

Northern Ireland: faring badly

At a glance

The PSE: UK research finds that over a third of households in Northern Ireland fall below society's minimum standards. Overall, levels of deprivation and financial hardship, are more extensive in Northern Ireland than in the UK as a whole and have increased since the last PSE survey in Northern Ireland in 2002/3. The research finds that in Northern Ireland:

- 40% of households said their home was colder than they would have liked compared to 35% in the UK.
- 43% can't afford unexpected household bills (of £500) compared to 33% in the UK.
- 20% of households can't keep their homes in an adequate state of decoration today compared to 11% in 2002/3.
- 10% of households live in damp homes compared to 4% in in 2002/3.



The **Poverty and Social Exclusion (PSE)** research measures the numbers of people who fall below what the population as a whole think should be a minimum standard of living. This is the only measure looking at both: what the majority think are necessities for life in the UK today, and actual living standards (rather than just income).

The current PSE: UK research included dedicated surveys in Northern Ireland on attitudes to necessities, carried out in 2011 and 2012, and on living standards, carried out in 2012. These surveys build on the 2002/3 PSE research in Northern Ireland, enabling trends over the last 10 years to be tracked.

What do we think we need?

The PSE attitudes to necessities survey looks at what the public think makes an unacceptably low standard of living in the UK today. The survey asks people from a list of 76 items (46 for adults and 30 for children) to choose between those which are 'necessary and which all people should be able to afford, and which they should not have to do without' and those which 'may be desirable but are not necessary'.

In both 2011 and 2012, the Northern Ireland attitudes to necessities surveys confirmed that there is broad agreement among people across Northern Ireland about the basic standard of living to which everyone should be entitled. This is a minimum standard which covers material necessities such as food and clothing, as well as social activities, for example, attending family events and children participating effectively in school.

For adults, over 75% agree on the necessity of being able to keep warm and dry, having a nutritious diet and having good oral health. They also attach importance to activities associated with carrying out social roles, responsibilities and customs like visiting friends or family in hospital, celebrating special occasions and attending landmark personal events like weddings and funerals.

Table 1: Examples of necessities chosen for adults

Top 3 material necessities – over 75% agree	Top 3 social necessities – over 75% agree
Heating to keep home adequately warm	Visiting friends or family in hospital or other institutions
Dry, damp-free home	Celebrating special occasions such as Christmas
Two meals a day	Attending weddings, funerals or similar occasions

There was even greater agreement among the public regarding their views of children's items and activities. Particular value is placed on necessities associated with children's health and education, together with their developmental, environmental and social needs.

Table 2: Examples of necessities chosen for children

Top 3 material necessities – over 75% agree	Top 3 social necessities – Over 75% agree
Warm winter coat	Garden or outdoor space to play in safely
Fresh fruit or veg at least once a day	Celebrations on special occasions
Three meals a day	A hobby or leisure activity

Overall, people in Northern Ireland are slightly less generous in their attitudes to necessities for adults than people in the UK as a whole though less so for necessities for children where views are more broadly similar. For example, while fewer people in Northern Ireland said a computer and internet connection at home were essential for adults compared to Britain, there was complete consensus across the UK on the importance of this for children: 66% of people in Northern Ireland agree that children need a computer and internet for their homework.

Even so, there were some child items where people in Northern Ireland were less generous than the rest of the UK. Respondents in Britain rated 3 child items (indoor games, enough bedrooms for every child of 10 or over and at least 4 pairs of trousers or leggings) significantly higher and 1 child activity (a holiday) significantly higher than respondents in Northern Ireland.

Change over the last ten years

The 2012 and 2011 necessities surveys are directly comparable to the attitudes to necessities survey conducted in Northern Ireland in 2002. Since then some items have come to be seen as necessities as their widespread use has embedded them in the way we live.

However, there has been a decline in the extent of public support for other items and activities over the last ten years. Most notably, fewer people now regard certain social activities associated with personal enjoyment and entertainment as necessities.

This may reflect the wider mood of austerity and the harsher economic climate of recent years. People are less inclined to think visiting family and friends or having one week's annual holiday away from home are essential and having a small amount of money to spend each week on yourself is no longer considered a necessity for adults in 2012.

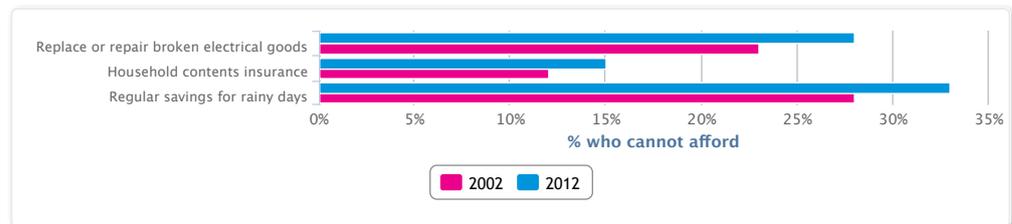
Even for children, people are prioritising the basics at the cost of the social. There has, for example, been a huge decrease in support over the last decade and even over the last year for a week's holiday for children - 69% said it was a necessity in 2002 compared to 47% in 2011 and 43% in 2012.

Going backwards

Comparing the results of the 2012 living standards survey with that conducted in 2002/3 reveals that more people are facing more problems today than they were ten years ago. In particular, households are less able to cope with unexpected events or afford minimal levels of financial protection than in 2002/3:

Table 3: Increasing levels of insecurity

There has been no significant change between 2002/3 and 2012 in the proportion of households with children unable to afford the basic necessities of food and clothing. But over a third of families cannot now afford one or more items central to a child's family life – a week's holiday away from home, a day trip with the family once a month and celebrating special occasions such as birthdays and Christmas. This is up from 28% a decade ago.



There has also been a large increase in the proportion of families unable to give their children pocket money – up from 6% to 15%.

Adult life is more restricted now with heat, shelter and food taking priority over family and social life. More adults in 2012 cannot afford a hobby or leisure activity, 7% in 2012 compared to 5% in 2002/3. Half the adult population in Northern Ireland have continued to wear worn out clothing because they could not afford to buy new clothes – up from just over a quarter in 2002/3. A fifth of the population can no longer afford to spend a small amount of money on themselves each week compared to 15% in 2002/3.

Housing conditions have fared particularly badly. The number of households unable to heat their home is at a record high – now 13% compared to 3% ten years ago. The number of households unable to afford damp-free homes has also risen – from 4% to 10%. One in five households can't keep their home in an adequate state of decoration – up from 11% in 2002/3.

Falling below minimum standards

Children in Northern Ireland are missing out

Nearly everyone agrees that people should be able to live in a home which doesn't have damp and which they can afford to heat. These are the top two necessities across the UK. Yet 16% of children live in homes that are either damp or inadequately heated, both factors that are known to be damaging for health.

Children in Northern Ireland are deprived in many other ways. The majority of people in 2012 believe a holiday away from home for their children is an important necessity, yet it is out of reach for 30% of families in Northern Ireland. Similarly day trips with their family once a month are seen as a necessity yet in Northern Ireland 12% of families with children cannot afford this.

For children, other social activities are also considered to be necessities. Along with day trips with the family once a month and a holiday away from home, the majority of people think that taking part in celebrations on special occasions like birthdays and Christmas, having a hobby or a leisure activity, taking part in clubs or social activities like drama or football, and outdoor leisure equipment, are all essential for a child's social participation. However,

- 17% of children lack one of these participation items or activities
- 12% of children lack two participation items or activities

Basic necessities for children's education and development include books, having space to study or do homework, games suitable for their ages, a computer and internet for homework, educational toys such as lego and being able to go on a school trip. Yet

- 17% of children lack at least one of these development items or activities
- 22% of households with children don't have a computer with access to the internet for homework

Financial insecurity

Significant numbers of people are finding it harder to cope financially, with more than one in four saying they have had to borrow in the last year to pay for day to day needs. 30% believe their household is 'a little' or 'a lot below' the level of income necessary to keep their household out of poverty.

In addition, people are less able to plan financially for their future with 31% of working age adults (320,000) being unable to afford to make regular payments into an occupational or private pension.

More than half of all households in Northern Ireland are struggling to keep up with household bills and a further 7% have fallen behind with some or many of their bills.

Of households that received help from their family and friends – 43% said it had 'a big' or 'very big' impact on their material standard of living.

Food insecurity

The general public strongly agree on what a minimally acceptable diet should be – for children, over 90% agree it means: three meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent at least once a day. For adults, over 76% agree that this means

“

We don't have a phone in the house anymore. We have the internet but that's only because the boys need that for school or we wouldn't even have that

”

Jean, mum of three

30%

of people cannot afford a week's annual holiday today compared to 24% in 2002

“

Just don't have enough money. The house is damp. We don't have the choices to go on holiday, the kids miss out so you know.

”

Mum, Northern Ireland

“

I haven't had a pay rise in 3 years but everything else has went up, electric, gas, food. It's hard to

two meals a day; fresh fruit and vegetables every other day; and meat, fish or a vegetarian equivalent every other day. Yet large numbers of the population cannot afford to eat properly:

- 4% of children lack one or more food items
- 7% of adults lack at least one of the adult food items

In addition, 29% of people have 'sometimes' or 'often' skimped on food so that others in the household would have enough to eat.

Fuel poverty

Fuel poverty is particularly high in Northern Ireland where significant numbers of household rely on oil for their heating. Not only were 13% of households facing severe problems with heating and couldn't afford to heat their home but many others had significant difficulties and were cutting back on their heating to some extent:

- 41% of households (290,000) said their home was a little or much colder than they would have liked last winter
- 46% (322,000) had turned the heating down or off, or only partially heated their house, even though it was cold.

Clothing

There was strong support for three essential items of clothing for adults. These were a warm, waterproof coat, two pairs of all-weather shoes and appropriate clothes for job interviews. Yet 8% of adults (100,000) cannot afford either a warm coat or two pairs of shoes and 17% of people unemployed and looking for work cannot afford suitable clothes for an interview.

7% of children lack one or more basic clothing items such as a warm winter coat, new, properly fitting shoes, some new (not second-hand) clothes and at least four pairs of trousers, leggings, jeans or jogging bottoms.

4% of children lack either a coat or a pair of properly fitting shoes.

Multiple deprivation

Households who can't afford three or more of the 22 adult necessities covering food, clothing, housing and social activities, are seen as multiply deprived. 36% of households in Northern Ireland lack three or more necessities. Moreover, significant numbers of these multiply deprived families are suffering very deep levels of poverty: 19% lack six or more items and 7% lack 10 or more.

Multiple deprivation has serious negative effects on all aspects of people's lives, their health and well-being and their self-esteem. Over a quarter of a million adults in Northern Ireland (19%) have felt embarrassed because of having a low income.

“

I feel really embarrassed all the time because you can't do anything, you can't go anywhere...I'm mortified here, how do you tell somebody 'no I don't have the money to go

”

Sue, recently made redundant

explain, nothing's matching, you know what I mean.

”

Family with two children, both parents working

“

we don't have the money to buy oil, it costs a couple of hundred pound

”

Mum with 12-week old baby and toddler

See also



Explore the data

The first PSE UK tables of data are available in the 'Explore the data' section.

Hear from communities in Northern Ireland who took part in an [innovative participatory research project](#).

Find out more about the work of [PSE Northern Ireland](#).

Read a detailed analysis of the 2011 Northern Ireland necessities of life survey, [The Necessities of Life in Northern Ireland](#) by Grace Kelly, Mike Tomlinson et al.

Further detailed PSE UK papers on the lack of necessities will also be published soon.

See also the PSE: UK team's first report '[The impoverishment of the UK](#)'.

About the surveys

The PSE:UK 2012 research draws on two surveys both carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) in Britain and by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in Northern Ireland.

- The 'living standards' survey was carried out between March and December 2012 and covered 5,193 households (4,205 in Britain and 988 in Northern Ireland) in which 12,097 people were living (9,786 in Britain and 2,311 in Northern Ireland).
- The 'Necessities of Life' survey was carried out between May and June 2012 across the UK and is based on a sample of 1,447 adults aged 16 or over in the Britain and 1,015 in Northern Ireland.
- The Necessities of Life survey was also carried out in Northern Ireland in February 2011 with a sample of 1,109 households.

The PSE NI 2002/3 research carried out two surveys. The first, the attitudes to necessities survey, was carried out in June 2012 and interviewed 1,070 people. The second, the living standards survey, was carried out between October 2002 and January 2003 and interviewed 3,865 people. Both surveys were conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

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