



Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2024

Technical Notes

Version 3: 9 September 2025

www.ark.ac.uk/nilt

Contents

	Page
What is the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey?	i
Links with other surveys	i
Technical details of the 2024 survey	
The overall design	iii
Ethical approval	iii
Survey content	iii
Pilot and mainstage fieldwork	iv
Advance letter	iv
Sampling design	v
Sampling errors and confidence intervals	vii
Data preparation	vii
Weighting	vii
Deriving social class variables	viii
Personal and household income	viii
Comparison with other data sources	ix
The NILT dataset	xii
Variables on the dataset	xii
Finding a topic in the questionnaire	xiv
NILT website	xiv
Contact information	xiv

Prepared by:

Paula Devine

ARK

School of Social Sciences and Education

Queen's University Belfast

Email: p.devine@qub.ac.uk

URL: <https://www.ark.ack/nilt>

What is the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey?

The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey was launched in the autumn of 1998. Its mission is to monitor the attitudes and behaviour of people in Northern Ireland annually to provide a time-series and a public record of how our attitudes and behaviour develop on a wide range of social policy issues. The survey explores a range of topics, with some topics repeated every year (for example, Community/Good Relations) and others varying from year to year. In general, the questions are designed to be repeated in years to come.

The survey aims to provide:

- A local resource for use by the general public;
- Trusted and independent evidence to inform policy making; and,
- A data source for a more theoretical academic debate.

We would like to thank the funders of the 2024 survey who have been supportive of the overall aims of the project, namely:

- The Executive Office;
- Department of Justice;
- Public Prosecution Service;
- Commissioner for Victims of Crime;
- Department of Education;
- Department of Health;
- Police Ombudsman; and,
- EPIC Futures NI.

We would especially like to thank all the respondents participating in the survey.

Links with other surveys

The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey is a direct successor of the Northern Ireland Social Attitudes survey (NISA) which ran from 1989 to 1996. NISA was linked to the British Social Attitudes survey (BSA), and, by running the same topics as BSA, it provided a time-series of social attitudes allowing comparisons with Britain. However, with the changing political context in Northern Ireland, it was agreed that the new Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey would be better served by cutting its links with its British counterpart. NILT now carries on the tradition of a time-series of attitudes but has shifted the focus away from comparisons with Britain. It is largely Northern Ireland focused, it is social policy focused, and it is designed to be accessible to wider public in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, every year includes a substantial component which either continues an old NISA time-series or replicates a set of BSA questions.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times survey is a constituent resource of ARK (www.ark.ac.uk), which is a research, policy and impact hub, based jointly in Queen's University Belfast and Ulster University. ARK runs a suite of three surveys in order to record the attitudes of people of all ages in Northern Ireland to the key issues affecting their lives:

- Northern Ireland Life and Times survey of adults aged 18 years or over;
- Young Life and Times survey of 16 year olds (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt); and

- Kids' Life and Times survey of 10-11 year olds (www.ark.ac.uk/klt).

Where possible and appropriate, questions are included across these surveys to compare attitudes among different age groups.

In 2023/2024, NILT and YLT asked identical or similar questions in the following areas:

- Good relations;
- Community safety and paramilitarism;
- Gender-based violence; and,
- Refugees and asylum seekers.

Technical details of the 2024 survey

The document is designed to be easy to use rather than technically exhaustive. Users who intend to carry out sophisticated statistical analyses or wish to manipulate the data to investigate particular features can get in touch with the survey team if they require more precise details on the survey set-up. Contact details are provided on page xii of this document.

The overall design

The 2024 Northern Ireland Life and Times involved 1,199 completed survey with adults aged 18 years or over.

In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey transitioned to a push-to-web methodology. This approach has been retained since then. A Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI) survey was developed, which was supplemented, where necessary, with Computer Assisted Telephone Interviews (CATI). Letters were sent to 8,000 sampled addresses asking the adult with the next birthday to go online to take part in the survey. To ensure that the survey was as inclusive as possible, participants could also ask to complete the survey by telephone.

Ethical approval

The 2024 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey received ethical approval from the Ethics Committee of the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast, where the survey coordinator is based.

Survey content

The survey explores of a number of topics. The topics included in the 2024 survey are:

- A. Introductory questions
- B. Respect
- C. Minority ethnic people
- D. Good relations
- E. Skills and employment
- F. Integrated education
- G. Safeguarding
- H. Criminal justice system
- I. Gender-based violence
- J. Political attitudes
- K. Community safety
- L. Background

Some of these questions were also included in the Young Life and Times survey of 16-year-olds, see <https://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt>.

Pilot and mainstage fieldwork

Once Ipsos UK received approval from the NILT project team, the CAWI survey link was activated. At this stage, Ipsos mailed the advance letters to households and began monitoring the survey's progress in real-time, as responses were submitted. The advance letters included a URL and unique access code for each household, granting survey access to the household member with the next birthday. Alternatively, participants were able to schedule a telephone (CATI) interview by calling a provided freephone number.

The majority (98%) of the total surveys achieved were completed using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), while 2% were completed using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Data collection was conducted between 6th September 2024 and 19th November 2024. On average, it took participants 55 minutes to complete the survey.

Ipsos' Operations team was responsible for all aspects of data collection. This included managing the online sample, preparing the briefing notes for CATI interviewers, allocation and scheduling of work and monitoring of progress. The small number of interviews completed using the CATI method were conducted by a team of highly experienced interviewers. Interviewers were fully briefed and understood the project aims and target audience. Prior to undertaking any telephone interviewing, they familiarised themselves with the questionnaire, paying particular attention to any sensitive or complex questions.

The fieldwork comprised two phases: a pilot phase followed by the mainstage fieldwork. The purpose of the pilot was to assess the reliability and accuracy of the questionnaire and the script, and to allow for any changes to be made ahead of the mainstage fieldwork. Question wording and understanding were tested, along with any routing and filtering.

Following a successful pilot, the mainstage fieldwork was launched with minor changes to the questionnaire, including amends to questions and response options. During fieldwork, data was continuously quality assured to ensure the highest quality of the final outputs.

During the initial phase of the project, a technical error in the script was discovered. Due to this error, c.600 participants were not asked *EERES*, *EECOLL*, *EEPAL*, and *EEREL*¹, resulting in missing data. Upon identification of this error, the affected participants who had consented to be recontacted were promptly followed up in an attempt to obtain the missing data. As a result of these efforts, 281 of the contacted participants provided answers to the omitted questions. This corrective action was communicated at the time of discovery to ensure transparency in the data collection process. Due to the differing modes of data collection, the dataset only includes responses from respondents who completed the survey online.

¹ These questions asked people statements about people from Eastern Europe:

EERES I would willingly accept them as a resident in my local area (Yes/No)

EECOLL I would willingly accept them as a colleague at my work (Yes/No)

EEPAL I would willingly accept them as a close friend of mine (Yes/No)

EEREL I would willingly accept them as a relative by way of marriage to a close member of my family (Yes/No)

The telephone interviewers worked in accordance with the ISO 20252 system which incorporates much of the Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS) and the old MRQSA/BS7911.

Advance letter

Ipsos developed four letters to be sent to the selected households. The initial letter informed the potential participants about the study, its importance and how they could take part. The subsequent letters acted as reminders to households to participate in the study. All the letters contained the link to the Ipsos privacy policy, and a copy of the NILT information leaflet was included in the initial letter.

Individuals were informed how their personal data would be handled in accordance with GDPR, and their right to withdraw from the research if they did not want to take part.

Each letter contained the URL for the survey, and an individual access code for that address. This access code would grant access to the survey and enabled us to record which addresses had taken part, so that we could send reminders only to non-responding addresses. Alternatively, participants could call a freephone number and book a telephone interview.

Ultimately, only three of the four planned mailings were utilised, as the target number of participants was reached following the third mailout.

Sampling design

The sample for the 2024 NILT survey consisted of a stratified random sample of addresses selected from the Postcode Address File (PAF) database of addresses. This database is considered the most comprehensive and up-to-date address listing available in the UK. The PAF, maintained by Royal Mail, is the most widely used sample frame for high-quality social surveys in the UK and contains a list of all delivery points in the country.

The Postcode Address File (PAF) provides a good sampling frame of addresses, however, it lacks information on household size, thus requiring further selection processes to be applied to convert the listing of addresses to a listing of individuals, from which, one person (the 'selected respondent') can be chosen to complete the survey.

PO boxes, and where possible, non-residential addresses, and businesses were removed following the extraction of postcodes. This refined list was deduplicated against an internal "Do Not Contact" registry and previous NILT survey samples. The resulting clean sample frame was appended with NI Urban Area (UA) codes, stratified by UA and full postcode. A random sample was drawn for each Local Government District (LGD) to achieve the desired sample size of 8,000 addresses, distributed proportionally across the 11 LGDs. Finally, urban/rural classifications and settlement classifications (2005 and 2015) were added before transferring the final sample file to the research team.

Table 1.1 shows the distribution of sample by LGD.

LGD	Count
Antrim and Newtownabbey	640
Ards and North Down	720
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	800
Belfast	1520
Causeway Coast and Glens	640
Derry City and Strabane	720
Fermanagh and Omagh	400
Lisburn and Castlereagh	640
Mid and East Antrim	640
Mid Ulster	480
Newry, Mourne and Down	800
Total	8,000

Each letter sent to the selected addresses clearly stated that the survey should be completed by one adult (aged 18 or over) in the household, and that if there were two or more adults then the adult with the next birthday should complete the survey. At the beginning of the interview, the participant also had to confirm that they were the person within the household with the next birthday.

Table 1.2 presents the overall breakdown of the sample.

	Count	Percent
Usable cases	1,199	15.0%
Unusable cases	370	4.6%
<i>Unusable cases (survey accessed, but not completed)</i>	341	4.2%
<i>Unusable cases (completion time under 20 min)</i>	29	0.4%
Letters returned	126	1.6%
Refusals by email, telephone	62	0.8%
No response following three letters	6,243	78.0%
Total	8,000	100%

Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted)

Table 1.3 presents sampling errors and 95% confidence intervals for the systematic random sample design as used in the survey. These intervals are based on unweighted data. Note that the margin of error for all sample estimates is within the parameters of $\pm 2.8\%$.

		%	Margin of Error	95% Confidence limits
Age	18 – 24	5.8	1.3	4.5 – 7.1
	25 – 34	14.3	2.0	12.3 – 16.3
	35 – 44	17.1	2.1	15.0 – 19.2
	45 – 54	18.8	2.2	16.6 – 21.0
	55 – 64	19.1	2.2	16.9 – 21.3
	65 and over	24.8	2.4	22.4 – 27.2
Sex	Male	38.9	2.8	36.1 – 41.7
	Female	60.7	2.8	57.9 – 63.5
	In another way/ prefer not to say	0.4	0.4	0.2 – 0.8
Marital status	Single	31.2	2.6	28.6 – 33.8
	Married/Civil partnership	48.7	2.8	45.9 – 51.5
	Separated	3.9	1.1	2.8 – 5.0
	Divorced	8.1	1.5	6.6 – 9.6
	Widowed	7.6	1.5	6.1 – 9.1
Religion	Catholic	31.9	2.6	29.3 – 34.5
	Protestant	39.4	2.8	36.6 – 42.2
	No religion	24.1	2.4	21.7 – 26.5
	Other religion/answer	5.7	1.2	3.3 – 5.7
	Don't know	0.7	0.5	0.2 – 1.2

Data preparation

Main survey data was collected via a computer aided interviewing software package. This was converted to SPSS format prior to analysis. All data were subject to an extensive range of inter and intra variable logic checks.

Weighting

As is common practice for a CAWI survey of this nature, the data are subsequently weighted to ensure representation of the general population of Northern Ireland. Weighting is the process of correcting for sample differences by increasing the relative importance (or weight) of underrepresented groups and decreasing the importance of overrepresented groups (where over/under representation is determined by comparing to a target).

Given the method of collection, a weighting variable to account for age, gender and location based on Northern Ireland Census data (2021) was added. Random Iterative Method (RIM) weighting was selected as the most appropriate technique as this is most commonly used to weight market research data to known demographics, without intrinsically altering the findings

of the raw data. Northern Ireland Census targets were used, given that Census data are the most accurate counts of the population at a specific point in time.

A RIM weighting factor was calculated by comparing the NILT data population proportions to the known population statistics for each variable (age, gender and location). This weighting factor was calculated using an advanced analytics tool which accounts for the differences in the survey population to the general population of Northern Ireland using a pre-calculated algorithm. When applied, the weighting factor (WTFactor) will weight the data accordingly to ensure research findings are representative of the general population in Northern Ireland.

Deriving social class variables

Occupational information was derived using the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) 2020. The SOC2020 information was also used to derive the National Statistics Socio-Economic (NS_SEC) variable, which is contained in this data set for the respondent (NS_SEC_1) and their partner (NS_SEC_2).

Personal and household income

The number of response codes for the personal and household income questions has been reduced, in order to make it easier for respondents, and to aid analysis.

Comparison with other data sources

For comparative purposes, the following tables provide NILT data alongside two data sources:

- Continuous Household Survey – the survey is undertaken annually by the Central Survey Unit within the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Using a representative sample of households across Northern Ireland, the survey provides an ongoing snapshot of social and economic conditions in Northern Ireland. For more information, see <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/central-survey-unit/continuous-household-survey>
- 2021 Northern Ireland Census – collected information on the usually resident population of Northern Ireland on 21 March 2021. This is the latest available census data for Northern Ireland and is the most up-to-date and precise view of the total Northern Irish population.

Comparison of household characteristics

		NILT 2024* (unweighted)	CHS 2023/24 (unweighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2021
<i>Characteristics of sampled households</i>			% sampled households	% households
<i>Tenure</i>	Owned outright	44.5	45.0	34.7
	Owned with mortgage/co-ownership	36.0	28.0	30.5
	Rented (Housing Executive or Housing Association)	6.8	13.0	15.3
	Rented privately**	9.2	13.0	17.2
	Rent free	1.5	1.0	2.3
	Other	2.0	-	-
<i>Base=100%</i>		<i>1,190</i>	<i>4,113</i>	<i>768,814</i>

* Household characteristics based on unweighted data from the NILT survey

** Including from a relative/friend

Comparison of individual characteristics

		NILT 2024 (weighted)	CHS 2023/24 (weighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2021
<i>Individual characteristics</i>		% individuals 18+		
Sex	Male	49.1	48.0	49.2
	Female	50.4	52.9	50.8
	In another way	0.5	-	-
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,198	4,816	1,903,175
Age	18-24	10.4	11.0	10.5
	25-34	16.6	16.0	16.5
	35-44	17.0	17.0	17.0
	45-54	17.3	17.0	17.2
	55-64	16.4	17.0	16.5
	65 and over	22.3	23.0	22.2
	Prefer not to say	0.1	-	-
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,198	4,816	1,903,175
				Northern Ireland Census 2021
		18+		16+
Marital Status	Single	35.4	33.0	38.1
	Married/Civil Partner	47.5	51.0	45.8
	Widowed	5.9	7.0	6.4
	Divorced/Separated	10.8	9.0	9.8
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,192	4,816	1,514,743*

* Bases for Census data are different due to age including those aged 18 and over, whereas marital status includes those aged 16 and over.

Individual characteristics – NILT 2024 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
% within age							
Single	98	63	36	22	18	11	36
Married/Civil Partner	2	33	57	58	57	55	48
Divorced/ separated/ widowed	0	4	6	19	25	33	17
Base=100% (unweighted)	67	169	204	225	229	297	1,191*

*8 missing cases have been excluded from this crosstabulation.

Individual characteristics – CHS 2023/24 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-64	65 and over	All
% within age						
Single	97	58	31	17	9	33
Married/Civil Partner	3	39	63	64	54	51
Divorced/ separated/ widowed	0	2	7	18	37	16
Base=100%*	-	-	-	-	-	-

*CHS data provided by NISRA only included percentages, it did not include bases for marital status by age.

Stated religious denomination

	NILT 2024 (weighted)	CHS 2023/24 (weighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2021
	%		
Protestant	37	43	37
Catholic	34	38	42
Other or no religion*	27	18	20
Missing/ refused/ I don't know	2	1	-
Base=100%	1,199	4,816	1,903,178

*Includes 'no religion' and religion not stated

The NILT dataset

The dataset for the 2024 Northern Ireland Life and Times survey is made freely and publicly available within six months of the end of the fieldwork period. The data have been tested extensively, but if you do find anything that looks like an error, please let us know as soon as you can. Contact details are available on page xii of this document.

Variables on the dataset

The variable name relating to each question can be seen above each question in the questionnaire. The dataset includes the variables relating to the majority of questions. However, in order to maintain confidentiality, some variables are omitted or recoded. For example, demographic variables relating to other people in the household are excluded from the dataset, as is the ETHGROUP variable. Variables relating to religion are also excluded, and are replaced by the following recoded versions of these variables:

Variable	Recoded version
RELIGION2	RELIGCAT
FAMRELIG2	FAMRCODE
PRTREL2	PRELCODE

These variables are classified into 3 groups: Catholic, Protestant and No religion. The Protestant category was created by grouping together the following denominations:

- Presbyterian
- Church of Ireland
- Methodist
- Baptist
- Free Presbyterian
- Brethren
- Other Protestant
- Other Christian

However, tables of results for the RELIGION2, FAMRELIG2 AND PRTREL2 variables can be found on the NILT website (<https://www.ark.ac.uk/ARK/nilt>) from 20 May 2025.

The dataset also contains a set of variables that have been specifically created to assist analysis.

Please note that all analyses of the adult data should be weighted to ensure representation of the Northern Ireland population. The weighting variable is called WTFactor.

The dataset also contains a set of variables that have been specifically created to assist analysis.

<i>WTFACOR</i>	Weighting variable to ensure representation of the general population of Northern Ireland having used RIM weighting to align to Northern Ireland Census data (2021)
<i>ADULT</i>	Number of adults aged 18 years or over in the household
<i>HOUSEHLD</i>	Number of people in each household
<i>RAGECAT</i> <i>P2AGECAT etc</i>	Age of respondent (categorised) 1 18-24 2 25-34 3 35-44 4 45-54 5 55-64 6 65+
<i>NSSEC1</i> <i>(Respondent)</i> <i>NSSEC2 (Partner)</i>	National Statistics Socio Economic Classification (NS SEC) 1 Managerial, administrative and professional occupations 2 Intermediate occupations 3 Small employers and own account workers 4 Lower supervisory and technical occupations 5 Semi-routine occupations 9 Refused/not answered/not classified
<i>URBRUR</i>	Urban/rural status 1 Rural 2 Urban

Finding a topic in the questionnaire

The table below provides a list of topics within the 2024 survey, and their page number within the questionnaire.

Topic	Page number
Section A: Introductory questions	4 - 7
Section B: Respect	8 - 9
Section C: Minority ethnic people	10 - 24
Section D: Good relations	25 - 38
Section E: Skills and employment	39 - 41
Section F: Integrated education	42 - 50
Section G: Safeguarding	51 - 54
Section H: Criminal justice system	55 - 58
Section I: Gender-based violence	59 – 63
Section J: Political attitudes	64 - 72
Section K: Community safety	72 - 74
Section L: Background	75 - 94

NILT website

The NILT website (<https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>) is the key source of information relating to the survey. This includes background information, datasets, questionnaires, technical notes and publications relating to all survey years. In addition, frequencies for every question and a breakdown by age, gender and religion are also available online.

A helpline is run for those who have any query about the survey. Users can contact the NILT team directly using the contact information below. The funders of the survey receive the dataset earlier than the public (three months after the end of fieldwork). Nonetheless, one of the guiding principles of the survey is that the information is made available to all and that no one person or organisation has ownership of the results.

Contact information

If you have any further queries, please contact the NILT coordinator using the details below:

Paula Devine
 ARK
 School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work
 Queen's University Belfast
 Email: p.devine@qub.ac.uk
 Phone: +44 (0)28 9097 3034
 URL: <https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt>