

Experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland

2025/26 – Background Quality Report (BQR)

Background

Analytics Division (AD) of the Department for Communities produces the experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland report. The report is produced annually and presents the findings from the Continuous Household Survey (CHS) in relation to experience of volunteering in Northern Ireland.

The CHS is a representative, continuous, personal interview survey of adults, aged 16 and over, living in private households in Northern Ireland. The survey is administered by Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). Respondents to the CHS are asked about a variety of subjects including their experience in the previous 12 months of volunteering.

The CHS has been running continuously since 1983. Questions on volunteering were included for the first time in 2017/18. Since then, the module of questions has been developed and is now a key source of information for the Department for Communities.

The sample for the CHS consists of a systematic random sample of 8,940 addresses selected from the NISRA Address Register (NAR). The NAR is developed within NISRA and is primarily based on the Land and Property Services (LPS) Pointer database. The findings reported for 2025/26 are based on 4,004 respondents, aged 16 and over.

In 2023/24 questions relating to volunteering were reviewed to improve collection of data relating to informal volunteering. As a result of these changes, 2023/24 to 2025/26 are not directly comparable to previous years.

Data Quality

Relevance:

The report and accompanying tables provide data for Northern Ireland for the experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland, including population level analysis along with a breakdown by various sections of society, including Section 75 categories, where possible. The report includes charts and associated commentary to communicate the findings to the end user. In addition, all data are provided in Excel and OpenDocument spreadsheets (ODS). Explanatory notes within the tables and a technical annex have been included to provide the end user with additional information on the methodology and definitions used in the presentation of statistics.

Consultations are carried out annually with a key user group to agree the questions to be included in the CHS to ensure it continues to cover the key requirements for users.

Accuracy and reliability:

In 2025/26, 3,459 households took part in the survey. When ineligible addresses are discounted from the sampling frame this gives a survey response rate of 45%.

A chi square goodness-of-fit test showed that the CHS sample was not representative of the population by age and sex when compared with the "Population and Migration Estimates for Northern Ireland". As a result, analysis of the CHS has been weighted for non-response with three separate weights produced for age, sex and age and sex combined.

Non-response weighting sometimes increases standard errors and sometimes decreases them, although the impact tends to be fairly small, i.e. the adjustment may be less or greater than 1 but will generally be reasonably close to 1. In the case of the analysis for these publications, the values of the adjustment for all three weighting systems are so close to one, it is not necessary to take account of this in the calculation of standard error and confidence intervals.

While weighting for non-response (also called post-stratification) should reduce bias, it must be acknowledged that it will not eliminate bias. The reasons individuals choose to take part in surveys are complex and depend on lots of factors specific to the individual. As a result, the non-response biases in surveys are likely to be complex. Post-stratification works on the assumption that, by aligning the survey to the population along a small number of dimensions such as age and sex, many of these complex biases will reduce. However, it would be misleading to suggest that they will be eliminated.

The 95% confidence intervals for each estimate have been included in additional data tables which accompany the report. These confidence intervals represent the ranges either side of the CHS proportions which are 95% certain to include the true values for the population. For example, we estimate that 47% of the adult population of Northern Ireland had volunteered in 2025/26, we can be 95% certain that the true proportion falls between 45.0% and 48.1%.

Any statements in the reports regarding differences between groups such as males and females, different age groups, level of deprivation, etc., are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level. This means that we can be 95% confident that the differences between groups are actual differences and have not just arisen by chance. Both the base numbers and the sizes of the percentages have an effect on statistical significance. Therefore, on occasion, a difference between two groups may be statistically significant while the same difference in percentage points between two other groups may not be statistically significant. The reason for this is because the larger the base numbers or the closer the percentages are to 0 or 100, the smaller the standard errors. This leads to increased precision of the estimates which increases the likelihood that the difference between the proportions is actually significant and did not just arise by chance.

Timeliness and punctuality:

Analytics Division of the Department for Communities, who produce this report, received a provisional CHS dataset in May 2026, with the final validated CHS dataset received in July 2026. This report is published on the planned date, as pre-announced on the Department for Communities website and GOV.UK.

Accessibility and Clarity:

This report is published in HTML format on the Department for Communities website on the pre-announced publication date and accompanying tables are produced in Excel and ODS. Within the report, several charts have been provided with titles, axis names and footnotes added to help clarify certain information where applicable. Additionally, the report includes a Definitions & technical notes section which provides summary background information, definitions and methodological explanations. The contact details of the responsible statisticians have also been included in the report and accompanying tables. In addition, the data from the CHS is available on the UK Data Service.

Coherence and Comparability:

The statistics contained within the report are derived solely from the CHS. Questions on volunteering were included for the first time in 2017/18. In 2023/24 questions relating to volunteering were reviewed to improve collection of data relating to informal volunteering. As a result of changes to methodology and content, figures for 2023/24 to 2025/26 are not directly comparable to previous years.

Data for volunteering are available from a range of sources for the United Kingdom¹²³. However, due to differences in the definitions and survey methodologies used many of these are not directly comparable with the estimates in this report for Northern Ireland.

Further Information:

For further information relating to the quality of the Experience of volunteering by adults in Northern Ireland publication please contact: analyticsdivision@communities-ni.gov.uk.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/community-life-survey-202425-annual-publication/community-life-survey-202425-volunteering-and-charitable-giving>

² <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/research-evaluation/research-publications/scottish-household-survey-results>

³ <https://www.gov.wales/wellbeing-wales-2025-wales-cohesive-communities-html>