

## Profiling the Irish language in Northern Ireland

A research report was published on 29 July 2022 adding new evidence on socio-demographic, household, and health factors in relation to Irish language knowledge in Northern Ireland. This work was led by Queen's University and was supported by researchers in the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). The research was endorsed by the Department for Communities. The study used Census data via the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS), a large sample (28%) of the Northern Ireland population.

The key objectives of the research were:

- To assess the socio-demographic, household and health associations of Irish language knowledge in 2011;
- To examine (model) the associations of socio-demographic, health, and area characteristics with self-reported Irish language knowledge in Northern Ireland in 2011;
- To examine change in self-reported Irish language knowledge between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses; and
- To track younger cohorts (3-19 years) of the population, with a focus on the 2001 cohort, and examine the correlates of change in self-reported Irish language knowledge after a ten-year period.

### Key Findings

- Of those with Irish language knowledge, nearly two-thirds (62.6%) reported living with others who had knowledge of Irish (26.5% with 1 other, 15.5% with 2 others and 20.6% with 3 or more others).
- **After taking account of other factors,** the main factors linked to having Irish language knowledge in 2011 were: being aged 11-15 years, born in the Republic of Ireland, Catholic religion/religion of upbringing, other/no religion of upbringing, Irish national identity, degree-level qualification and others with Irish language knowledge in the household.
- People living in the 20% most deprived areas and those living in the West and South of Northern Ireland (former NUTS III areas) were more likely to have Irish language knowledge. However, the impact of area deprivation and area of residence lessened after accounting for religion/religion of upbringing, national identity and co-residence with others with Irish language knowledge.
- **After taking account of other factors,** good health was positively associated with Irish language knowledge. Having a communication difficulty reduced the likelihood of indicating a knowledge of Irish by 49% for persons aged 3-74 years.
- Of NILS members enumerated in both the 2001 and 2011 Censuses, 15.5% indicated ever having Irish language knowledge. Of those who indicated having Irish language knowledge in either 2001 or 2011, similar proportions retained (31.6%), lost (32.7%) or gained (35.7%) knowledge between the two Censuses.

- When assessing Irish language change between 2001 and 2011 (n=350,418), the highest proportion of persons gaining Irish was for those aged 3-10 years (13.6%) in 2001, while the highest proportion of persons losing Irish was seen in persons aged 11-15 years in 2001 (13.3%).
- For those who knew Irish in either 2001 and/or 2011 (n=54,335), 45.7% of those self-reporting as Catholic in 2001 but not in 2011 lost Irish; while 43.5% of those who were not Catholic in 2001, but were in 2011 gained Irish.
- For the younger age cohort (3-19 years in 2001), higher proportions of those NILS members who did not report Irish language knowledge in 2011 but had knowledge in 2001 (i.e. those who 'lost' Irish) were in households where there was a decline in numbers with Irish language knowledge, whereas 'gainers' tended to be in households where the number of 'knowers' remained the same or grew.

## Impact and Next Steps

This report, and a separate report published on the Ulster-Scots language will assist with the interpretation of the results from the 2021 Census on the Irish/Ulster-Scots languages. The two research reports will be helpful to the development of strategies for the Irish and Ulster-Scots languages led by the Department for Communities.

**Lead author:** Ian Shuttleworth

**E-mail:** [I.Shuttleworth@gub.ac.uk](mailto:I.Shuttleworth@gub.ac.uk)