

Words matter.

Public attitudes to languages in Northern Ireland

2025 NI Life & Times survey

Paula Devine

ARK

- joint initiative across Queen’s University Belfast and Ulster University, established in 2000

Life and Times surveys

- **NI Life & Times (NILT):** 18+ (1998)
- **Young Life & Times:** 16 year olds (2003)
- **Kids’ Life & Times (KLT):** 10/11 year olds (2008)

Men and Women in Northern Ireland: Challenging the Stereotypes

By Lizanne Dowds, Gillian Robinson,
Ann Marie Gray & Deirdre Heenan

Now what? Attitudes to devolution in Northern Ireland

By Roger Mac Ginty and Rick Wilford

Retirement: Facing the disappointment

By Eileen Evason
University of Ulster

Integrate or Segregate? Ten Years of Social Attitudes to Community Relations in Northern Ireland

By Joanne Hughes and Caitlin Donnelly

Attitudes to climate change in Northern Ireland

Katy Hayward and Jonny Hanson

Violence Against Women and Girls – Attitudes and Experiences

Paula Devine and Martina McKnight

Attitudes to immigration

Katy Hayward and Paula Devine

Political identities and aspirations in Northern Ireland

Katy Hayward and Ben Rosher

Access to mental health supports in Northern Ireland

Nicole Bond, Siobhan O'Neil, Paula Devine and Martina McKnight

The Other Division in Northern Ireland: public attitudes to poverty, economic hardship and social security

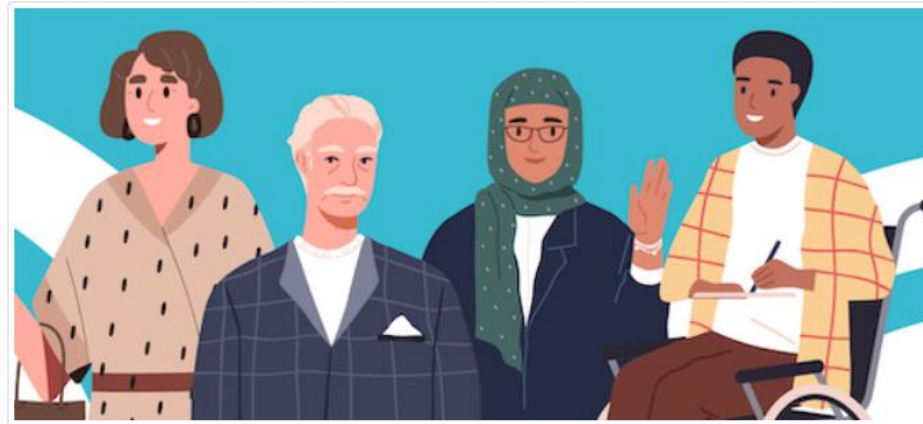
Sabrina Bunyan, Mark Simpson, Goretti Horgan and Ann Marie Gray

Attitudes of a random sample of 1,244 adults aged 18 or over

- Good Relations
- Minority ethnic groups
- Respect
- Politics
- Abortion
- Community safety, perception of paramilitary influence
- Criminal justice system
- Integrated education
- Artificial Intelligence
- Languages
- Gender-based violence

Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey

Results from the 2025 survey are now available.
You can view the results of the previous NILT surveys [here](#).



The Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) Survey records the attitudes, values and beliefs of adults to a wide range of social policy issues. This annual survey has been running since 1998.

On this site, you can find [results](#), [datasets](#), [publications](#), [questionnaires](#) and [technical notes](#) relating to the survey.

Our funders, including

- Department for Communities
- Department of Justice
- Department of Education
- Public Prosecution Service
- Police Ombudsman Office
- The Executive Office
- UKRI

ESRC Impact Acceleration Account, QUB

Our respondents

ARK / Conflict Textiles exhibition: *Languages*
McClay Library, Queen's University

<https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts2/fullevent1/?id=375>



Cueca chilena y Cueca Sola, by Aurora Ortiz

Words Matter.

Public attitudes to languages in Northern Ireland

Aisling O'Boyle and Lorna Carson

North-South team to establish Living Observatory of Shared Languages and Identities on the Island of Ireland

Posted on: 11 August 2025

Researchers from Trinity and Queen's University Belfast have secured funding of approximately €3.7 million to establish a Living Observatory of Shared Languages and Identities on the Island of Ireland. The LIFELANGS project was announced today as one of four that will be supported by the North-South Research Programme (NSRP), administered by the Higher Education Authority.

This initiative is a key pillar of the Government's Shared Island strategy, advancing an all-island research agenda that strengthens cross-border ties and delivers real, lasting impact for communities across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Funded under the Emerging Hubs of Excellence Strand, the LIFELANGS observatory will aim to secure a more inclusive and resilient future for all and create a critical mass of interdisciplinary expertise and evidence-based resources in languages, education, and social sciences.



INNOVATION

€16m for four collaborative all-island projects announced



CLÁR TAIGHDE THUAIDH THEAS NORTH SOUTH RESEARCH PROGRAMME

HEA AN tAÚDARÁS um ARD-OIDEACHAS HIGHER EDUCATION AUTHORITY  Rialtas na hÉireann Government of Ireland



Taoiseach Micheál Martin TD and Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science James Lawless TD today announced the allocation of €16 million in funding for four major cross-border research collaborations between higher education institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The investment is delivered through the second call of the **North-South Research Programme (NSRP)**, administered by the Higher Education Authority (HEA).

This initiative is a key pillar of the Government's **Shared Island strategy**, advancing an all-island research agenda that strengthens cross-border ties and delivers real, lasting impact for communities across Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Each of the four selected projects will receive up to €4 million over a four-year period. These projects were chosen following a highly competitive process involving 131 applications from 17 higher education institutions, evaluated by international experts. This outcome confirms the strong appetite between Ireland and Northern Ireland's Higher Education and Research Institutions to collaborate on an all-island basis.



Who are we?

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/census-2021-infographics>

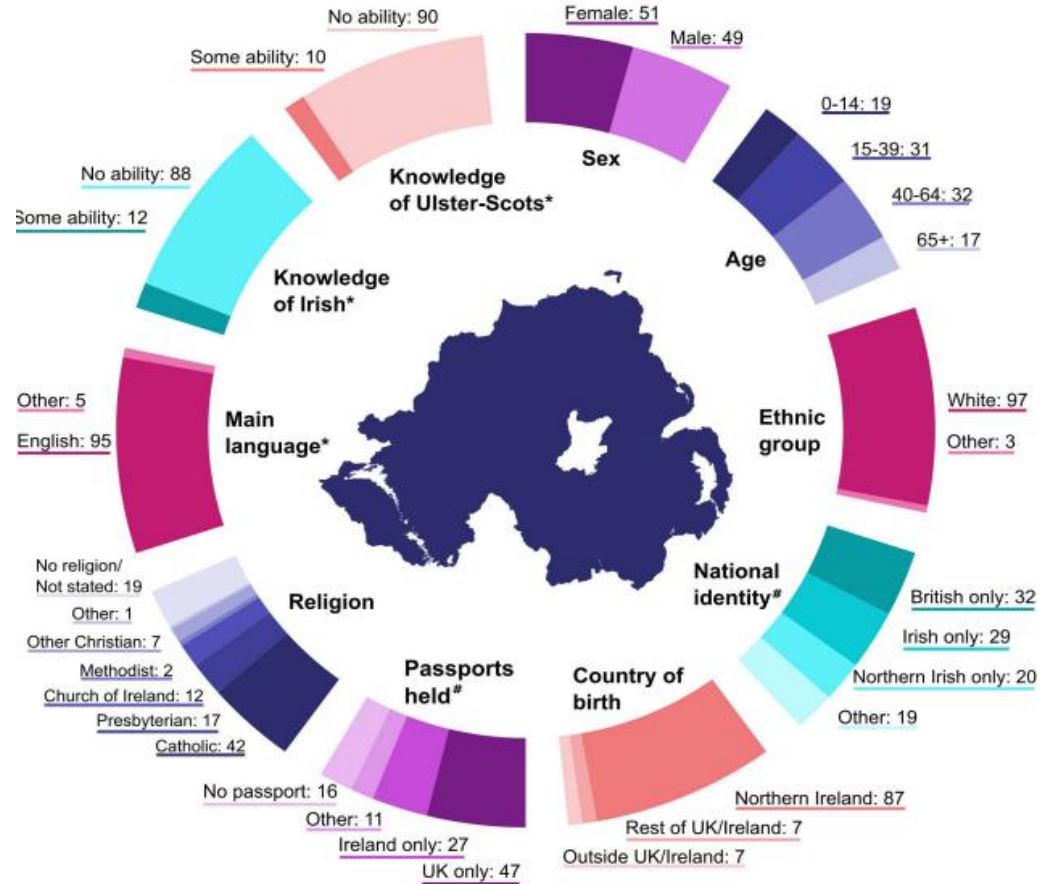


Table 1: Main language of usual residents aged 3 and over – Census 2021

Main language	Number	Percentage
English	1,751,500	95.4%
Main language not English	85,100	4.6%
Polish	20,100	1.1%
Lithuanian	9,000	0.5%
Irish	6,000	0.3%
Romanian	5,600	0.3%
Portuguese	5,000	0.3%
Arabic	3,600	0.2%
Bulgarian	3,600	0.2%
Other languages	32,200	1.8%
All usual residents aged 3 and over	1,836,600	100.0%

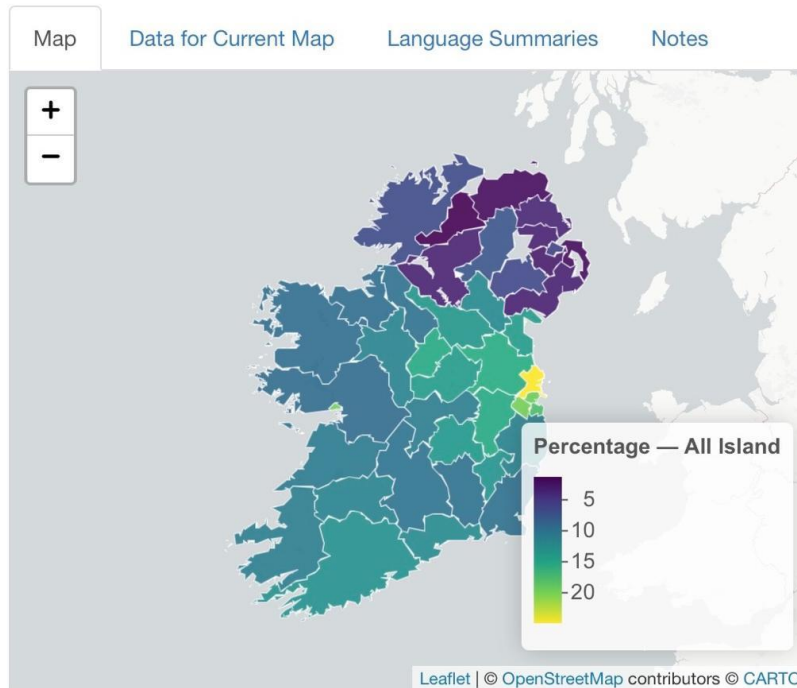
<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/system/files/statistics/census-2021-main-statistics-for-northern-ireland-phase-1-statistical-bulletin-language.pdf>

Combined 2021 NISRA and 2022 CSO Census Map for main languages other than Irish or English

Language
 All languages ▾

Statistic
 Percentage of Population ▾

Jurisdiction
 All Island ▾



<https://antoinrodgers.shinyapps.io/lifelangs/>

Figure 6: Map of percentage of population aged 3 and over with some ability in Irish language by LGD – Census 2021

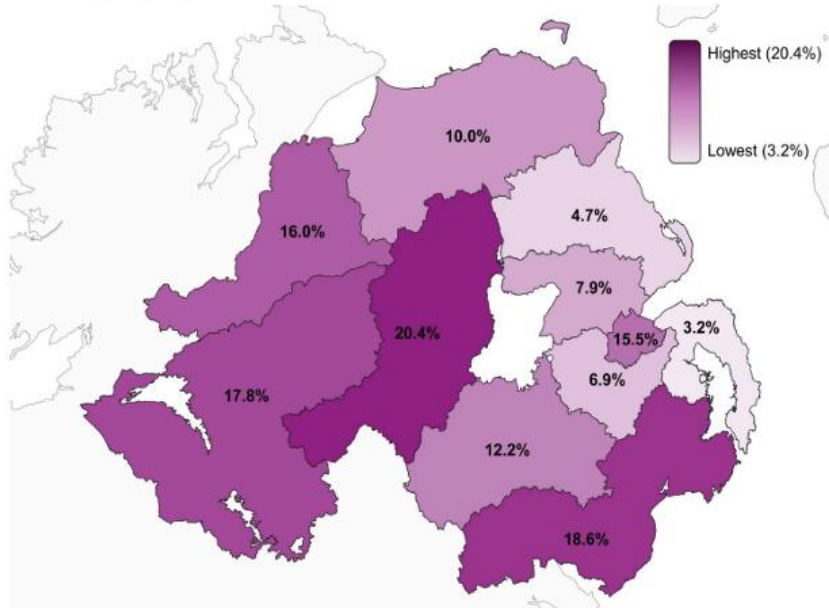
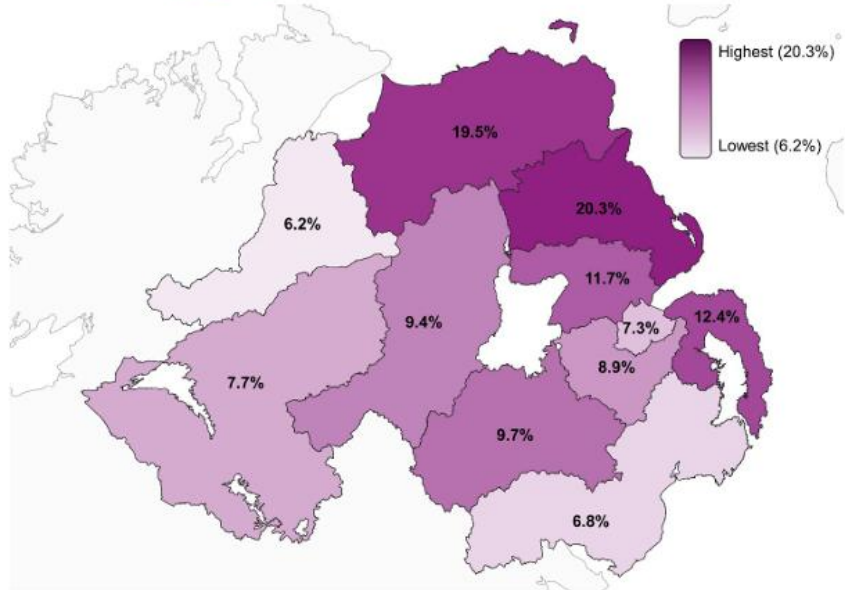


Figure 9: Map of percentage of population aged 3 and over with some ability in Ulster-Scots language by LGD – Census 2021



[Census 2021 Main statistics for Northern Ireland - Statistical bulletin - Language](#)

- But what do we think about the languages we speak?
- And what are the relationships to our ideas about identity?

How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?

	%		
	The Irish language adds to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland	Learning the Irish language in the school curriculum is beneficial for children at school in Northern Ireland	More should be done by the NI Executive to encourage and promote the Irish language in Northern Ireland
Strongly agree	30	23	25
Agree	26	22	20
Neither agree nor disagree	18	21	21
Disagree	11	17	16
Strongly disagree	12	15	16
Don't know	2	2	2

How much do you agree or disagree with these statements?

	%		
	Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture adds to the richness and diversity of Northern Ireland	Learning about Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture in the school curriculum is beneficial for children at school in Northern Ireland	More should be done by the NI Executive to encourage and promote Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture in Northern Ireland
Strongly agree	12	9	9
Agree	33	22	19
Neither agree nor disagree	31	35	37
Disagree	13	18	19
Strongly disagree	6	9	9
Don't know	6	6	6

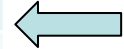
Which of the following best describes your interest in learning or improving your knowledge of Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture in the future?

	%
Very interested	4
Somewhat interested	19
Not very interested	28
Not interested at all	42
I already know about Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture and do not need to improve	2
Don't know	4



Which of the following best describes your interest in learning or improving your knowledge of the Irish language in the future?

	%
Very interested	16
Somewhat interested	25
Not very interested	18
Not interested at all	39
I already know the Irish language and do not need to improve	1
Don't know	2



Preferred ways of learning the Irish language

	% saying yes
Formal education (school, college or university curricula)	36
Informal education (community classes, language cafés, or local courses)	<u>68</u>
Online courses	<u>60</u>
Podcasts or other online media	<u>37</u>
Television and radio programmes	<u>37</u>
Poetry and other literature	23
Music and arts performances, plays, etc.	35
Phrase books and dictionaries	32
Visiting Gaeltacht areas (areas in which Irish is the main language spoken)	<u>41</u>
Online language learning app	<u>56</u>

Preferred ways of learning about Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture

	% saying yes
Formal education (school, college or university curricula)	24
Informal education (community classes, language cafés, or local courses)	<u>44</u>
Online courses	<u>30</u>
Podcasts or other online media	29
Television and radio programmes	<u>46</u>
Poetry and other literature	27
Music and arts performances, plays, etc.	<u>40</u>
Phrase books and dictionaries	25
Visiting hairtplain areas (where Ulster-Scots has particular significance/provenance)	<u>43</u>
Online language learning app	29

Would you like to see or hear more or less of the Irish language being used in Northern Ireland today, (e.g. in public, official documents, street signs, TV/radio, etc.)?

	%
I would like to see or hear a lot more	22
I would like to see or hear a little more	18
I would like to see or hear about the same amount as now	21
I would like to see or hear a little less	7
I would like to see or hear a lot less	22
Don't know	10

Would you like to see or hear more or less of the of the Ulster-Scots (US) language being used in Northern Ireland today, (e.g. in public, official documents, street signs, TV/radio, etc.)?

	%
I would like to see or hear a lot more	6
I would like to see or hear a little more	15
I would like to see or hear about the same amount as now	35
I would like to see or hear a little less	8
I would like to see or hear a lot less	17
Don't know	19

- 78% of respondents who speak Irish very well or to some extent say that Irish language is very or fairly important to their identity

- 80% of those who said Ulster-Scots heritage was important to their identity also reported some knowledge of the culture
- 33% of those with some knowledge described Ulster-Scots as important to their identity

- Across all indicators, support for Irish language promotion was higher overall than support for Ulster-Scots language, heritage and culture
- Attitudes towards Ulster-Scots were somewhat more evenly distributed across political affiliations

- Irish and Ulster-Scots fulfil very different functions, roles, and spaces within contemporary Northern Ireland society, education and policy interventions will require bespoke approaches



www.ark.ac.uk/nilt