

imagine  
all the  
people

# Irish

CITY OF BOSTON  
Martin J. Walsh  
Mayor

2016

## Irish in Boston

*"imagine all the people"* is a series of publications produced by the Boston Redevelopment Authority for the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Advancement. The series provides a comprehensive profile of Boston's diverse immigrant communities and their numerous contributions to the city's social, cultural and economic landscape. It is part of an ongoing effort to celebrate immigrants and gain insight into how they shape our city.



Irish step dancers at Fenway Park, Don Harney



Mayor Walsh, US ambassador to Ireland Kevin O'Malley and Boston Photographer Bill Brett at Greenhill's Bakery in Dorchester, Jeremiah Robinson

# Introduction

Ireland has a long history of emigration, but since the 1990s Ireland has consistently had positive net migration.<sup>1</sup> Irish immigration to the United States extends back to before the Revolutionary War. In the early 1800s, thousands of Irish Catholic men began moving to the urban centers of the Northeast to take advantage of job opportunities on construction projects such as the Erie Canal. During and following the Great Irish Famine of 1845-1852, millions of Irish families arrived in the United States looking to escape these conditions. The Famine killed as many as one million people, or 12 percent of Ireland's population, and began a period of population decline in Ireland that lasted for more than half a century. Many of the Irish immigrants who came to America during the second half of the nineteenth century settled in already established Irish communities in New York and Boston. The Irish once were the largest foreign-born population in Boston, but today, although large shares of the city's population have Irish ancestry, the foreign-born population is declining. The Irish economy has grown rapidly and the country has attracted many immigrants of its own.

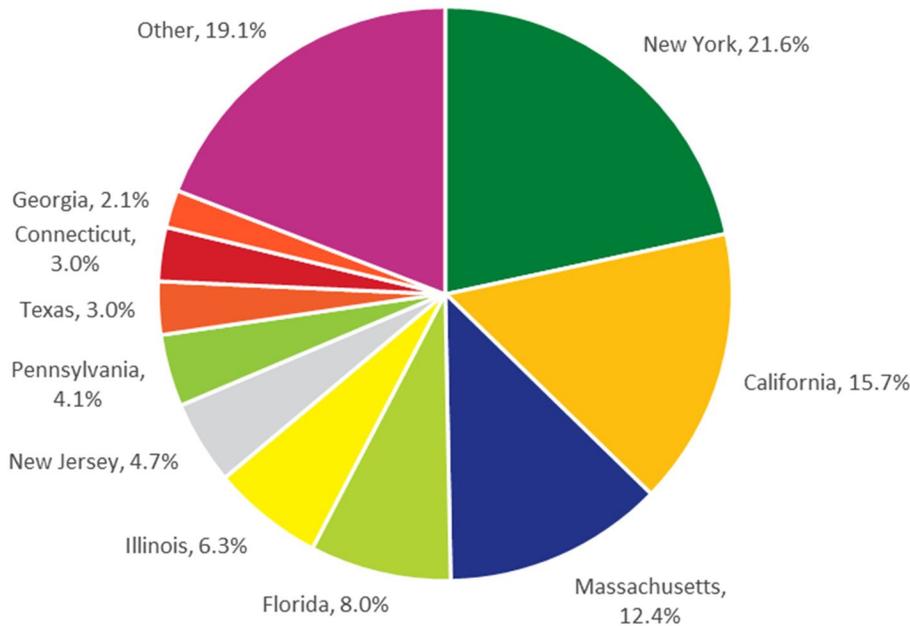
Only the United Kingdom has a larger foreign-born Irish population than the United States, while Australia is the third largest destination of Irish.<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts has the 3rd largest share (12 percent) of the estimated 125,022<sup>3</sup> foreign-born Irish living in the United States in 2014. States with the largest concentrations of Irish include New York (22 percent) and California (17 percent).



Irish pubs on Union Street, Christina Kim

## Population Share

### Share of Foreign-Born Irish Population by State



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division

Of the 15,466<sup>4</sup> foreign-born Irish residing in Massachusetts, approximately 3,213<sup>5</sup> live in Boston. Irish are the 12<sup>th</sup> largest country of origin among Boston's foreign-born population. Overall, foreign-born Irish in Boston constitute 1.8 percent of the city's total foreign-born residents.

Boston's foreign-born Irish, though scattered throughout the city, live mostly in the neighborhoods of Dorchester (31 percent), West Roxbury (18 percent), and South Boston (10 percent). Other neighborhoods with smaller shares are Brighton, Roslindale, and Hyde Park.<sup>6</sup>

The U.S. Census Bureau's ACS Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) allows for the detailed socio-economic analysis of specific populations. For smaller populations like foreign-born Irish in Boston, a 5-year sample is required to limit variation due to sampling error. The analysis that follows uses 2009-2013 ACS PUMS data.

*Almost half of the 3,213 foreign-born Irish in Boston live in Dorchester or West Roxbury.*

## Demographics and Education

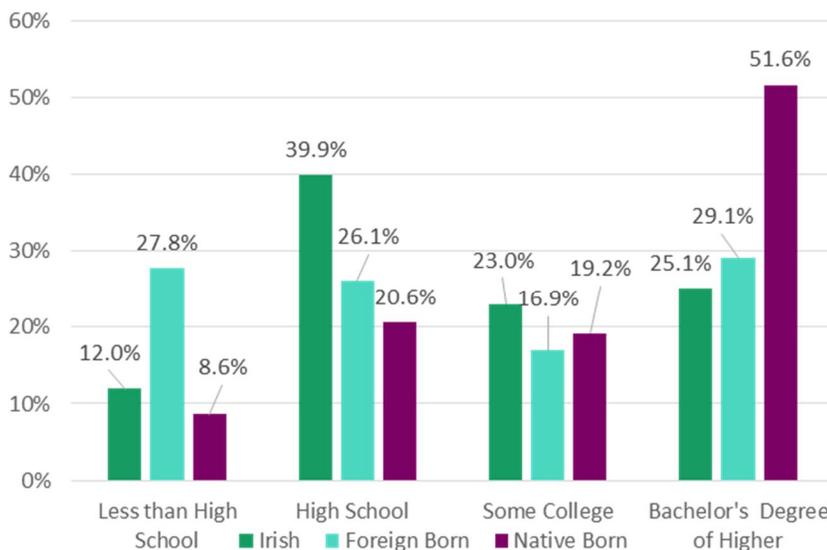
Irish migration has historically been dominated by males, and 57 percent of foreign-born Irish in Boston are male. Nearly 66 percent of foreign-born Irish in Boston are either married (50 percent) or divorced, separated or widowed (16 percent). Approximately 48 percent of all foreign-born Irish are between the ages of 35 and 64, and the median age of the population is 44 years. A smaller share of foreign-born Irish in Boston have arrived in the United States after 2000 (36 percent) compared to all foreign born (43 percent). Slightly less than half of foreign-born Irish (49 percent) are naturalized U.S. citizens.

Only 12 percent of foreign-born Irish ages 25 years or older in Boston have not completed high school. This share is less than for all foreign-born residents (28 percent) and only slightly greater than the native-born population (9 percent). Approximately 40 percent of foreign-born Irish have a high school diploma as their highest level of educational attainment.

While 48 percent of foreign-born Irish 25 years or older have attended college, only 25 percent have completed at least a bachelor's degree, compared with 29 percent of the entire foreign-born population, and 52 percent of the native born. Less than 12 percent of foreign-born Irish living in Boston hold a graduate or professional degree, compared with 14 percent of all foreign-born and 22 percent of the native born.

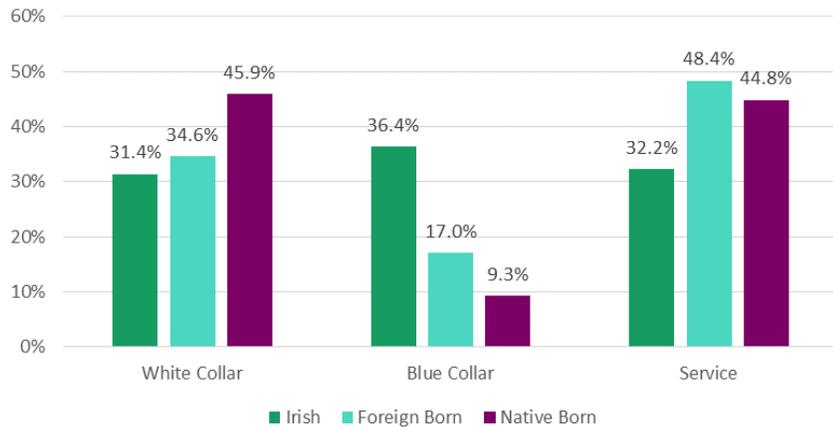
*Irish foreign born are likely to have a high school diploma as their highest educational attainment.*

### Educational Attainment - Population 25 Years and Older



The labor force participation rate<sup>7</sup> of foreign-born Irish is 72 percent compared to 68 percent for all foreign born and 69 percent for the native-born population. Even with their higher levels of educational attainment, a greater share of foreign-born Irish work in what are generally categorized as blue-collar jobs (36 percent) and fewer work in white-collar jobs than the native born and all foreign born<sup>8</sup>. Foreign-born Irish are underrepresented in service sector jobs (32 percent) even when compared to the native born (45 percent). The most common blue-collar occupation among the Irish is construction.

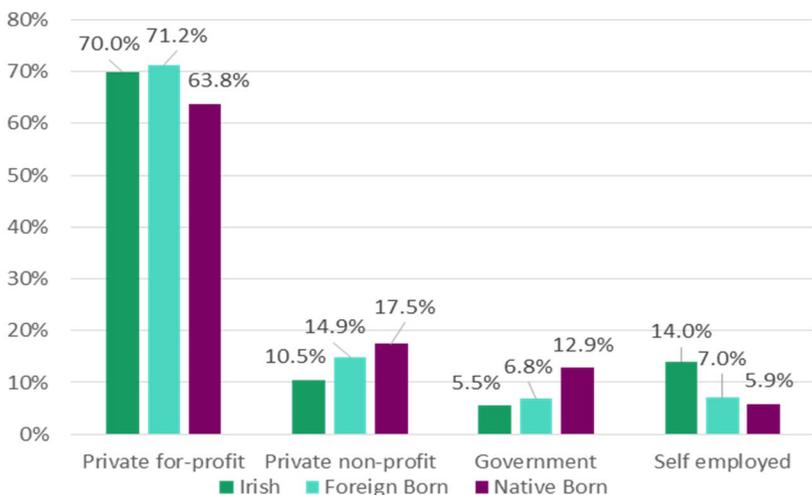
### Occupations by Nativity



U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

Twice as many foreign-born Irish in Boston (14 percent) are self-employed (excluding unpaid family workers), compared to all foreign born (7 percent) and the native born (6 percent). Fewer foreign-born Irish work in the public sector (5.5 percent) than do all foreign-born (6.8 percent) and native born in Boston (12.9 percent).

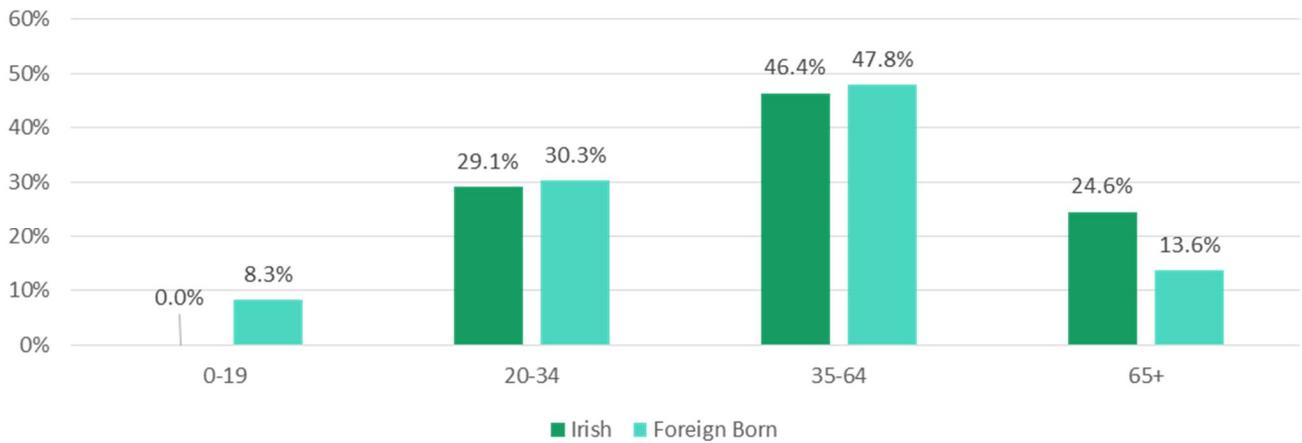
### Employment by Type of Employer



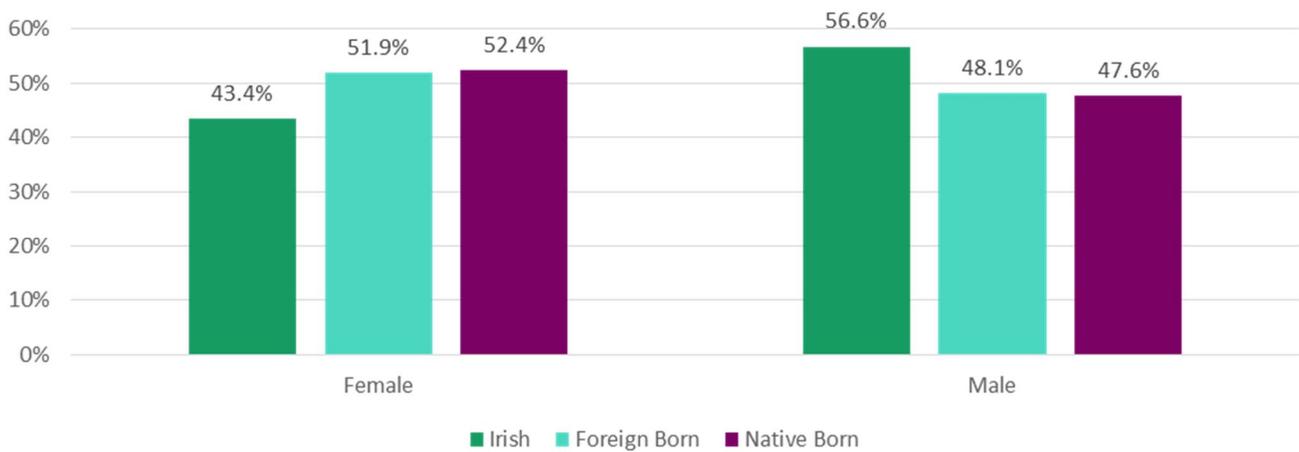
U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

# Imagine all the people:

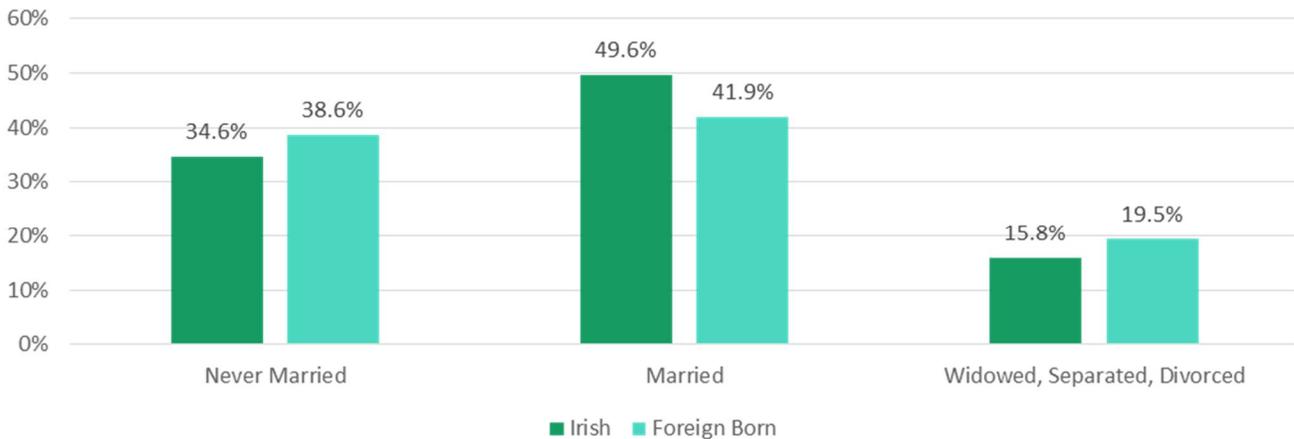
## Age



## Gender

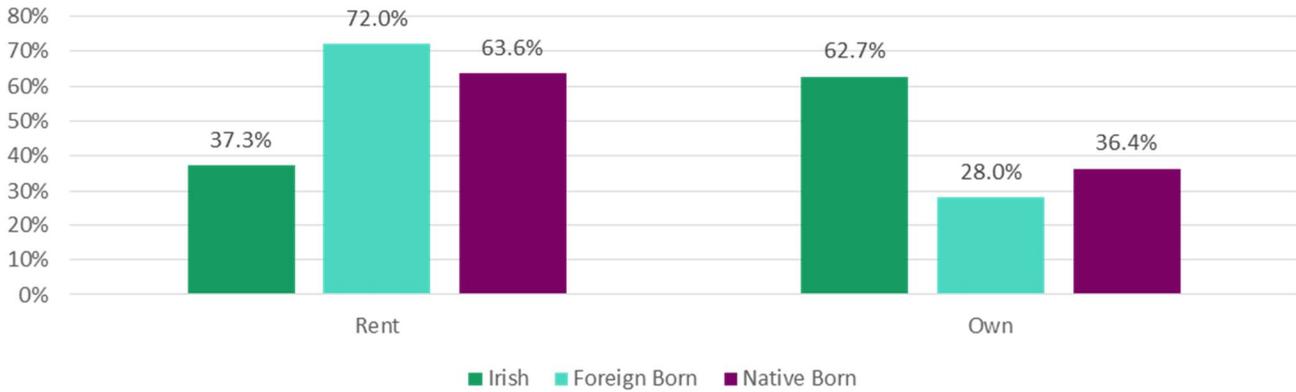


## Marital Status

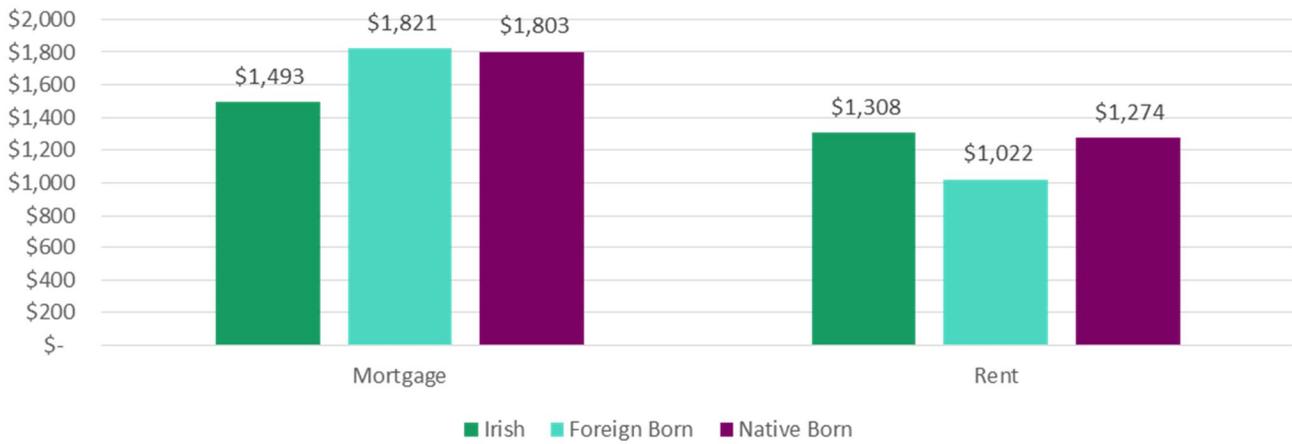


Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

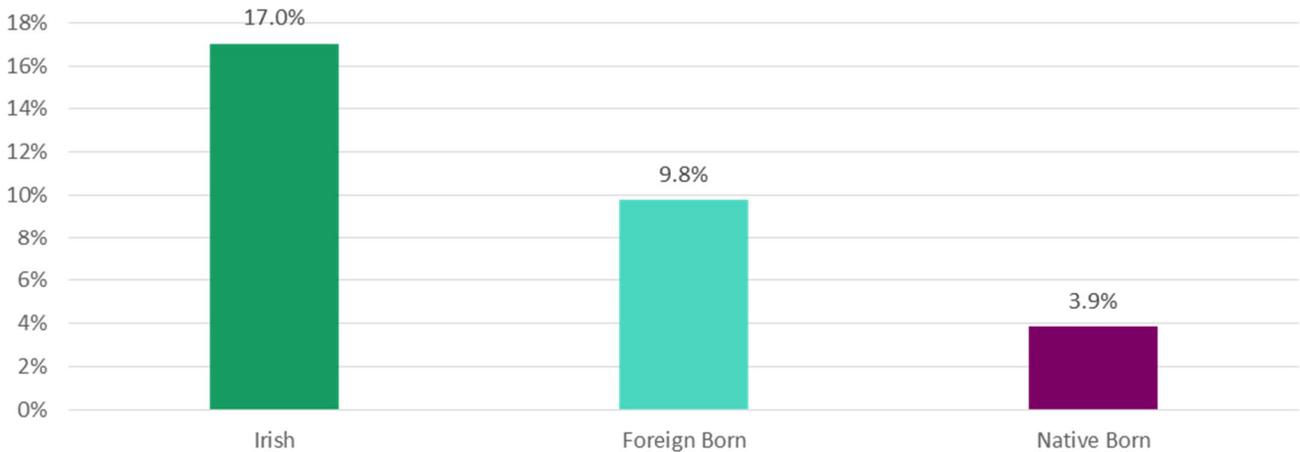
## Housing Tenure\*



## Housing Costs\*



## Medical Uninsurance



\*Housing data are based on the householder's nativity.

# imagine

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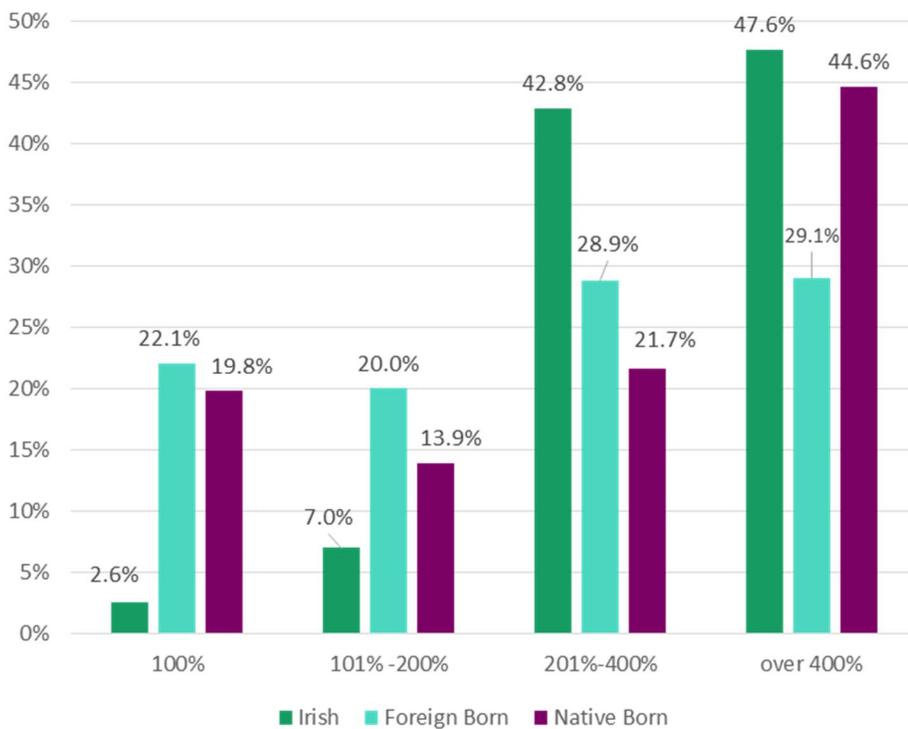
imagine

## Standard of Living

Nearly 48 percent of foreign-born Irish have achieved a middle class standard of living, compared with 45 percent of Boston's native-born population, and 29 percent of all foreign born. A family income four times the poverty level is used as a proxy for a middle-class standard of living. The actual income needed to achieve this standard depends on the size and composition of the family. For a two-person family in 2014, a middle class income would be at least \$62,920. In contrast, only 3 percent of foreign-born Irish live below the federal poverty level compared to 20 percent for the city's population.

*Only 3% of foreign-born Irish are poor, and 48% are at least middle class.*

## Household Income compared to Poverty Threshold



U.S. Census Bureau, 2009-2013 American Community Survey, PUMS, BRA Research Division Analysis

## Economic Impact

Foreign-born Irish contribute to the local economy through their labor and consumer spending. The total value of their economic contributions was estimated using a Regional Economic Model (REMI) that calculated the value of goods and services consumed on each dollar spent. Foreign-born Irish in Boston generated total expenditures of nearly \$60 million in 2014.<sup>9</sup> These annual expenditures contributed slightly less than \$36 million to the regional product and generated \$2 million in state and local taxes.<sup>10</sup> In total, these expenditures supported 250 jobs in the Massachusetts economy.<sup>11</sup>



St. Patrick's Day Parade in South Boston, Jeremiah Robinson

## Conclusion

The number of Irish who migrate to Boston today is smaller compared to migration in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, Ireland still ranks 12<sup>th</sup> among other immigrant sending countries in the city. Foreign-born Irish in Boston contribute to the economy, culture, and civic life of the city. Foreign-born Irish are more likely to work in construction and be self-employed. They have greater share of their population with a middle-class income than the native-born population and have a significantly smaller share of their population living below the federal poverty level than others in Boston.

<sup>1</sup>Ruhs, M and Quinn, E., Ireland: From Rapid Immigration to Recession, Migration Policy Institute (2009).

<sup>2</sup>UNICEF Migration Profiles, 2013.

<sup>3</sup>American Factfinder website Table B05006 reports 125,022 Irish residing in the United States in 2014 with a margin of error of +/- 5,318. The 124,622 estimate reported for this analysis was tabulated from 2014 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample data. Both estimates contain a margin of error due to sampling methodology. For more information on American Fact Finder please see: <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?lang=en>.

<sup>4</sup>American Factfinder website Table B05006 reports 15,777 Irish residing in Massachusetts with a margin of error of +/- 2,118 in 2014. The 15,466 estimate reported for this analysis was tabulated from 2014 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample data. Both estimates contain a margin of error due to sampling methodology. Lower survey response rates due to documentation issues may result in an undercount of the population.

<sup>5</sup>American Factfinder website Table B05006 reports 3,240 Irish in Boston with a margin of error of +/- 922 in 2014. The 2014 U.S. Census Bureau Public Use Microdata Sample data estimates 3,213 foreign-born Irish for Boston. Both estimates contain a margin of error due to sampling methodology.

<sup>6</sup>2009-2013 American Community Survey, American Factfinder, BRA Research Analysis.

<sup>7</sup>Defined as the share of the working-age population that is either currently employed or seeking work. U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016).

<sup>8</sup>For a smaller population like foreign-born Irish in Boston, occupations fall into three broad categories. White collar includes managerial & professional, health care, education, and arts, design entertainment, sports & media occupations. Service includes service, sales, office & administrative support, community & social service occupations. Blue collar includes construction, farming, fishing, and forestry, and production occupations. Military specific occupations and long-term unemployed are excluded from the analysis.

<sup>9</sup>BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI.

<sup>10</sup>BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI.

<sup>11</sup>BRA Research Division Analysis, 2014, Regional Economic Model, Inc., REMI.



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FOR IMMIGRANT  
ADVANCEMENT

*Martin J. Walsh, Mayor of Boston*



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