



Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey 2025

Technical Notes

Version 3, 4 June 2026

www.ark.ac.uk/nilt

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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 2025 survey who have been supportive of the overall aims of the project, namely:

- Department for Communities;
- Department of Education
- Department of Justice;
- EPIC Futures;
- Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland;
- Public Prosecution Service;
- The Executive Office; and
- Ulster University.

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 the wider public in Northern Ireland.

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 2025, 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 2025 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 xiii of this document.

The overall design

In 2020, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the survey transitioned from face-to-face 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.

1,244 adults aged 18 years or over completed the survey.

Ethical approval

The 2025 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 2025 survey are:

- A. Introductory questions
- B. Respect
- C. Minority ethnic people
- D. Good relations
- E. Languages
- F. Integrated education
- G. Artificial Intelligence
- H. Gender-based violence
- I. Criminal justice system
- J. Abortion
- K. Political attitudes
- L. Community safety
- M. 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

Fieldwork was undertaken by Ipsos UK. 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 (97%) of the total surveys achieved were completed using Computer Assisted Web Interviewing (CAWI), while 3% were completed using Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI). Data collection was conducted between 26 September 2025 and 14 December 2025. On average, it took participants 51 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. 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 were used as the targeted number of participants were successfully recruited following the third mailing.

Sampling design

The sample for the 2025 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 (see Table 1). Finally, urban/rural classifications and settlement classifications (2005 and 2015) were added before transferring the final sample file to the research team.

Table 1: Distribution of sample by LGD.

LGD	Count
Antrim and Newtownabbey	609
Ards and North Down	731
Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon	881
Belfast	1518
Causeway Coast and Glens	651
Derry City and Strabane	613
Fermanagh and Omagh	494
Lisburn and Castlereagh	618
Mid and East Antrim	599
Mid Ulster	571
Newry, Mourne and Down	715
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 2 presents the overall breakdown of the achieved sample, including the response rate.

Table 2: Breakdown of achieved sample

	Count	Percent
Usable cases	1,244	15.5%
Unusable cases	366	4.6%
<i>Unusable cases (survey accessed, but not completed)</i>	325	4%
<i>Unusable cases (completion time under 20 min)</i>	41	0.5%
Total addresses with letters returned	88	0.9%
Refusals by email, telephone	75	1%
No response following three letters	6,227	78%
Total	8,000	100%

Sampling errors

Table 3 provides 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 $\pm 2.8\%$.

Table 3: Sampling errors and confidence intervals for key variables (unweighted)

		%	Margin of Error	95% Confidence limits
Age	18 – 24	5.1	1.2	3.9 – 6.3
	25 – 34	15.8	2.0	13.8 – 17.8
	35 – 44	18.4	2.1	16.2 – 20.6
	45 – 54	17.8	2.1	15.7 – 19.9
	55 – 64	17.5	2.1	15.4 – 19.6
	65 and over	25.0	2.4	22.6-27.4
Sex	Male	42.3	2.7	39.6 – 45.0
	Female	57.4	2.7	54.7 – 60.1
	In another way/ prefer not to say	0.3	0.3	0.0 – 0.6
Marital status	Single	29.2	2.5	26.7 – 31.7
	Married/Civil partnership	51.8	2.8	49.0 – 54.6
	Separated	4.0	1.1	2.9 – 5.1
	Divorced	7.7	1.5	6.1 – 9.2
	Widowed	5.0	1.2	3.8 – 6.2
Religion	Catholic	30.2	2.6	27.6 – 32.8
	Protestant	39.1	2.7	36.4 – 41.8
	No religion	25.2	2.4	22.8 – 27.6
	Other religion/answer	5.5	1.2	4.2 – 6.8

Data preparation

The 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 (NSSEC1) and their partner (NSSEC2).

Comparison with other data sources

For comparative purposes, Tables 4 to 8 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.

Table 4: Comparison of household characteristics

		NILT 2025 (unweighted)	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	45.0	44.5	45.0	34.7
	Owned with mortgage/co-ownership	31.7	36.0	28.0	30.5
	Rented (Housing Executive or Housing Association)	7.5	6.8	13.0	15.3
	Rented privately**	11.1	9.2	13.0	17.2
	Rent free	1.3	1.5	1.0	2.3
	Other	0.9	2.0	-	-
<i>Base=100%</i>		<i>1244</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 and from an employer

Table 5: Comparison of individual characteristics

		NILT 2025 (weighted)	NILT 2024 (weighted)	CHS 2023/24 (weighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2021
<i>Individual characteristics</i>		% individuals 18+			
Sex	Male	49.0	49.1	48.0	49.2
	Female	50.6	50.4	52.9	50.8
	In another way	0.3	0.5	-	-
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,244	1,198	4,816	1,903,175
Age	18-24	10.5	10.4	11.0	10.5
	25-34	16.5	16.6	16.0	16.5
	35-44	16.9	17.0	17.0	17.0
	45-54	17.2	17.3	17.0	17.2
	55-64	16.5	16.4	17.0	16.5
	65 and over	22.2	22.3	23.0	22.2
	Prefer not to say	0.3	0.1	-	-
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,244	1,198	4,816	1,903,175
					Northern Ireland Census 2021
					18+
Marital Status	Single	34.0	35.4	33.0	38.1
	Married/Civil Partner	48.7	47.5	51.0	45.8
	Widowed	4.1	5.9	7.0	6.4
	Divorced/Separated	10.9	10.8	9.0	9.8
Base=100%	<i>n</i>	1,244	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.

Table 6: Individual characteristics – NILT 2025 (weighted data)

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+	Total
% within age							
Single	95.3	62.0	31.2	18	17.8	10.9	34.0
Married/Civil Partner	2.5	33.5	59.3	60.1	54.5	61.4	48.7
Divorced/ separated/ widowed	0	1.5	5.9	19.7	25.9	27.3	15.0
Base=100% (unweighted)	64	197	229	222	218	311	1,244

Table 7: 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.

Table 8: Stated religious denomination

	NILT 2025 (weighted)	CHS 2023/24 (weighted)	Northern Ireland Census 2021
	%		
Protestant	37	43	37
Catholic	32	38	42
Other or no religion*	31	18	20
Missing/ refused/ I don't know		1	-
<i>Base=100%</i>	<i>1,244</i>	<i>4,816</i>	<i>1,903,178</i>

*Includes 'no religion' and religion not stated

The NILT dataset

The dataset for the 2025 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 xiii 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/other Christian and No religion. The Protestant/other Christian 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 4 June 2026.

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 WTFACOR.

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

WTFACOR	Weighting variable to ensure representation of the general population of Northern Ireland having used RIM weighting to align to Northern Ireland Census data (2021)
ADULT	Number of adults aged 18 years or over in the household
HOUSEHLD	Number of people in each household
RAGECAT P2AGECAT etc	Age of respondent (categorised) 0 0-17 1 18-24 2 25-34 3 35-44 4 45-54 5 55-64 6 65+
NSSEC1 (Respondent) NSSEC2 (Partner)	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
URBRUR	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	4-8
Section B: Respect	9
Section C: Minority ethnic people	10-21
Section D: Good relations	22-31
Section E: Languages	32-38
Section F: Integrated education	39-45
Section G: Artificial Intelligence	46-50
Section H: Gender-based violence	51-57
Section I: Criminal justice system	58-61
Section J: Abortion	62-64
Section K: Political attitudes	65-71
Section L: Community safety	72-74
Section M: Background	75-93

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:

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