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**Abstract**

Ireland has experienced substantial increases in participation in higher education in recent years. This paper examines whether or not increased admission rates between the mid-1990s and 2000s led to a reduction in social class inequality in access to higher education. We draw on two data sets, one, a dedicated survey of new entrants to higher education in 2004, the other, a combination of the results of a series of school leavers' surveys conducted in the mid-1990s and early 2000s. We show that the period has been characterised by both continuity and change. Continuity is reflected in persistent social inequalities in access to higher education: the children of higher professionals and farmers, in particular, have maintained their privileged access to higher education. Change is reflected in some closing in relative social inequalities, partly arising as more advantaged groups reach a saturation point in progression to higher education, and partly due to the children of manual workers increasing their participation rates. (HRK / Abstract übernommen)