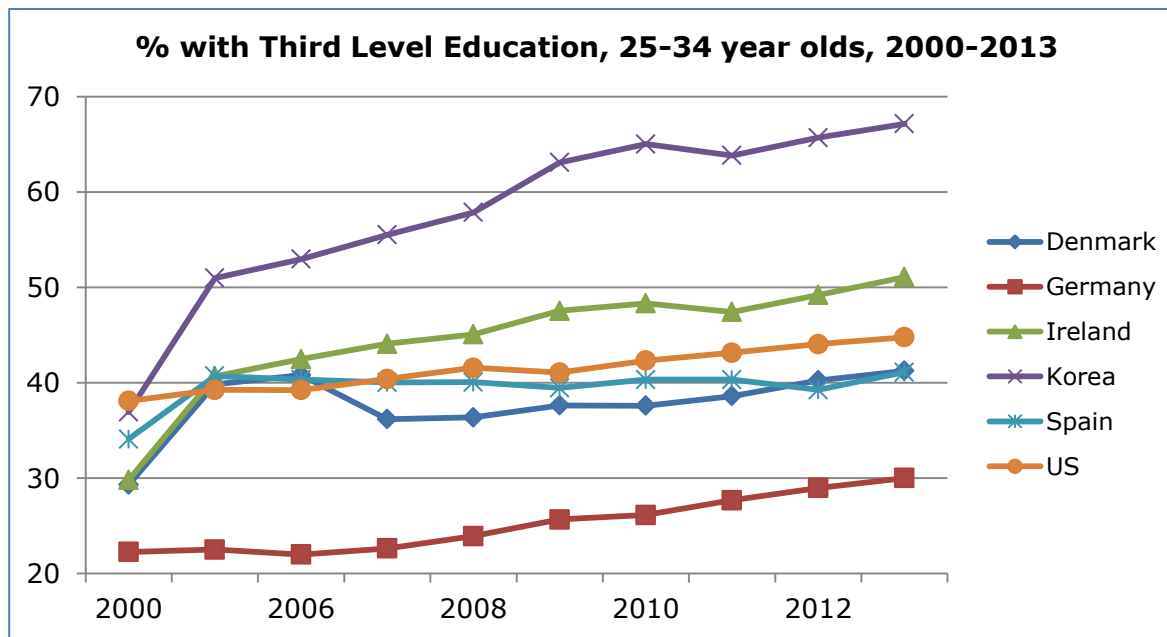
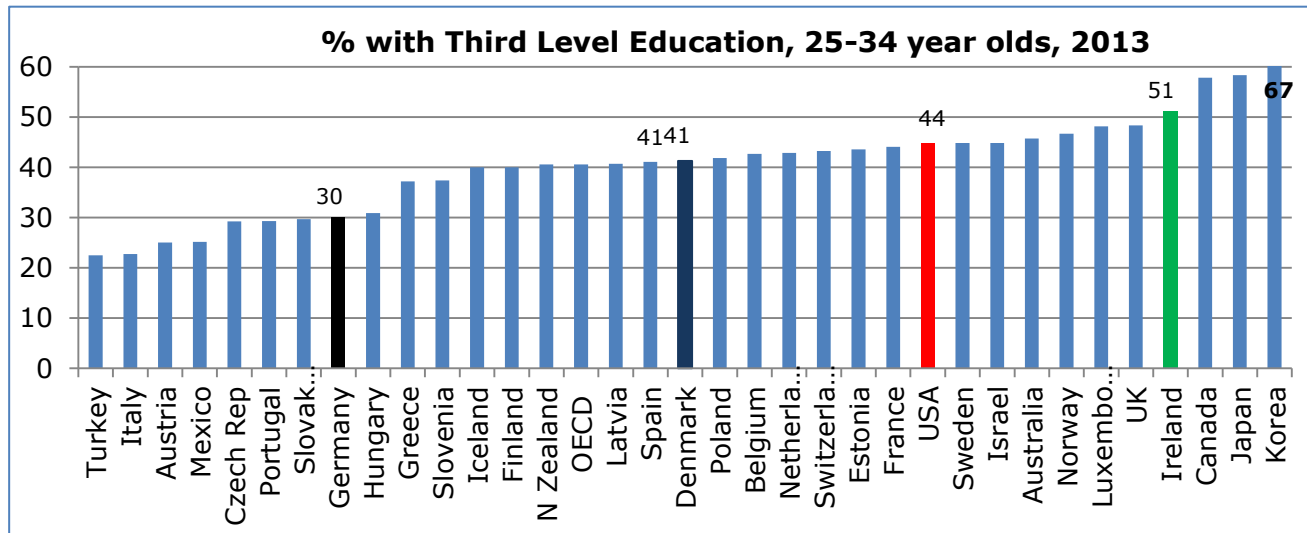
High level of reading ability among Irish 15 year-olds

Quality: PISA mathematics scores



Lower level of maths ability, but still above OECD average

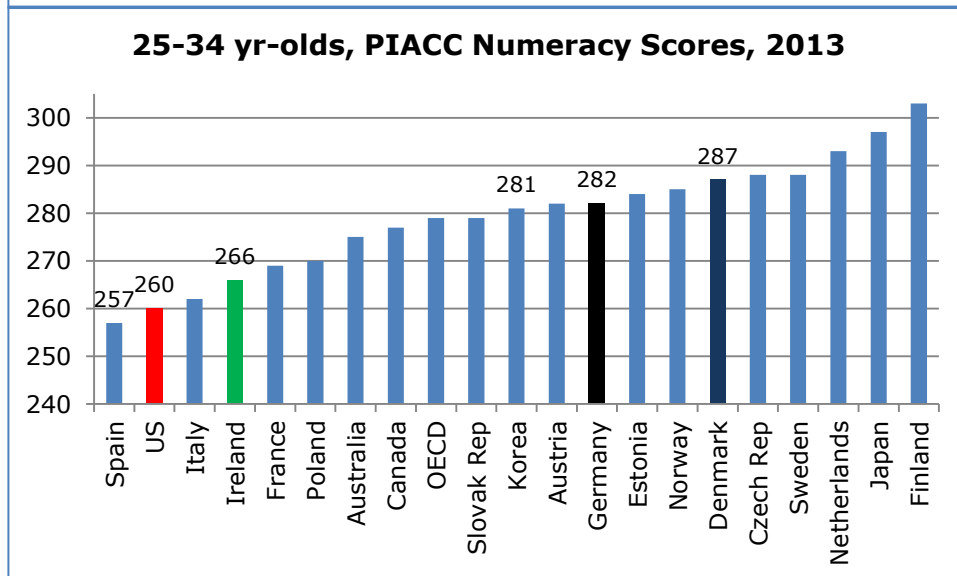
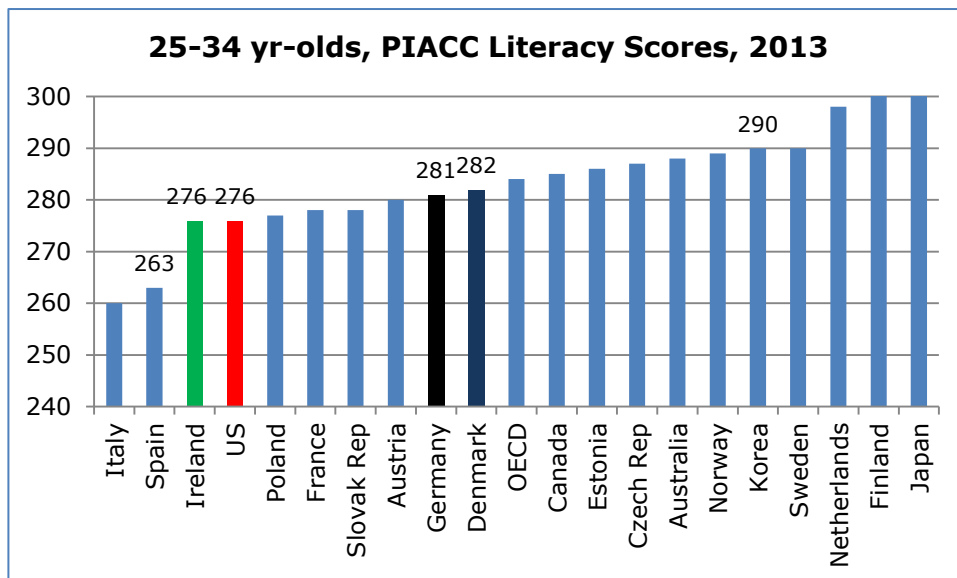
Quality: how many have third-level education?



High proportion of Irish young adults have third level education

Quality: PIACC scores

Programme of International Assessment of Adult Competencies



BUT: low scores on literacy & numeracy among young adults (inconsistent with PISA results for many countries?)

In sum ..

	Quantity	Quality
Denmark	+	+
Germany	--	+-
Ireland	++	+
Korea	--	++
Spain	-	-
USA	++	+-

Conclusion:

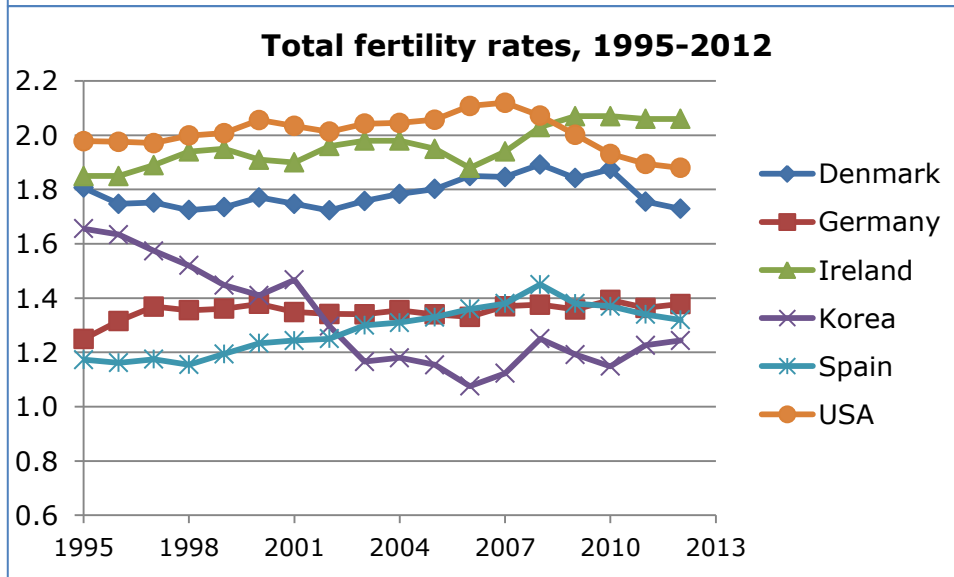
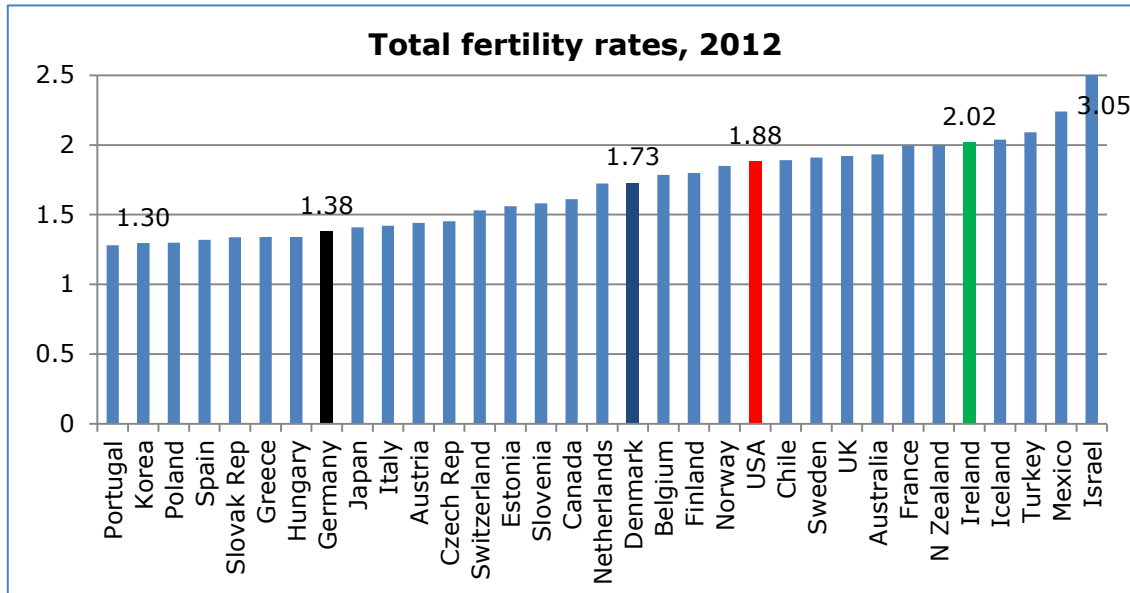
Taking account of both quantity and quality, Ireland's recent record on human capital development is relatively strong

How have Irish family patterns
contributed to this outcome?

Families, children & human capital

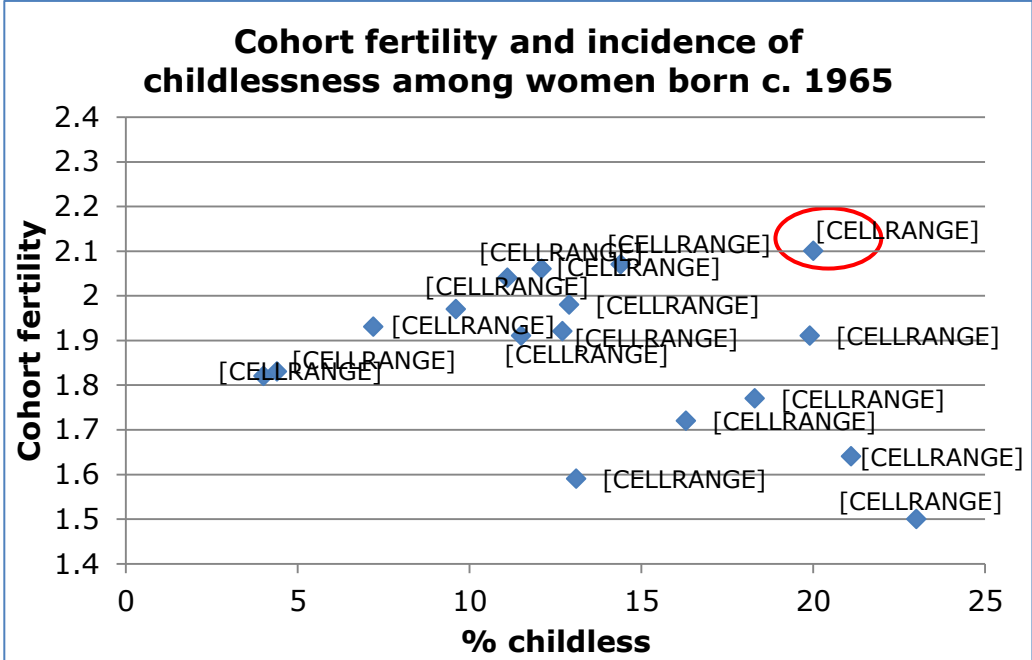
- The standard economic framework -- two key decisions for parents:
 - Children v other 'goods'
 - Quantity v quality of children
- Implications:
 - Small family size → high investment per child
 - But, in affluent societies, with much room for manoeuvre
 - Divert consumption/investment from other goods to children?
 - Moderately large families can be accompanied by reasonably high investment per child
 - What has happened in Ireland?

Total fertility rates



Ireland has remained close to top of OECD fertility table, despite recession

BUT: Ireland combines high cohort fertility and high level of childlessness among women

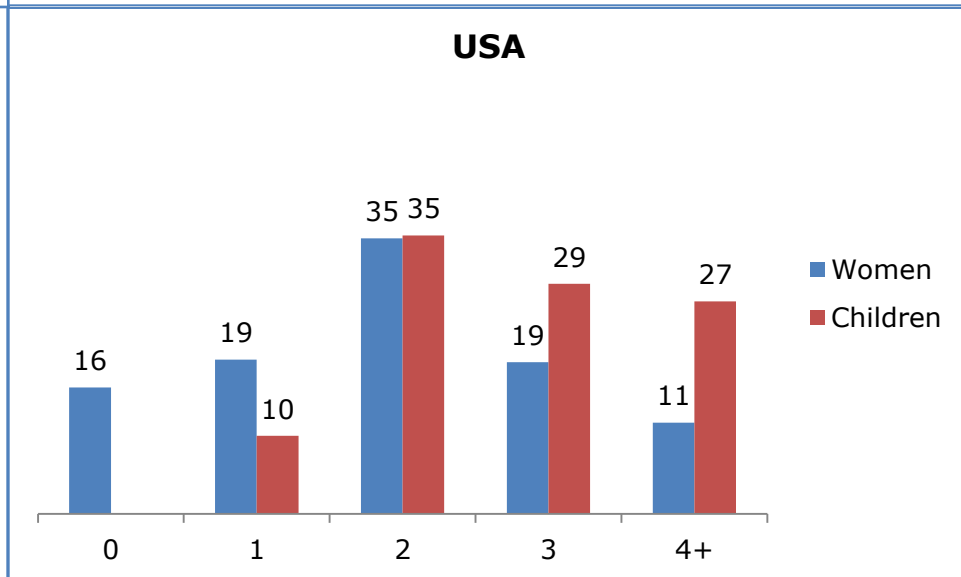
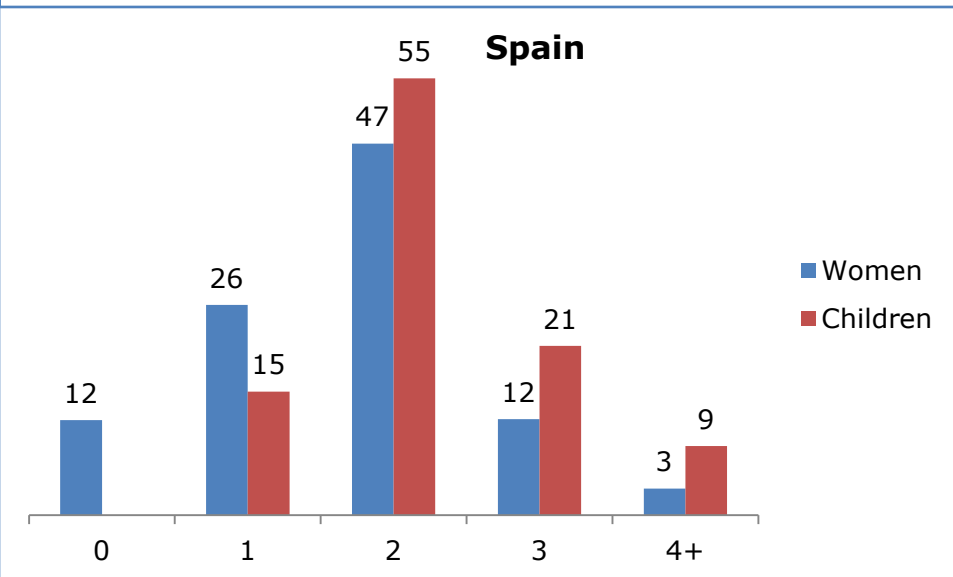
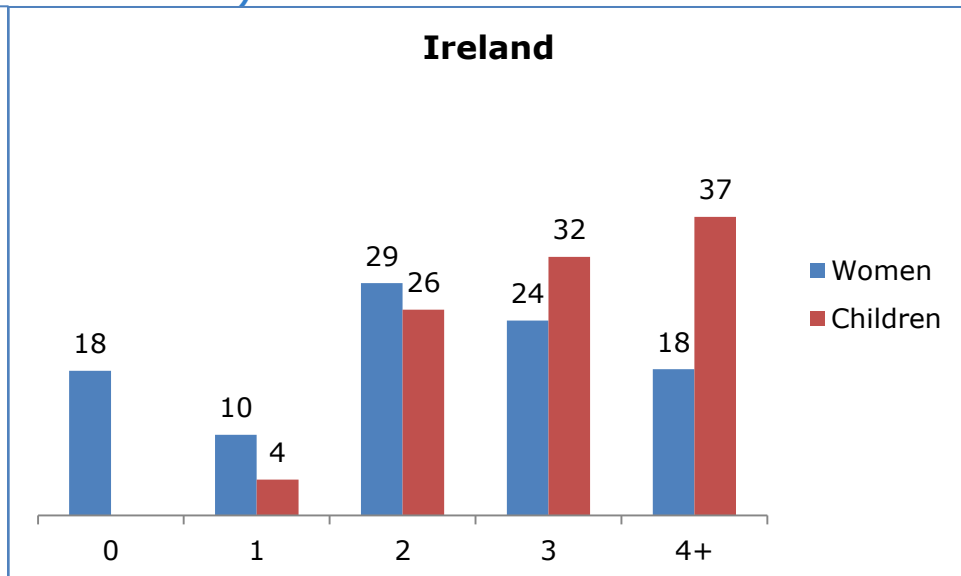
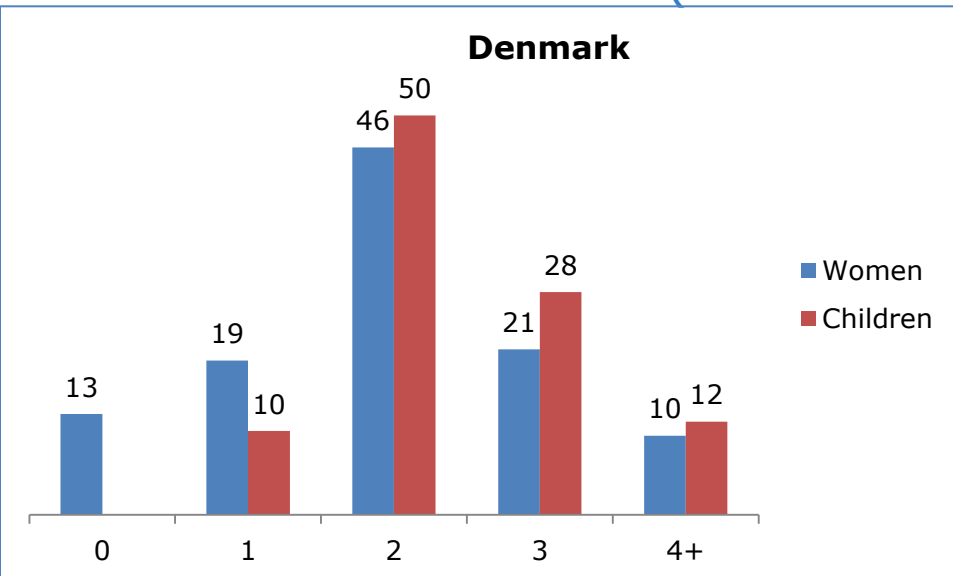


Source: OECD Family Database, except data for Ireland which are from Census 2011 and for Germany which are from Shkolnikov et al. (2007) and relate to women born in 1961

Implications:

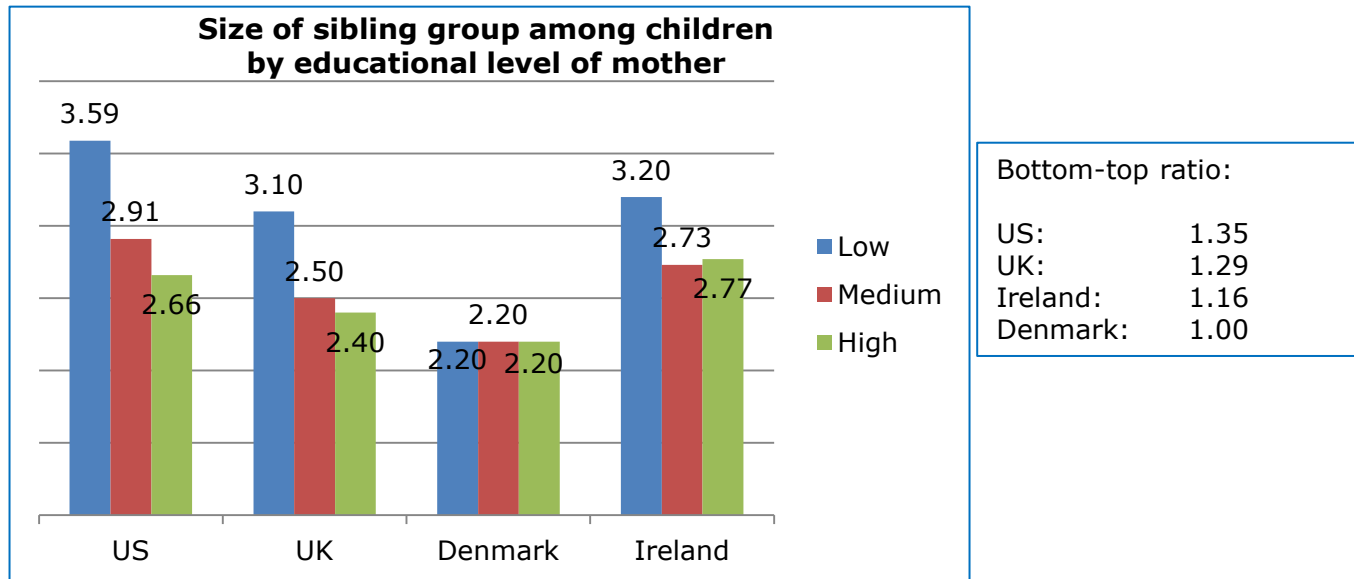
- Since many Irish women have no children, others must be having lots to yield high overall fertility outcome ...
- Many Irish children must be living in relatively large families ...

Women & Children's Family Size (women born c. 1960)



Source: Data from D.M. SHKOLNIKOV et al. (2007) 'The Concentration of Reproduction in Cohorts of Women in Europe and the United States' *Population & Development Review* 33, 1: 67-99.

Social gradient in children's family size

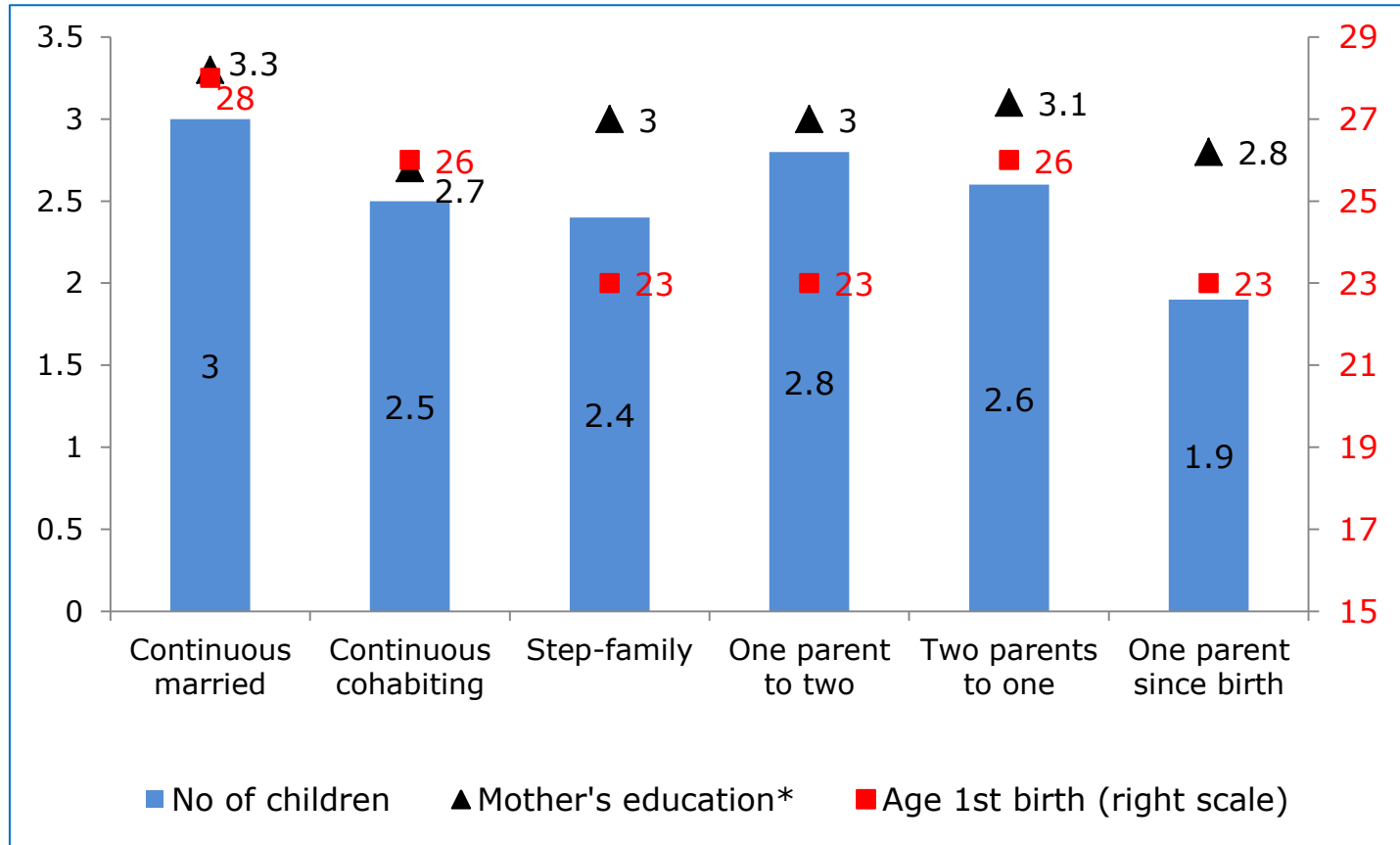


Note: Data are based on samples of 8-9 year-olds in US and Ireland and 11 year-olds in UK and Denmark.

Sources: Derived from US Current Population Survey 2012, UK Millennium Cohort Survey (2012 round), Danish Longitudinal Survey of Children (2007 round) with linked population register data; Census 2011 (Ireland).

Implication: a relatively egalitarian distribution of family resources in Ireland?

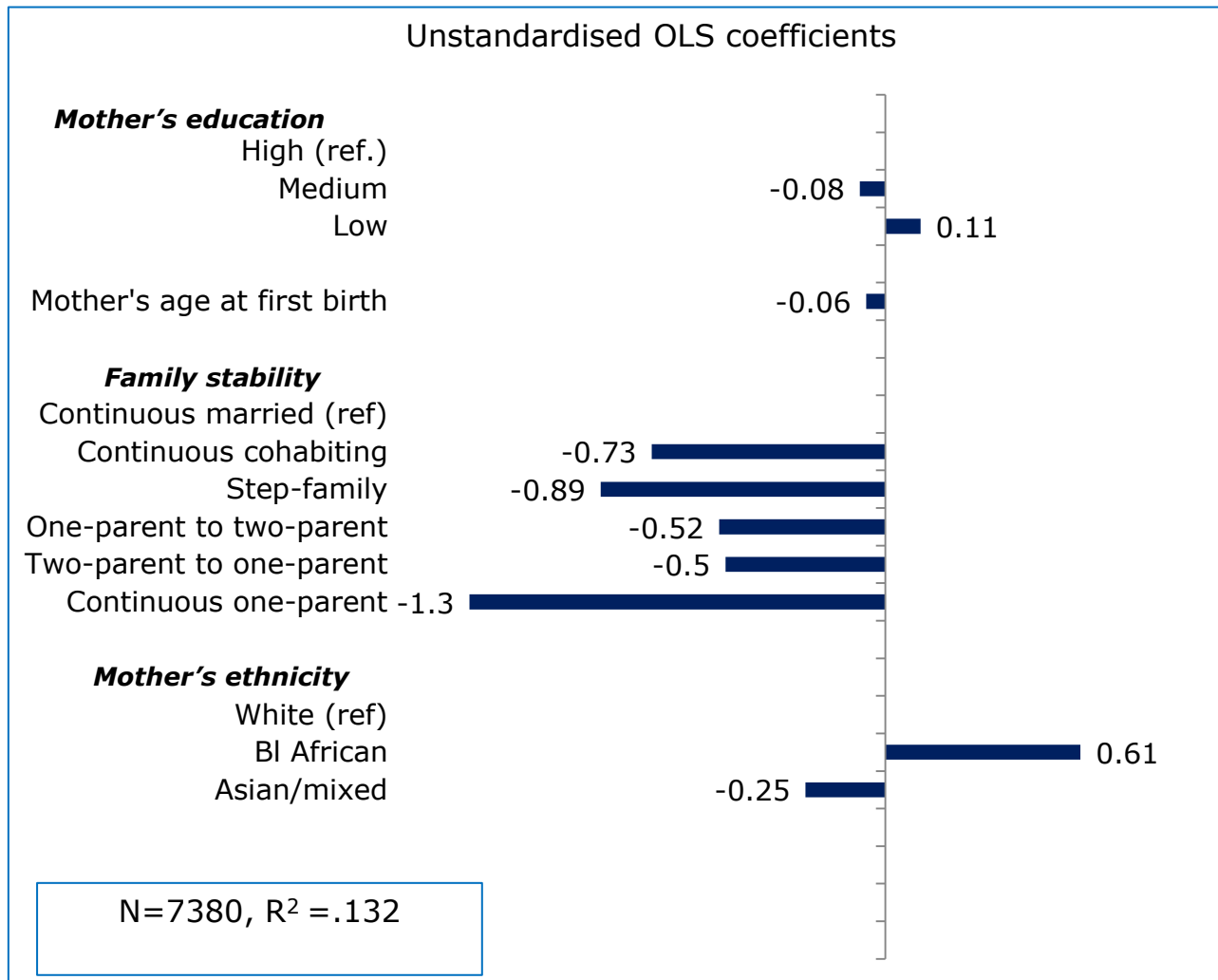
Stable families have more children and the parents are better educated and more mature than in less stable families



* Based on ISCED scale : 1= none or primary, 2= lower secondary, 3= higher secondary, 4= non degree, 5= degree, 6= post-grad.

Source: Growing Up In Ireland Child Cohort data (9 year olds)

Predictors of size of sibling group among 9 year-olds in Ireland



Source: Growing Up In Ireland Child Cohort data (9 year olds)

Some conclusions

- Ireland's strong human capital profile derives from (a) relatively high fertility and (b) high educational achievement
- Combination of (a) and (b) is not as expected: cf. quality/quantity trade-off
- Esp. since children's family in Ireland is especially large: high level of childlessness counterbalanced by high incidence of large families
 - 37% of children in families of 4 or more children
 - Mean children's family size: 3.25
 - Highest in developed world
- Some aspects of family patterns that help investment in children:
 - Fairly flat social gradient in children's family size: no concentration of large families among least well-off – relatively large families among college-educated women
 - Stable families have the most children: family instability reduces family size

Some policy implications

- Role of policy in driving investment in human capital not clear
 - Esp. in regard to quantity: state supports have at most modest positive effect on birth rate
 - Re quality dimension (e.g. educational attainment): biggest spenders don't always get big results (e.g. Denmark)
 - Modest spenders can do reasonably well (e.g. Ireland)
- The importance of cultural influences acting via family patterns
 - But how?
 - Which ones? (a Catholic effect unlikely: cf. Spain)
- Need to recognise the continuing importance of large families
 - Strengthens the case for horizontal distribution: Defend Child Benefit? Restore extra payments for large families? Tax breaks for children?
 - But also with strong vertical distribution: cash or services?