



# BRIEFING

## Northern Ireland: Census Profile

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This briefing summarises key statistics from the 2011 Census for Northern Ireland, and its constituent local government districts. The briefing provides information about population levels, the number, population share, age and gender of residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, as well as countries of origin, main languages and passports held. Moreover, the briefing compares the 2001 and 2011 Census results.

Please note: This census profile of Northern Ireland cannot be directly compared with the other UK census profiles. While this profile focuses its analysis on the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, in the census profiles for England, Wales and Scotland the focus is on the category of non-UK born residents, in which residents born in the Republic of Ireland are included.

## Key points

In 2011, the total usual resident population of Northern Ireland stood at just over 1.8 million residents. About 4.5% of those residents (81,314) were born outside of the UK or the Republic of Ireland. This represents an increase of 199% in the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland since 2001.

In 2011, 32.8% of the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland held a UK and/or an Irish passport, and 61.3% held only a non-UK/Irish passport. The rest (5.9%) held no passport.

Belfast had the highest number (18,414) of residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, but Dungannon had the highest share (10.4%) in 2011.

Between 2001 and 2011, the total population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland grew numerically the most in Belfast (11,873 additional residents), but the biggest percentage increase (+1,139%) took place in Dungannon.

After the UK and the Republic of Ireland, the most common country of birth of residents in Northern Ireland was Poland (19,658 residents), followed by Lithuania, India, the USA and Germany.

## Understanding the evidence

The census is the most complete source of information about the population. It is particularly useful for obtaining population estimates for small geographical areas and information on the characteristics of such a population. Other sources of information on population characteristics in the UK such as the Labour Force Survey have large margins of error at the local level, because they are based on survey data and rely on a limited number of observations at the local level. The census is based on a count of people and households, with efforts to include everyone, but it is supplemented by a survey to detect and estimate those who are missed at first.

The latest UK censuses were conducted during 2011, with 27 March 2011 as the official census day of record. In Northern Ireland, the census was conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in England and Wales and the National Records of Scotland (NRS) in Scotland, with different release dates for the data in these censuses (including the migration-related data).

When analysing the nature of migration, defining who counts as a migrant is of crucial importance. Yet there is no consensus on a single definition of a 'migrant'. Different datasets—and analyses from these datasets—use a variety of definitions of 'migrant,' including (1) country of birth, (2) nationality, (3) passports held, (4) length of stay, (5) reason for migration and (6) being subject to immigration controls. For example, people who are foreign-born are not all foreign nationals; likewise, some foreign nationals may have lived in the UK for decades while others reside in the UK for only a year. Some are the children born abroad of UK national parent(s)—e.g. service personnel. Others are long-term residents who have acquired UK citizenship.

The data analysed in this briefing are based mainly on the census statistics for country of birth. In particular, this briefing focuses on residents born outside of the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) due to the particular political and geographical context of Northern Ireland. Thus it is important to note that our other census briefings for England, Wales and Scotland published on the Migration Observatory website focus on the characteristics of the population born outside of the UK only, and thus the statistics presented here are not comparable.

When using data on country of birth, it is also important to bear in mind that many of those included in the 'born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland' category will have UK and/or Irish citizenship. This briefing also includes data for passports held, but not current nationality. The census collected data on passports held, and this can be used as a proxy for nationality; yet nearly 19% of the total usual resident population of Northern Ireland held no passport in 2011. Moreover, data for passports held are not available for 2001, precluding the measure of change over time.

The data presented include statistics for usual residents of the UK only, unless otherwise specified. Usual residents are defined as anyone in the UK on census day who had stayed or intended to stay in the UK for 12 months or more (or was outside the UK—including in the Republic of Ireland—but had a permanent UK address and intended to stay outside the UK for less than 12 months). In terms of countries of birth, data are available for 144 countries of birth for Northern Ireland as a whole. At the local level, however, data have not been provided for all countries of origin. Instead, the NISRA has identified 36 key countries of origin most common at the Northern Ireland level, and all local analyses of the most frequent countries of origin only refer to the most frequent countries out of the 36 key countries of origin. As such, particularly at the local level, there may be other more numerous country of birth groups that the current census release does not include.

See the Migration Observatory video interview of Peter Stokes, 2011 Census Statistical Design Manager, for further discussion.

## In 2011, the total usual resident population of Northern Ireland stood at just over 1.8 million residents. About 4.5% of those residents (81,314) were born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland

As shown in Table 1, in 2011, the total usual resident population of Northern Ireland stood at just under 2 million people, 81,314 of which had been born outside of the United Kingdom (UK) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI). This represents 4.5% of the total resident population of Northern Ireland, up from 1.6% in 2001.

Since 2001, the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland grew by 54,088 people, accounting for 43% of the total population growth of 125,596 usual residents in the decade. While overall the population of Northern Ireland increased by 7.5% between 2001 and 2011, the resident population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland grew by 199% in the same period, from 27,266 residents in 2001 to 81,314 in 2011.

Table 1 – Key census statistics for Northern Ireland

	2001	2011	Change (%)
<b>Total usual resident population</b>	1,685,267	1,810,863	+7.5%
<b>Born in the United Kingdom</b>	1,615,769	1,691,677	+4.7%
<b>Born in Northern Ireland</b>	1,534,268	1,608,853	+4.9%
<b>Born in the Republic of Ireland*</b>	42,272	37,872	-10.4%
<b>Born outside UK and ROI</b>	27,226	81,314	+198.7%
Born outside UK and ROI as share of population	1.6%	4.5%	+178%
<b>Non-UK/Irish passport holders</b>		53,867	
Non-UK passport holders as share of population		3%	

Source: Northern Ireland Census 2001 and 2011, NISRA (Tables QS207NI, UV098, KS206NI). Usual resident population. \*Includes Ireland part not specified.

## In 2011, 50.3% of residents born outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland were male and 81.5% were between 16 and 64 years of age

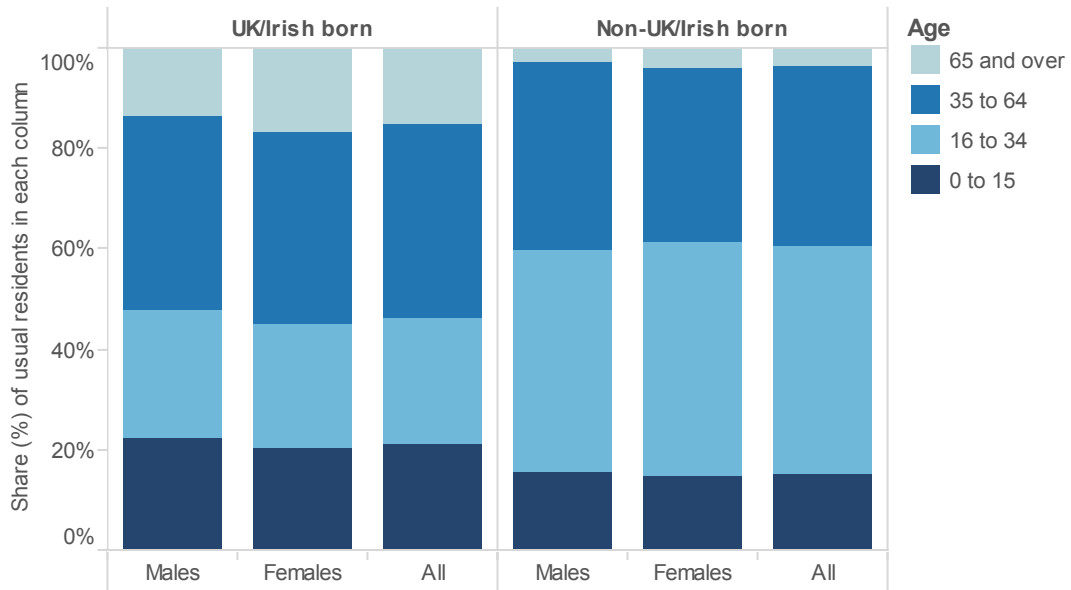
In Northern Ireland in 2011, the population born outside of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland had a younger age profile than the population born in the UK and ROI. In 2011, 45.4% of those residents born outside of UK or ROI were aged 16–34 years of age and 81.5% were aged 16–64 (see Figure 1). In comparison, 63.7% of the population born in the UK and ROI were between 16 and 64 years old in 2011.

Moreover, of the 81,314 residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in 2011, 50.3% were male and 49.7% were female. In comparison, 51.1% of the population born in the UK and the Republic of Ireland were female in 2011. However, the gender distribution of those born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland differed somewhat depending on the age-group; a slight majority of those aged 0–15 and 35–64 were men (51.6% and 52% respectively). At the same time, the proportion of women tended to increase with age, with over 58% of those aged above 65 being female.

Figure 1

**Residents born outside UK and ROI by age and sex: Northern Ireland 2011**

Chart provided by migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011, NISRA (Tables DC2017NI+CT0028NI). Usual resident population.

**In 2011, 32.8% of those born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland held either a UK or an Irish passport (or both), and 61.3% held only a non-UK/Irish passport. The rest (5.9%) held no passport**

In 2011, 78.2% of residents of Northern Ireland held a UK and or an Irish passport (or both) and 3% (54,248 usual residents) held only a non-UK/Irish passport

(see Table 1). At the same time, 18.9% of residents held no passport.

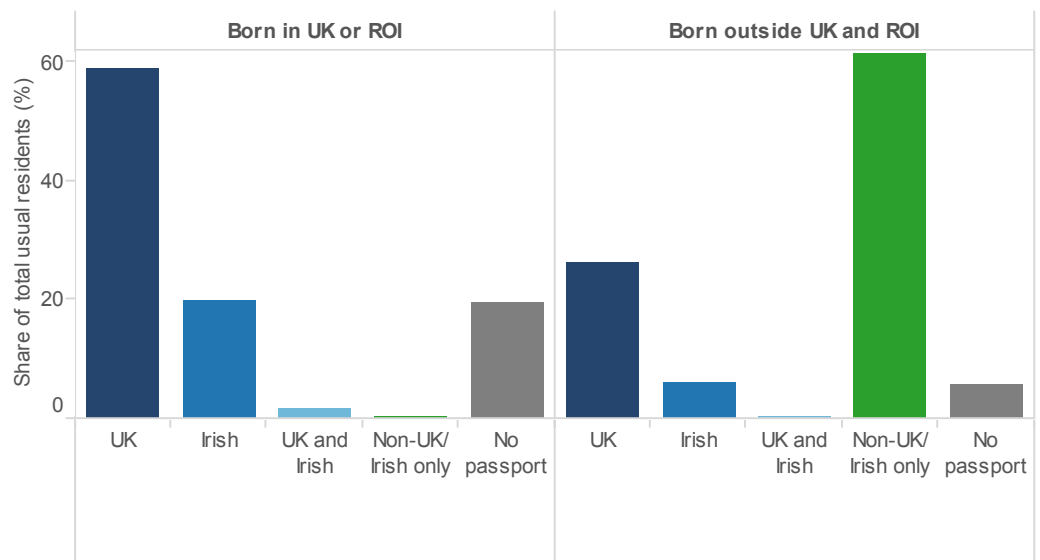
In terms of those born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, 32.8% (26,727 residents) held a UK passport, while 61.3% (49,965 residents) held only a non-UK/Irish passport (see Figure 2). Only 5.9% of the population born outside UK and ROI (4,761 residents) held no passport.

It is important to note that for residents with multiple passports, those who had a UK or Irish passport and

Figure 2

**Country of birth and passports held: Northern Ireland 2011**

Chart provided by migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011, NISRA (Table DC2225NI). Usual resident population.

at the same time another passport are included as having a UK or Irish passport. Thus, respondents with both a UK/Irish passport as well as a non-UK/Irish passport are not included in the non-UK/Irish passport category. It is only residents who had one or more passports other than a UK and Irish passport that are included in the non-UK/Irish category.

**Belfast had the highest number (18,414) of residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in Northern Ireland, but Dungannon had the highest population share (10.4%) in 2011**

As shown in Figure 3, out of all the local government districts (LGDs – please note these are the 1992 LGDs, not those in shadow operation since April 2014) in Northern Ireland, Belfast had the highest number (18,414) of residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in 2011. This represents 6.6% of the local resident population of Belfast and accounts for 22.7% of all those born outside the UK and ROI resident in Northern Ireland (while in total Belfast’s residents represent 15.5% of the population of Northern Ireland).

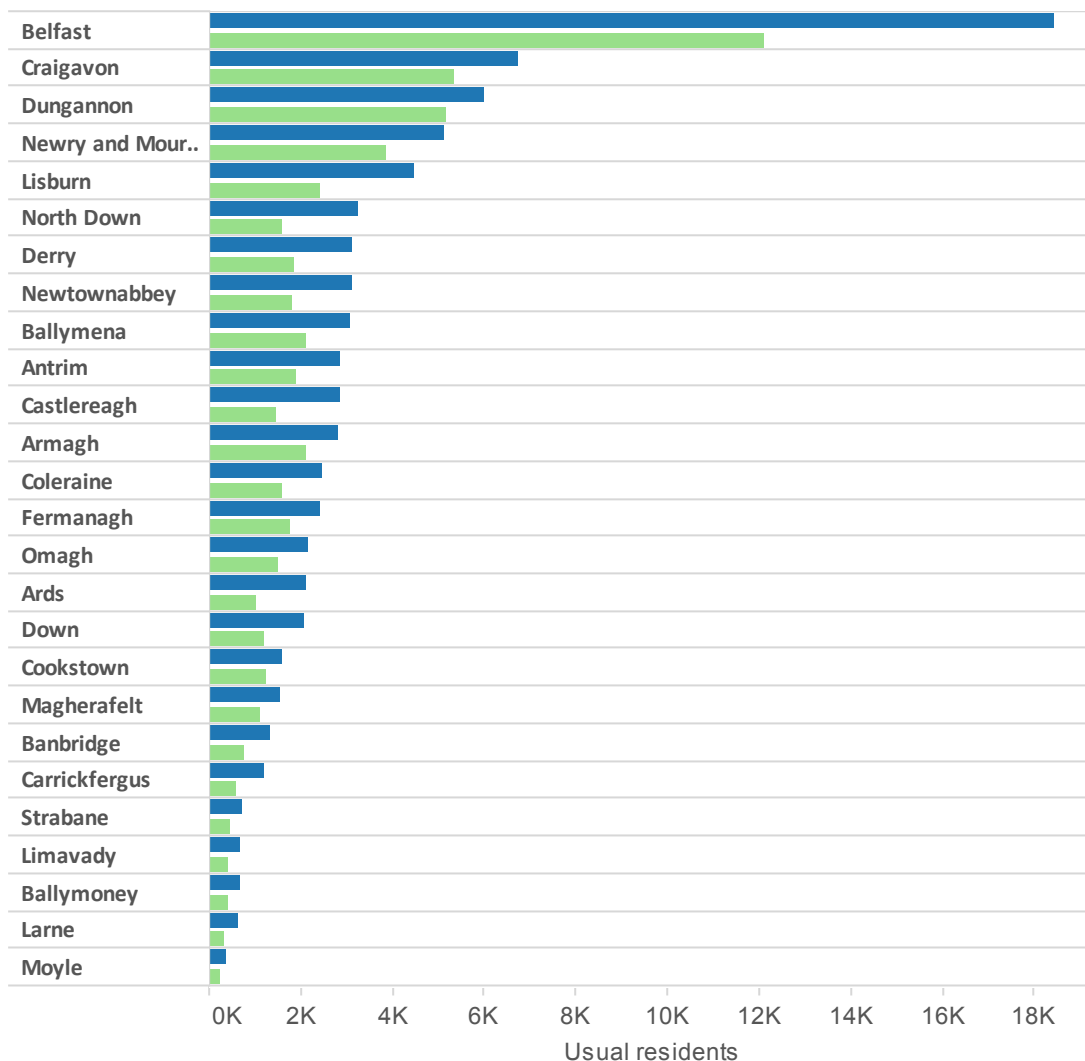
Figure 3

In terms of the size of the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, Belfast was followed by Craigavon, with 6,712 residents in the area in 2011, and Dungannon with 5,998. In fact, in terms of the population share, it is the local government district of Dungannon that comes out first, with 10.4% of the local population born outside of the UK or the Republic of Ireland in 2011.

Conversely, the locality with the smallest population born outside of the UK and ROI was Moyle with 348 residents representing 2% of the local population, although it is important to highlight that Moyle is also the smallest local government district in Northern Ireland

**Residents born outside UK and ROI and with non-UK/Irish passports: Northern Ireland 2011**

Chart provided by migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011, NISRA (Tables QS207NI,KS206NI,CT0029NI). Usual resident population.  
 Note: The categories of residents born outside of UK and ROI and residents with only a non-UK/Irish passport are overlapping; the vast majority of residents with a foreign-passport will also be foreign-born.

■ Non-UK/Irish born      ■ Non-UK/Irish passport

overall. It was the Strabane LGD that had the lowest population share (1.7%) of residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in 2011.

In terms of passports held, Belfast also had the highest number of residents with only a non-UK/Irish passport in 2011, with 12,110 non-UK/Irish passport holders accounting for 4.3% of the local population (see Figure 3). This also represents 22.5% of all those with only a non-UK/Irish passport in Northern Ireland in 2011. Conversely, Moyle had the smallest number of residents with only a non-UK/Irish passport in 2011, with the estimated 199 residents representing 1.2% of the local population, also the smallest non-UK/Irish passport holder population share in Northern Ireland.

While there were 81,314 people born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland usually resident in Northern Ireland in 2011 and 119,186 residents born outside of the UK only, there were also 2,535 short-term residents (defined as staying between 3 and 12 months) born outside of the UK in Northern Ireland in the same year. Data are not available for residents born outside the UK and the Republic of Ireland; a short-term resident is by definition born outside of the UK. As well as having the largest resident population that was born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, Belfast also had the highest number (1,088) of short-term residents born outside of the UK, amounting to 42.9% of all the short-term residents in Northern Ireland. The lowest number (estimated 5 residents) of short-term residents was in again in the Moyle local government district.

### **Between 2001 and 2011, the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland grew numerically the most in Belfast (11,873 additional residents), but the biggest percentage increase (+1,139%) took place in Dungannon**

As shown in Figures 4 and 5, between 2001 and 2011 the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland increased in each local government district within Northern Ireland, but to varying degrees and at different speeds. The largest numerical increase took place in Belfast, with the number of residents rising by 11,873 persons during the intercensal period, representing an increase of 182%. This was followed by Craigavon, with an increase of 5,602 residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland, from 1,110 in 2001 to 6,712 in 2011. This represents the second highest percentage increase (505%) in Northern Ireland.

The highest percentage increase, however, took place in Dungannon, with more than a tenfold increase (1,139%) in the population born outside of the UK and ROI, from an estimated 484 residents in 2001 to 5,998 in 2011 (see Figure 4). In fact, Dungannon experienced the highest increase in its total population (21.2%) of any LGD in Northern Ireland and 55% of this growth can be accounted for by the increase in the number of residents born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in the area.

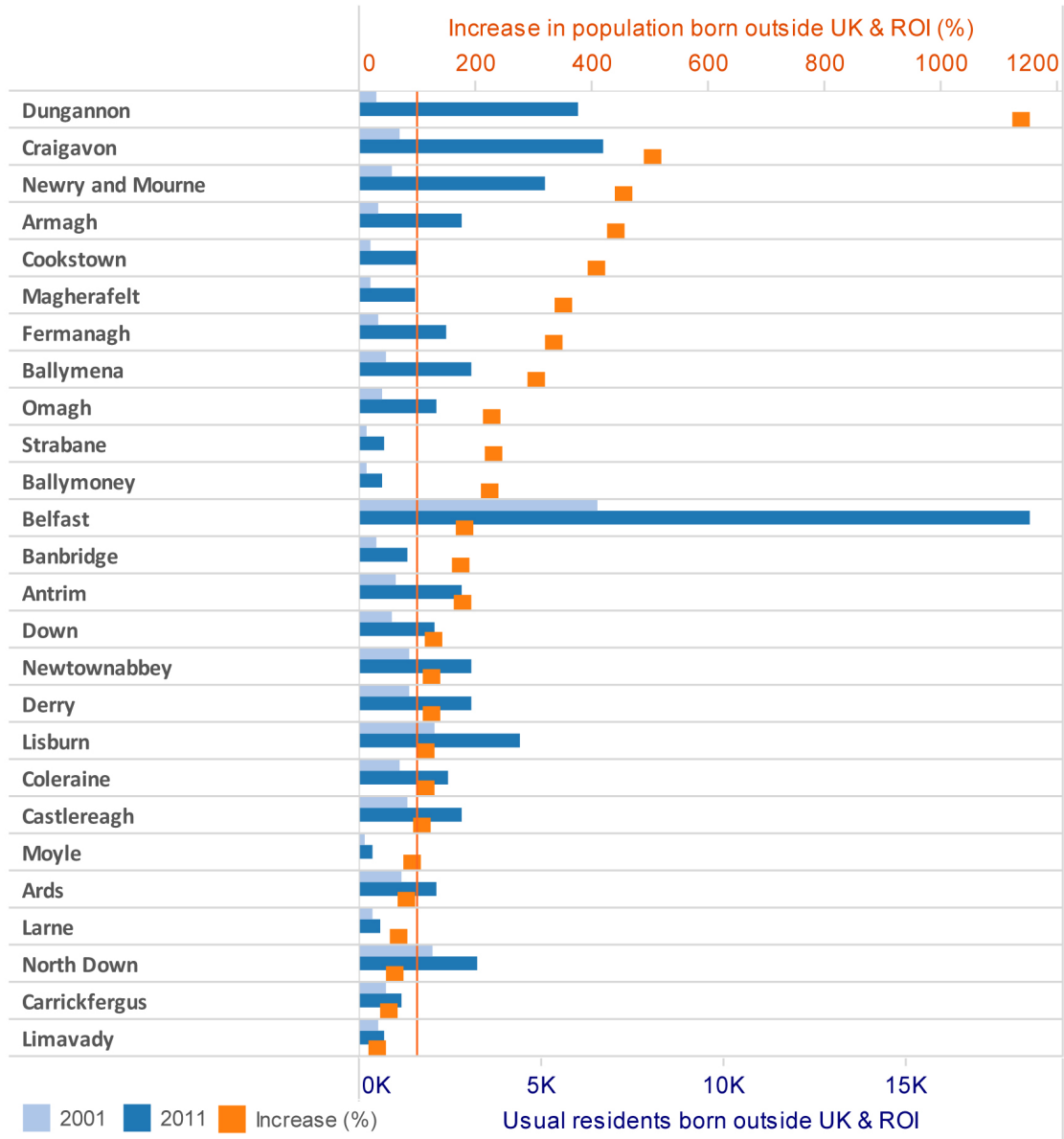
As shown in Figure 5, as the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland increased in each local government district in Northern Ireland since 2001, so has there been an increase in its share of the local population in each district. In terms of those born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland as a proportion of the total resident population within a given area, the highest percentage increase (a tenfold increase from 1% in 2001 to 10.4% in 2011) took place correspondingly in Dungannon.

At the same time, the population born outside of the UK and ROI grew by the smallest number of residents in Limavady, increasing by 158 residents. This presents an increase of 31% and is also the lowest percentage increase in the population born outside of the UK and ROI in Northern Ireland. The area with the lowest percentage change (27%) in the percentage of its local population being born outside of the UK or ROI was also Limavady, increasing from 1.5% in 2001 to 2% in 2011.

Figure 4

### Residents born outside UK and ROI: Northern Ireland 2001-2011

Chart provided by migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



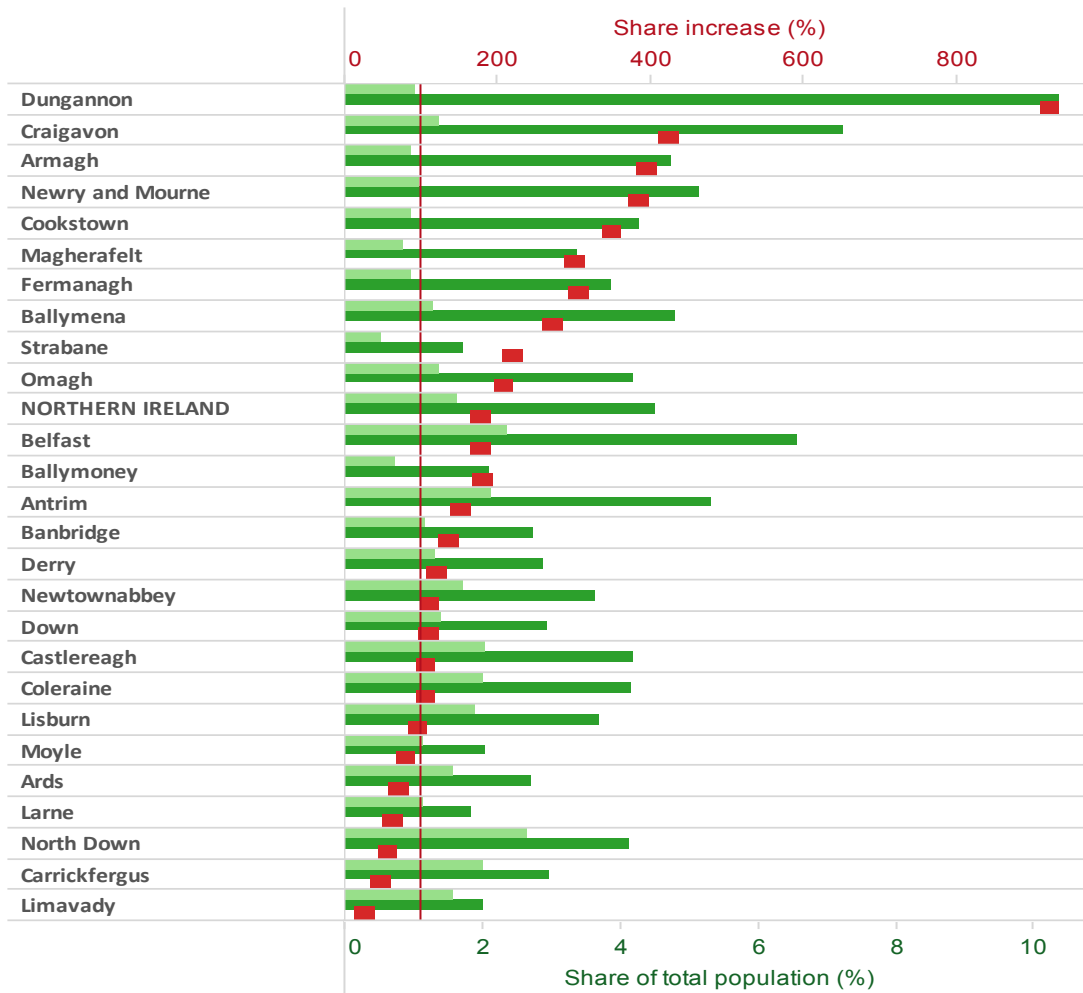
Source: NI Census 2001 & 2011, NISRA (Tables QS207NI+UV098). Usual resident population.



Figure 5

### Residents born outside UK and ROI as share of local population: Northern Ireland 2001-2011

Chart provided by migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Northern Ireland Census 2001 & 2011, NISRA (Tables QS207NI+UV098). Usual resident population.

■ 2001 (%)     
 ■ 2011 (%)     
 ■ Share increase (%)

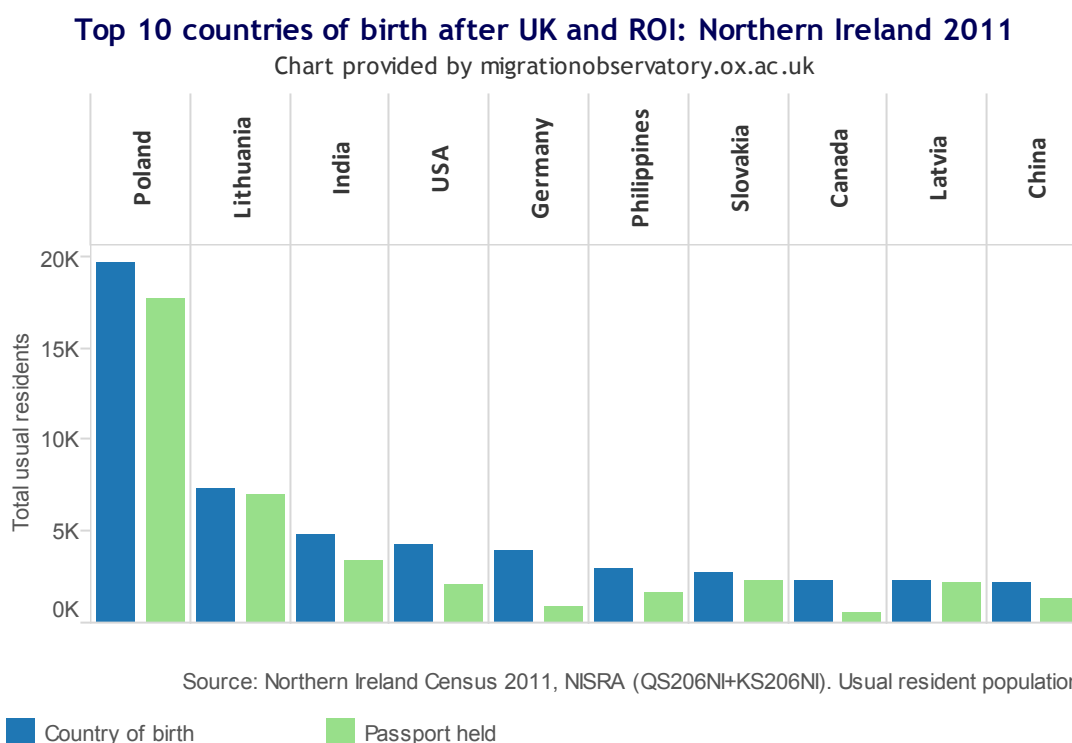
Source: NI Census 2001 & 2011, NISRA (Tables QS207NI+UV098). Usual resident population.

**After the UK and the Republic of Ireland, the most common country of birth of usual residents in Northern Ireland was Poland (19,658 residents), followed by Lithuania, India, the USA and Germany**

As shown in Figure 6, after the UK and the Republic of Ireland, Poland is the most common country of birth in Northern Ireland with 19,658 residents, amounting to 24.2% of the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland (and 1.1% of the total population of Northern Ireland). This is followed by residents born in Lithuania (7,341), India (4,796), the USA (4,251) and Germany (3,908). Migrants from Eastern European countries that joined the EU between 2001 and 2011 have become an important part of the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland; in 2011, there were 35,720 residents born in the A8 and A2 EU Accession countries, representing 44% of those born outside the UK and ROI and 2% of the total resident population in Northern Ireland.

Within the top 10 countries of birth for the population born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland were also the Philippines, Slovakia, Canada, Latvia and China. The resident population born in these 10 countries represents more than half (64.5%) of all those born outside of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland.

Figure 6



Of those residents born in Poland, 82% held a non-UK/Irish passport only in 2011, while 8% held a UK or Irish passport (or both) and 10% held no passport. These percentages were similar for Lithuanian-born residents, but differed in terms of residents born in India. In comparison, 62% of Indian-born residents held a non-UK/Irish passport only and 37% held a UK and/or an Irish passport (while 1% held no passport).

The differences in the relationship between the ‘country of birth’ and ‘passports held’ measures in the cases of Poland and India can be partly explained, on the one hand, by the fact that EU citizens have less need to acquire UK citizenship as they are not subject to immigration controls and on the other, by the historical differences in migration from these countries.

### As a percentage of those born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland within each area of Northern Ireland, the Lithuanian-born group was the least evenly distributed among the top 5 groups

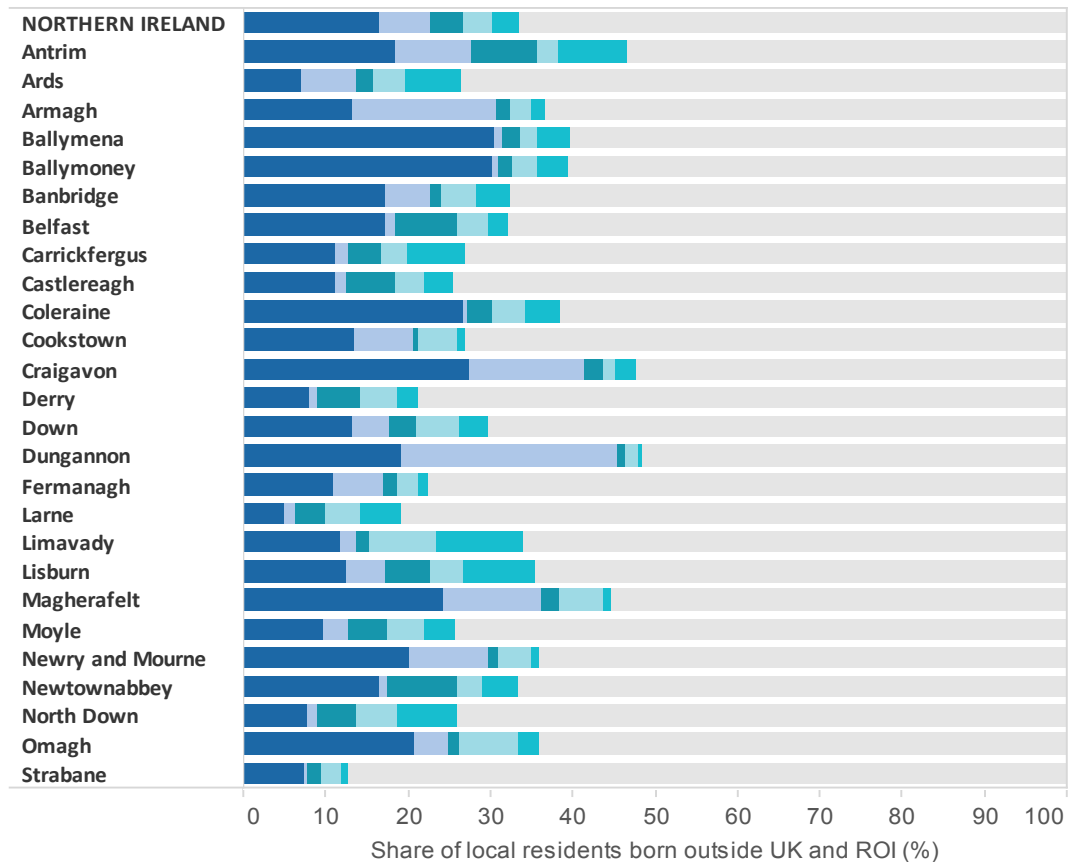
It is important to note that residents from the top five countries of birth (other than the UK and the Republic of Ireland) were not evenly distributed across Northern Ireland. For example, while Belfast’s residents represent 15.5% of the population of Northern Ireland, its Polish-born residents accounted for 31% of all Polish-born residents, while its Indian-born and Lithuanian-born populations represented 37% and 4% respectively of all those born in India and Lithuania resident in Northern Ireland. Conversely, the German-born group’s distribution, for example, followed more closely the overall population distribution within Northern Ireland.

Moreover, the residents from the top five countries of birth (other than the UK and ROI) represented differing percentages of the total population born outside of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in different areas of Northern Ireland (see Figure 7). As a share of those born outside the UK and ROI within each area of Northern Ireland, the Lithuanian-born group was the least evenly distributed. While Lithuanian-born residents accounted for 9% of the population born outside of the UK and ROI of Northern Ireland, in Dungannon, this stood at 32.1%, the highest in Northern Ireland. This was followed by Armagh, with 28.6% of those born outside the UK and ROI born in Lithuania. At the same time, residents born in Lithuania represented the lowest proportion (0.9%) of those born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland in the Coleraine LGD.

Figure 7

#### Top 5 countries of birth (excl. UK and ROI) as share of local residents born outside UK and ROI: Northern Ireland 2011

Chart provided by migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk



Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011, NISRA (Table QS208NI). Usual resident population.  
 Note: These 5 countries of origin are those of the most numerous countries of birth (excl. UK and ROI) in NI. The NISRA has not released data for other countries of origin at the local level, only for NI as a whole.

**Country of Birth**  
 Other  
 Germany  
 USA  
 India  
 Lithuania  
 Poland

## In terms of main spoken language, 50,376 residents of Northern Ireland (2.9% of total population) spoke a language other than English or Irish as their main language in 2011

There were 50,376 residents of Northern Ireland who spoke a language other than English or Irish (Gaelic) as their main language in 2011. This represents 2.9% of the total resident population aged 3 and above. For those residents, the most commonly spoken language was Polish. In fact, 17,731 residents mainly spoke Polish in 2011, accounting for 35% of those who used a language other than English or Irish as their main spoken language (and 1% of the population aged 3 and above overall).

This was followed by Lithuanian (12.3%), Chinese languages (4.4%), Portuguese (4.5%) and Slovak (4.5%). Table 2 shows the top 10 main spoken languages (or language groups) other than English or Irish in Northern Ireland in 2011.

Table 2 – Main spoken language if not English or Irish: Northern Ireland 2011

	Usual residents	Share (%)*
<b>Polish</b>	17,731	35.0%
<b>Lithuanian</b>	6,250	12.3%
<b>Chinese languages</b>	2,214	4.4%
<b>Portuguese</b>	2,293	4.5%
<b>Slovak</b>	2,257	4.5%
<b>Tagalog/Filipino</b>	1,895	3.7%
<b>Latvian</b>	1,273	2.5%
<b>Russian</b>	1,191	2.4%
<b>Malayalam</b>	1,174	2.3%
<b>Hungarian</b>	1,008	2%
<b>Other</b>	13,450	28.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>50,376</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Northern Ireland Census 2011, NISRA (Table KS207NI). Usual resident population above 3 years of age; \*Share of all those who spoke a language other than English or Irish as their main language.

It is also interesting to look at the English proficiency of those residents who spoke a language other than English. In 2011, there were 54,540 residents in Northern Ireland who did not select English as their main spoken language in 2011. Comparable data for proficiency for non-Irish speakers is not currently available, even though the Census asked about the ability to speak, read, write or understand Irish. As such, the following analysis focuses on the English proficiency of residents who choose a language other than English as their main language, including those who selected Irish.

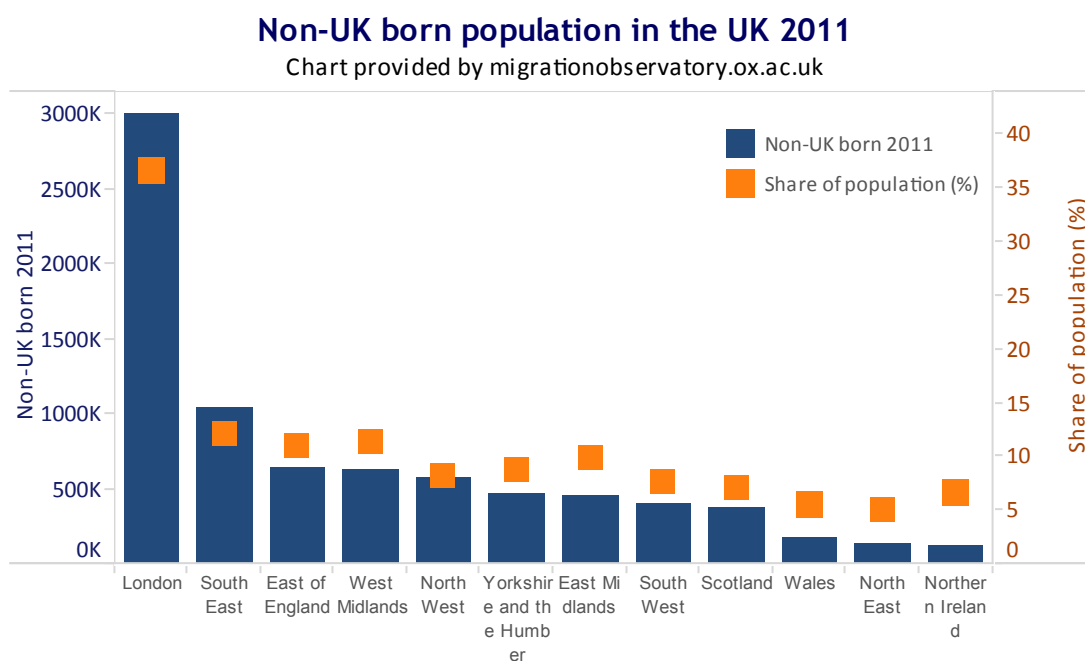
Of those 54,540 residents, 71% reported speaking English very well or well (33% and 39% respectively). At the same time, 23% reported not being able to speak English well, while 5% reported they couldn't speak English at all (0.7% and 0.2% of all residents above the age of 3 respectively). Compared to England and Wales, non-English speaking residents in Northern Ireland reported a lower English proficiency. While 71% of those who did not speak English as their main language in Northern Ireland stated they could speak English very well or well, for England and Wales as a whole, this was 79% (in Wales, this measure denotes proficiency in English and/or Welsh).

## In both 2001 and 2011, Northern Ireland had a smaller number of non-UK born residents than all the regions of England as well as than Wales and Scotland

In order to be able to compare Northern Ireland with other parts of the UK, it is necessary in this instance to look at the non-UK born population only (rather than those born outside of the UK and the Republic of Ireland), but it is important to bear in mind that the Irish-born population makes up a larger proportion of the non-UK born population in Northern Ireland than it does in other parts of the UK.

As shown in Figure 8, Northern Ireland had a smaller non-UK born population than all other parts of the UK, including each region of England in 2011, and this remained unchanged since 2001. In 2011, the number of non-UK born residents in Northern Ireland (119,186) was about 25 times lower than London’s 3 million non-UK born (the region with the highest number of non-UK born residents in the UK).

Figure 8



Source: England & Wales Census, ONS, Scotland Census, NRS and Northern Ireland Census, NISRA 2011. Usual resident population.

In terms of the share of the non-UK born population within the total population of the country or region, in 2011 Northern Ireland had the third smallest share (6.6%) of non-UK born residents out of the constituent parts of the UK. In 2001, it had the fifth smallest share, with 4.1% of its population born outside of the UK. In 2011, the region with the highest proportion of non-UK born residents was London (37%), while the region with the lowest share was the North East (5%).

### Evidence gaps and limitations

There are two main limitations of the census. Firstly, it is typically only conducted every 10 years. Therefore, other sources of information are important in order to update the information between censuses. Secondly, there are only a limited number of questions included in the census. Therefore, sources of information on the broader characteristics of the population can also complement the census information.

While the census aims to include the entire population, it does have a certain margin of error. For Northern Ireland as a whole, the relative confidence interval at the 95% confidence level published by the NISRA was 11,000 people more or less than the estimate (NISRA, 2012a). To give an example at the more local level, for Belfast’s usually

resident population, the relative confidence interval at the 95% level was 1.93%, suggesting a 95% probability that the true value of the population lies somewhere between 275,539 and 286,385 persons (NISRA, 2012b). Specific confidence intervals are not currently available for census data relating to country of birth.

### References

- NISRA. (2012a) "Population and Household Estimates for Northern Ireland: Methodology Overview". Belfast, July 2012.
- NISRA. (2012b). "Population and Household Estimates for Local Government Districts: Quality Assurance Report". Belfast, September 2012.

### Related material

- Migration Observatory Briefing – Geographical Distribution and Characteristics of Long-Term International Flows to the UK [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/geographical-distribution-and-characteristics-long-term-international-migration-flows-uk](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/geographical-distribution-and-characteristics-long-term-international-migration-flows-uk)
- Migration Observatory briefing – Migrants in the UK: An Overview [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-overview](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/briefings/migrants-uk-overview)

### Further information

- Census Project Page [www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/projects/census](http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/projects/census)



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Based at the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford, the Migration Observatory provides independent, authoritative, evidence-based analysis of data on migration and migrants in the UK, to inform media, public and policy debates, and to generate high quality research on international migration and public policy issues. The Observatory's analysis involves experts from a wide range of disciplines and departments at the University of Oxford.



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