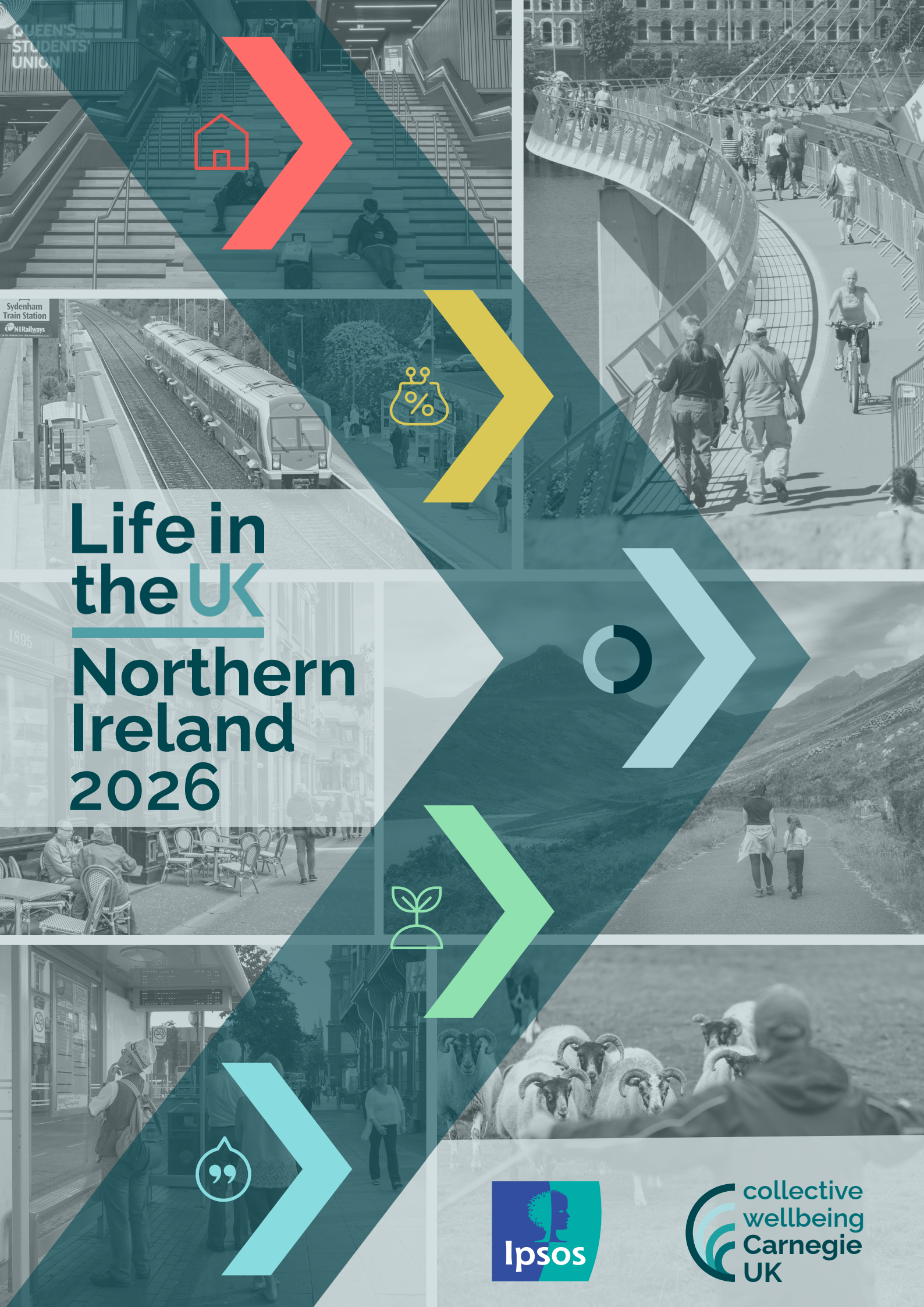


Life in the UK

Northern Ireland 2026

Ipsos

collective wellbeing Carnegie UK

The Life in the UK Index

Background

Carnegie UK's Life in the UK wellbeing index measures collective wellbeing across the UK. It is based on what people in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales tell us about their lives.

The purpose of this index is to demonstrate to governments and other decision makers the value of focussing their attention on the things that really matter to people. It offers a way of understanding whether we are collectively living better or worse over time, helps identify where progress is being made, and points to the areas of our lives that require new or sustained policy intervention.

Method

- The evidence for the 2026 index was collected via a 26-question survey of 6,731 respondents across the UK using Ipsos' KnowledgePanel, a random probability survey panel with selection based on a random sample of UK households. The fieldwork was carried out between 21st and 27th May 2026.
- The survey has been running since 2023 with similar sample sizes, with fieldwork always conducted at a comparable time each year, in May. The Northern Ireland sample sizes for each year are as follows:
  - 2023: 728
  - 2024: 716
  - 2025: 919
  - 2026: 714
- Samples were stratified to achieve a reasonable representation of respondents by age, education and ethnicity. In particular, the number of minority ethnic individuals was boosted to facilitate analysis by ethnicity at the UK level.
- Questions are categorised into four domains to measure people's social, economic, environmental, and democratic wellbeing. The average of these scores results in the overall collective wellbeing score.
- The overall collective wellbeing index score and the wellbeing domain scores have a value of between 0 and 100. It should be noted these index scores are derived scores, not percentages.
- The collective wellbeing score, domain scores, and individual questions were all analysed to compare aspects of life for different groups of people in different parts of the UK.

- Regression analysis is used to help understand which demographic characteristics are most associated both with collective wellbeing overall and with social, economic, environmental and democratic wellbeing, specifically. Throughout the report, the lists of demographic factors that are associated with wellbeing are ordered by the strength of the regression co-efficient, with strongest first.

- This year additional demographic characteristics are included in the regression analysis that were not included in this analysis in previous years. These are: religion, sexual orientation, whether someone is a graduate or not, and working status. Where this additional analysis finds differences that align with statistical testing, these are shown. In some cases, the additional analysis has changed the strength of associations between demographic factors and wellbeing scores, so these should not be compared directly to previous years' results.

- Throughout the report, statistical significance testing has been carried out, tested to 95%, which means that we can have a high level of confidence that any changes represent meaningful shifts over time or differences between groups of people.

- The graphs do not show statistical significance, nor do they show all question response options meaning percentages do not always add up to 100%. This more detailed information can be found within the data dashboard via our website.

Carnegie UK has been working with leading social research agency Ipsos since the inception of Life in the UK, with Ipsos conducting the fieldwork and analysis of the survey. More information on the methodology used to create the index and the full technical report are available here.

Carnegie UK is committed to following the principles of the Code of Practice for Statistics in the production of our Life in the UK index. We outline how we adhere to these principles in our Voluntary Statement of Compliance.

Carnegie UK works to put wellbeing at the heart of decision making. This report provides an independent and authoritative overview of our collective wellbeing in the UK in 2026. We hope it makes the case for better measures of social progress and highlights where policy intervention is urgently required.


QUEEN'S
STUDENTS'
UNION
STUDENT SERVICES




Sydenham
Train Station
NI Railways


1895
ROBINSONS
EST. 1895







Contents

Introduction: Life in the UK - Northern Ireland 2026 6

Our collective wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 7

Social wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026 10
› Summary 15

Economic wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026 16
› Summary 21

Environmental wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026 22
› Summary 27

Democratic wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026 28
› Summary 36

Summary table of domain scores by key demographic characteristics 38

Introduction: Life in the UK - Northern Ireland 2026

This is the latest edition of our annual Life in the UK - Northern Ireland index, now with four years' worth of data trends, enabling us to take a slightly longer-term view of how people across Northern Ireland are living.

Northern Ireland's collective wellbeing in 2026 is **62**; this now represents a significant improvement compared to the headline score we saw in 2024. The social, economic, and environmental wellbeing scores for Northern Ireland – **74**, **68**, and **66**, respectively – did not record any real changes this year, although Northern Ireland also avoided some of the declines seen across the UK as a whole.

Unlike other domains, democratic wellbeing had improved markedly from both 2023 and 2024, though it remained concerningly low. It stood at **39** and was in line with that of other UK jurisdictions for the first time. Fewer people reported low trust in institutions ranging from the UK Government to banks than three years earlier, and trust in the Northern Ireland Executive had largely retained the improvements seen over the previous two years.

However, the polling took place in May, before the summer's unrest and subsequent political disputes; we can only speculate what impact these events may have had on measures of democratic wellbeing in recent months. However, we would emphasise the need for political and government institutions in Northern Ireland to prioritise work that builds trust with individuals and communities.

Our mission at Carnegie UK is to ensure that everyone in the UK and Ireland has what they need to live well together now and into the future. We hope that this index points to where change and policy intervention are most needed in Northern Ireland to help make progress towards that goal. With the existing Programme for Government and wellbeing dashboard already well developed in Northern Ireland, the Executive is in a strong position to use wellbeing measurement data to help deliver meaningful improvements to people's lives.



Sarah Davidson
CEO, Carnegie UK

Our collective wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026

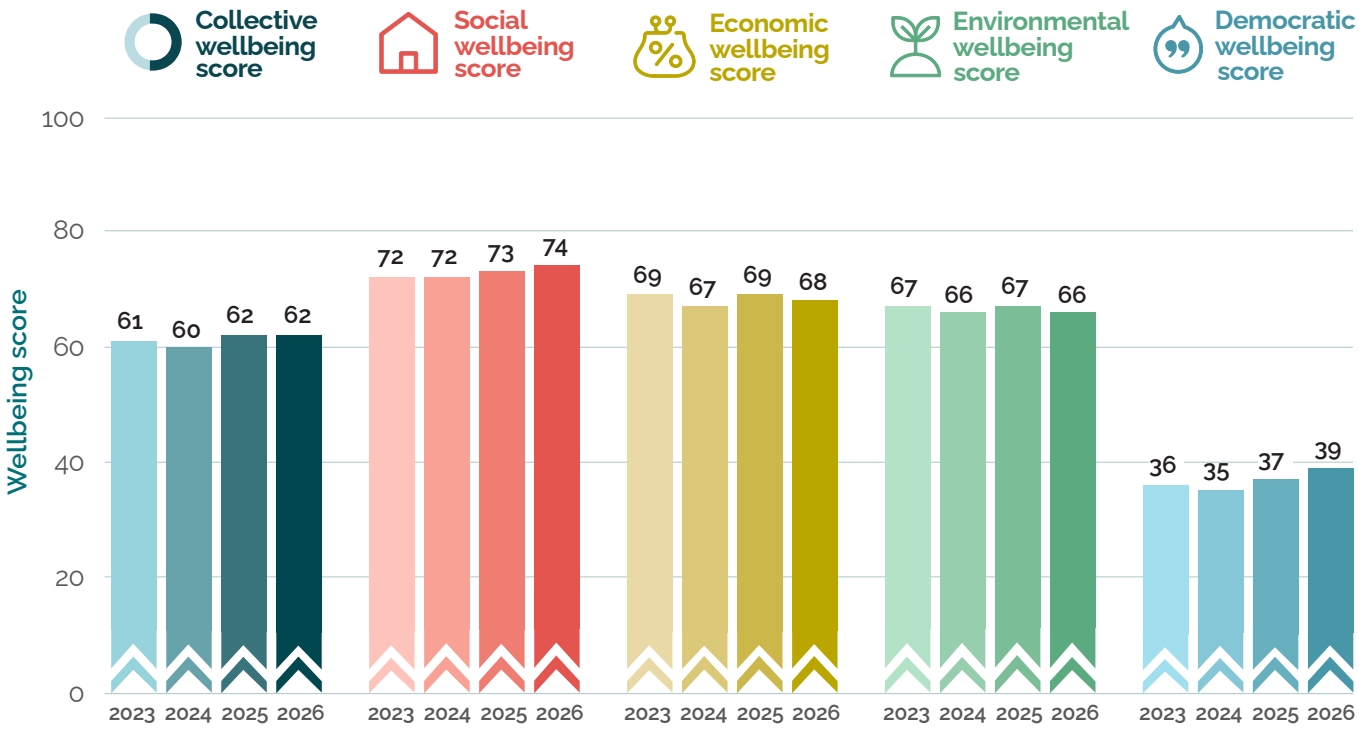
Collective wellbeing is about everyone having what they need to live well now and into the future. It goes beyond individual happiness or health. Instead, it looks at the holistic, bigger picture: how our society, economy, environment and democracy work together to support people and communities.

The overall score for collective wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 is **62** out of a possible 100. This marks an improvement since 2024.



While there have been no statistically significant changes to social, economic, or environmental wellbeing since 2023, democratic wellbeing has seen a statistically significant increase, rising to 39 from 36. This has been shaped by a rise in trust in the UK Government and in other institutions such as banks.

Figure 1: Life in the UK Northern Ireland results since 2023



Due to rounding some of the differences over the years are statistically significant, while others are not. For example, between 2024 and 2026 collective wellbeing increased from 60.1 to 62.1 (a statistically significant +2.0 point increase), whilst social wellbeing increased from 72.5 to 74.0 (a non-significant +1.5 point increase).

Understanding what influences collective wellbeing

The findings of the 2026 Life in the UK index for Northern Ireland indicate a positive change to collective wellbeing, largely driven by the improvements we have seen in democratic wellbeing.

The effect that improved democratic wellbeing has had on overall collective wellbeing in Northern Ireland demonstrates the central importance of strengthening trust in and influence over the institutions that shape our lives. Furthermore, while at the overall UK level several domain scores were lower than in one or more previous years, in Northern Ireland these decreases have not occurred. At the same time, the index tells us that people's experience of life in Northern Ireland is still shaped by a wide range of demographic factors, and that inequalities persist.

In 2026 the following factor stands out as particularly important in predicting a higher collective wellbeing score in Northern Ireland:

- **Having a higher household income.** People with annual household incomes of £100,000 and above have a collective wellbeing score of **72**. People with an annual household income of between £52,000 and £99,999 have some of the highest collective wellbeing scores (**66**), and those with an annual household income of between £26,000 and £51,999 have a collective wellbeing score of **62**. Meanwhile, those with an annual household income of below £26,000 have a collective wellbeing score of **56**, 16 points lower than for those in the highest income bracket.[1]

The following factors are also notable influences on collective wellbeing in Northern Ireland:

- **Being disabled.** Disabled people have a collective wellbeing score of **56**, eight points lower than for those who are not disabled (**64**).
- **Living in social housing.** People who live in social housing have a collective wellbeing score of **50**, 14 points lower than for homeowners (**64**).[2]
- **Being from a Catholic community background.** People from a Catholic community background have a collective wellbeing score of **59**, six points lower than for those from a Protestant community background (**65**).
- **Not being a graduate.** Non-graduates have an average collective wellbeing score of **61**, four points lower than for those who are graduates (**65**).

1 The base size for people with an annual household income of £100,000 and above was smaller than for other groups at 62 people, so findings should be treated with caution.

2 The base size for social housing tenants was smaller than for other groups at 55 people, so findings should be treated with caution.

Figure 2. Factors that have the biggest impact on collective wellbeing

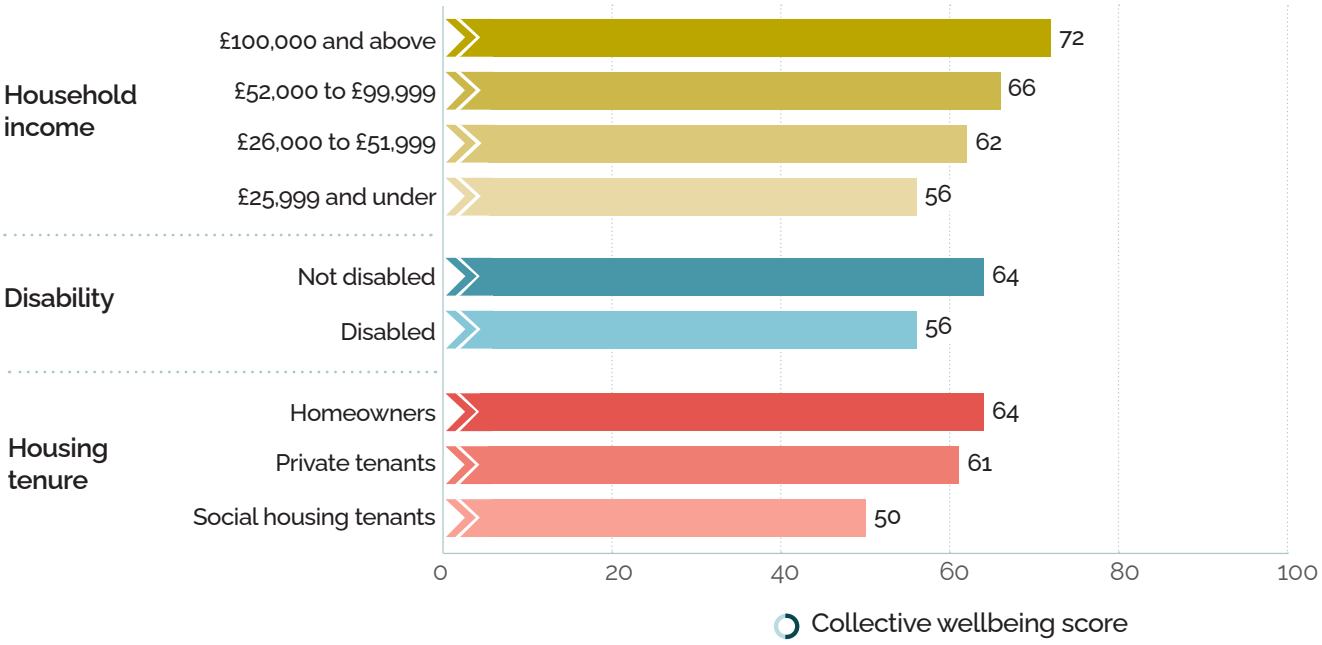
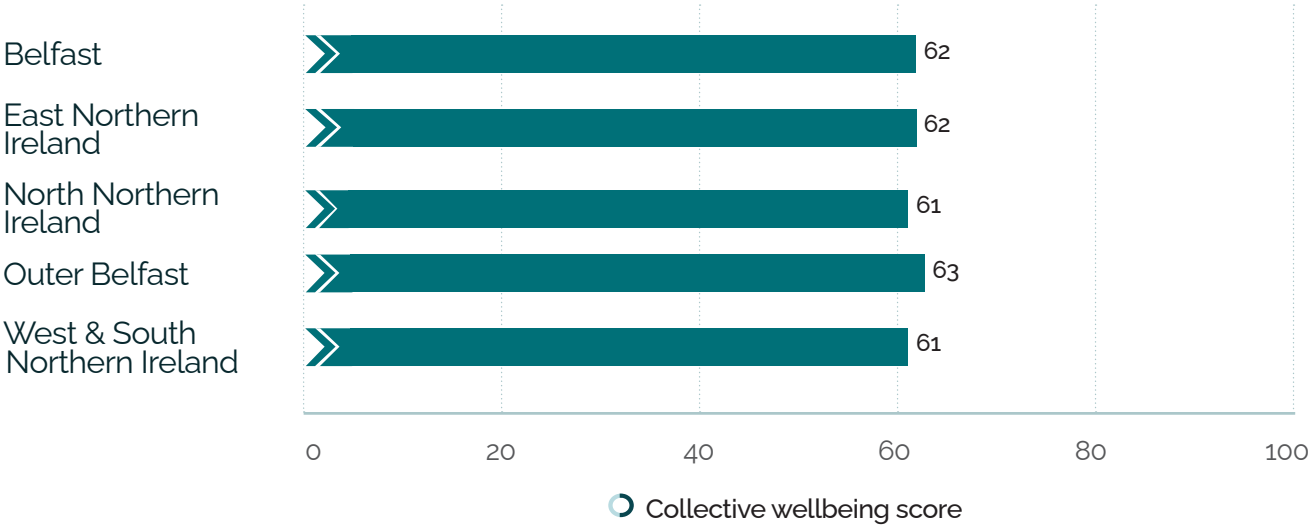


Figure 3: Collective wellbeing scores by region in Northern Ireland



The visualisation of the Northern Ireland map can be found on our website here.

Social wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026

We all have the support and services we need to thrive.

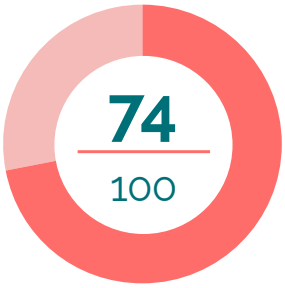




74

100





Northern Ireland scores 74 out of a possible 100 for social wellbeing.

Social wellbeing is about everyone being able to achieve their potential and contribute to society because they have their basic needs met. Our basic needs include feeling healthy, having access to services, feeling safe in and connected with our communities, and being free from discrimination.

To determine trends in social wellbeing across Northern Ireland, we asked questions about access to services, community relationships, safety and community cohesion, and self-reported health and mental health.

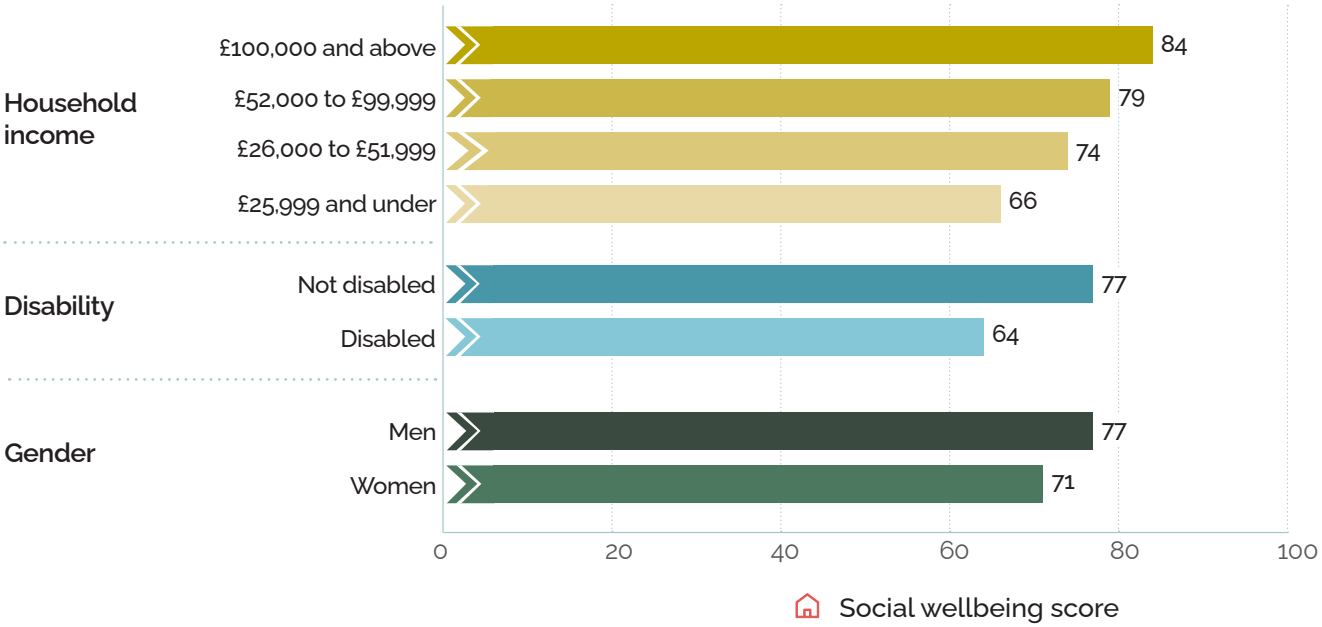
The groups most likely to experience **high** levels of social wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

- Those with annual household incomes of £100,000 and above, who have a social wellbeing score of **84**, 18 points higher than for those with annual household incomes of below £26,000 (**66**). People whose annual household income is between £52,000 and £99,999 also have a higher social wellbeing score of **79**.
- Men, who have a social wellbeing score of **77**, six points higher than for women (**71**).

The groups most likely to experience **low** levels of social wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

- Disabled people, who have a social wellbeing score of **64**, 13 points lower than for people who are not disabled (**77**).
- People from a Catholic community background, who have a social wellbeing score of **72**, four points lower than for those from a Protestant community background (**76**).

Figure 4. Factors that have the biggest impact on social wellbeing

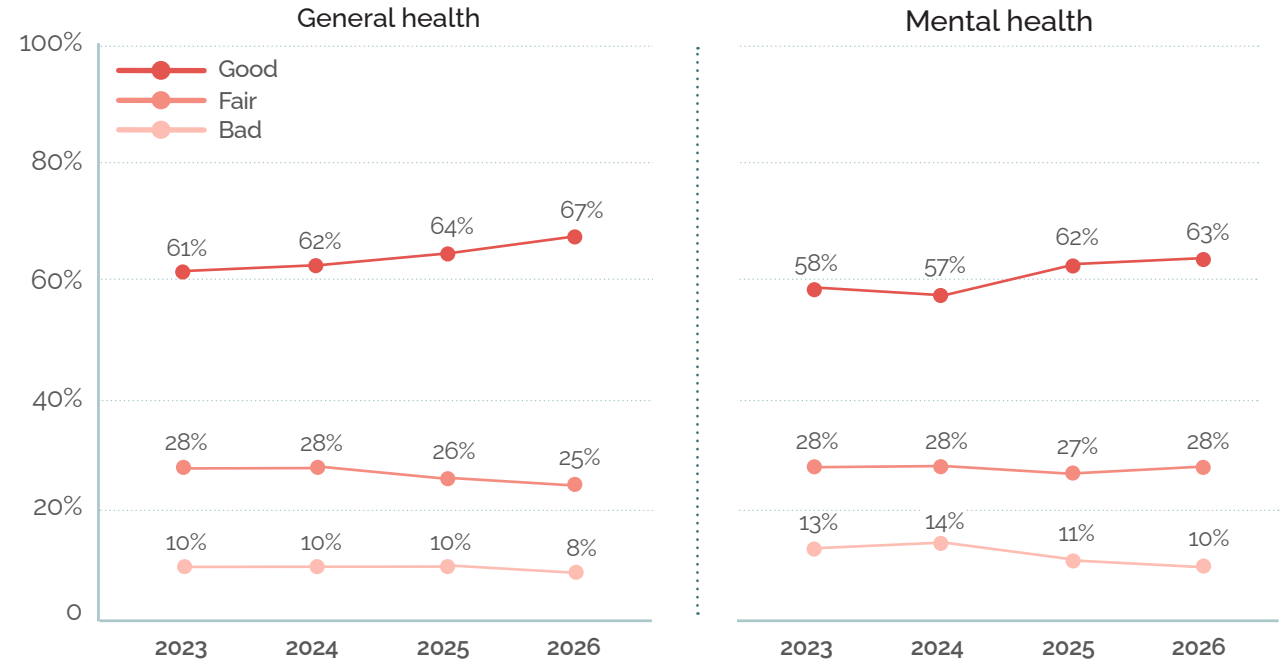


Social wellbeing: breakdown of results

There have been few changes to the factors that make up social wellbeing, but more people feel able to rely on others in their neighbourhood than in previous years.

The figures below show the trends since 2023 in the questions we ask around social wellbeing.

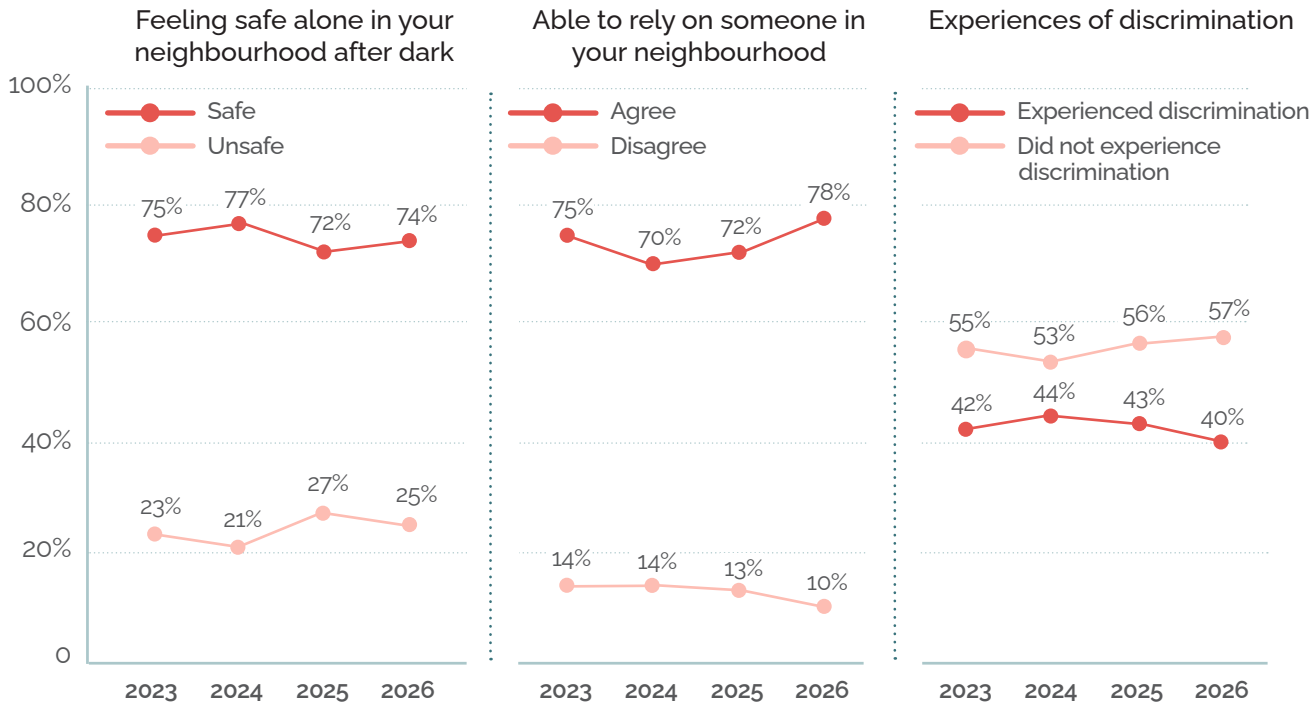
Figure 5. Perceptions of general and mental health



Qs: How is your health in general? And how would you describe your mental health in general?

- Around two-thirds (67%) of people say that they are in good general health, while just under two-thirds (63%) say they are in good mental health.

Figure 6. Community cohesion



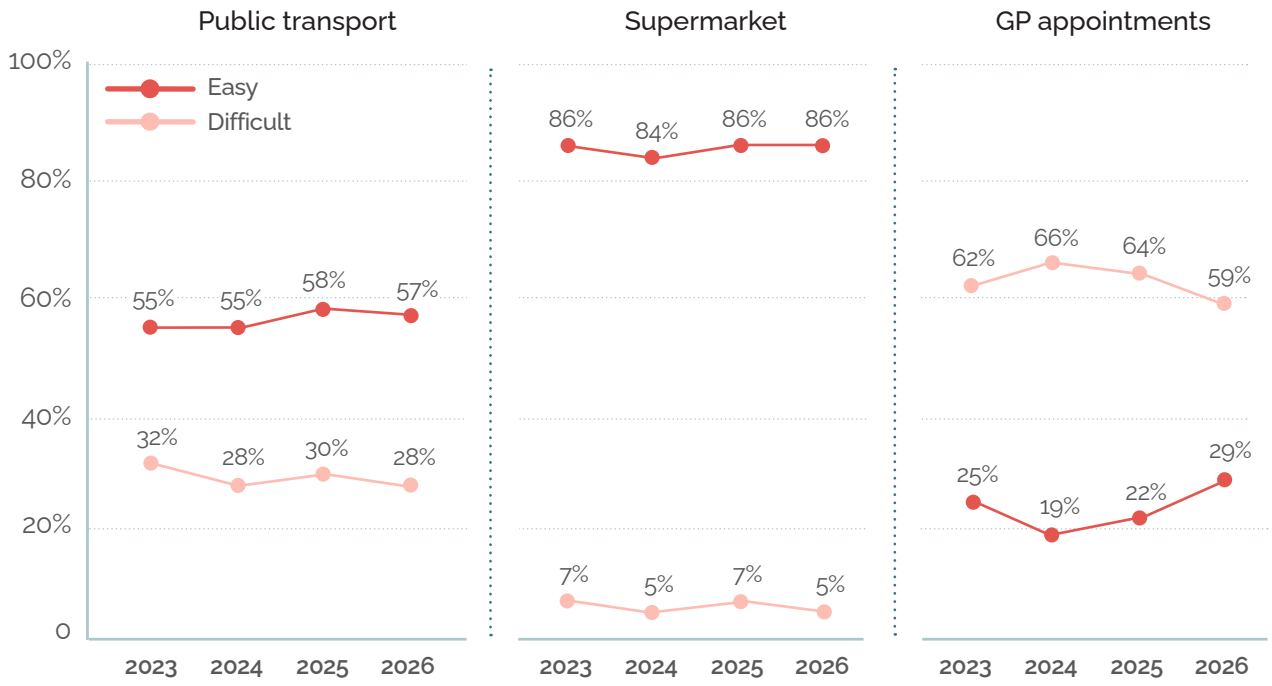
Q: How safe do you feel walking alone in your local neighbourhood after dark?

Q: To what extent, if at all, do you agree or disagree with the following statement? If I was alone and needed help, I could rely on someone in this neighbourhood to help me.

Q: How much, if at all, have you personally been unfairly treated or discriminated against in the last 12 months?

- A quarter (25%) of people feel unsafe walking alone in their neighbourhood after dark, similar to previous years and the UK average.
- Four in five (78%) people feel that they could rely on someone in their neighbourhood to help them if they were alone and needed help, eight percentage points higher than in 2024 and 12 percentage points higher than the UK average.
- Two in five (40%) people have experienced discrimination in the last 12 months, similar to previous years and the UK average.

Figure 7. Access to services[3]



Qs: Thinking of physical access, distance, opening hours and the like, how easy or difficult is it for you to: Access public transport (bus, metro, tram, train, etc.) that can get you to where you want to go; access a grocery shop or supermarket in person; get a GP appointment at a time when you need one.

- Almost three in ten (28%) people find it difficult to access public transport that gets them where they want to go, ten percentage points higher than the UK average.
- 86% of people find it easy to access a grocery shop or supermarket in person, similar to previous years and the UK average.
- Three in ten (29%) people find it easy to get a GP appointment at a time they need one, seven percentage points higher than last year. However, this is still 10 percentage points lower than the UK average.



3 The questions pertaining to access to public transport and GP appointments do not contribute to the overall social wellbeing score. See the technical report for more detail..

Summary

Northern Ireland's social wellbeing score of **74** out of a possible 100 remains higher than the UK average of 72.

Within Northern Ireland there has been a positive improvement since 2024 in relation to whether people feel they can rely on others in their neighbourhood. Indeed, people in Northern Ireland are more likely than those in any other part of the UK to feel that they could rely on someone in their neighbourhood to help them if they were alone and needed help.

Northern Ireland has also seen an improvement in how easy people find it to access a GP appointment when they need one compared to 2024 and 2025, however, this remains lower than the UK average.

Additionally, while other parts of the UK have seen losses in relation to some aspects of social wellbeing like general health and access to a grocery shop or supermarket, these negative changes have not been reflected in Northern Ireland.

This overall picture of stability and slight improvement on some measures masks variations according to demographic aspects such as income level, whether someone is disabled, gender, and community background.

Figure 8. Social wellbeing scores over time





Economic wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026

We all have a decent minimum living standard.



68

100









Northern Ireland scores 68 out of a possible 100 for economic wellbeing.

Economic wellbeing means that everyone has a decent minimum living standard and can absorb financial shocks. This includes access to a decent income, affordability, financial resilience, job opportunities and skills.

To determine trends in economic wellbeing across Northern Ireland, we asked questions about skills and job availability, and the affordability of essential items like food and fuel.

The people most likely to experience **high** levels of economic wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

- Those with annual household incomes of £100,000 and above, who have an economic wellbeing score of **86**. People whose annual household income is between £52,000 and £99,999 have an economic wellbeing score of **77**, and those whose annual household income is between £26,000 and £51,999 have an economic wellbeing score of **67**. Meanwhile, those with annual household incomes of below £26,000 have an economic wellbeing score of **55**, 31 points lower than for those in the highest income bracket.
- Graduates, who have an economic wellbeing score of **75**, nine points higher than for non-graduates (**66**).
- People from a Protestant community background, who have an economic wellbeing score of **72**, six points higher than for those from a Catholic community background (**66**).

The groups most likely to experience **low** levels of economic wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

- People who live in social housing, who have an economic wellbeing score of **46**, 26 points lower than for homeowners (**72**).
- People in households with one or more children under the age of 16, who have an economic wellbeing score of **63**. This is eight points lower than for those in households with no children (**71**).
- Disabled people, who have an economic wellbeing score of **60**, 12 points lower than for people who are not disabled (**72**).
- People in the most deprived areas (IMD1), who have an economic wellbeing score of **58**, 19 points lower than for those in the least deprived areas (**77**).[4]

4 Indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation for small, fixed geographic areas of the UK. IMD classifies these areas into five quintiles based on relative disadvantage, with quintile 1 ('IMD1') being the most deprived and quintile 5 ('IMD5') being the least deprived.

Figure 9. Factors that have the biggest impact on economic wellbeing

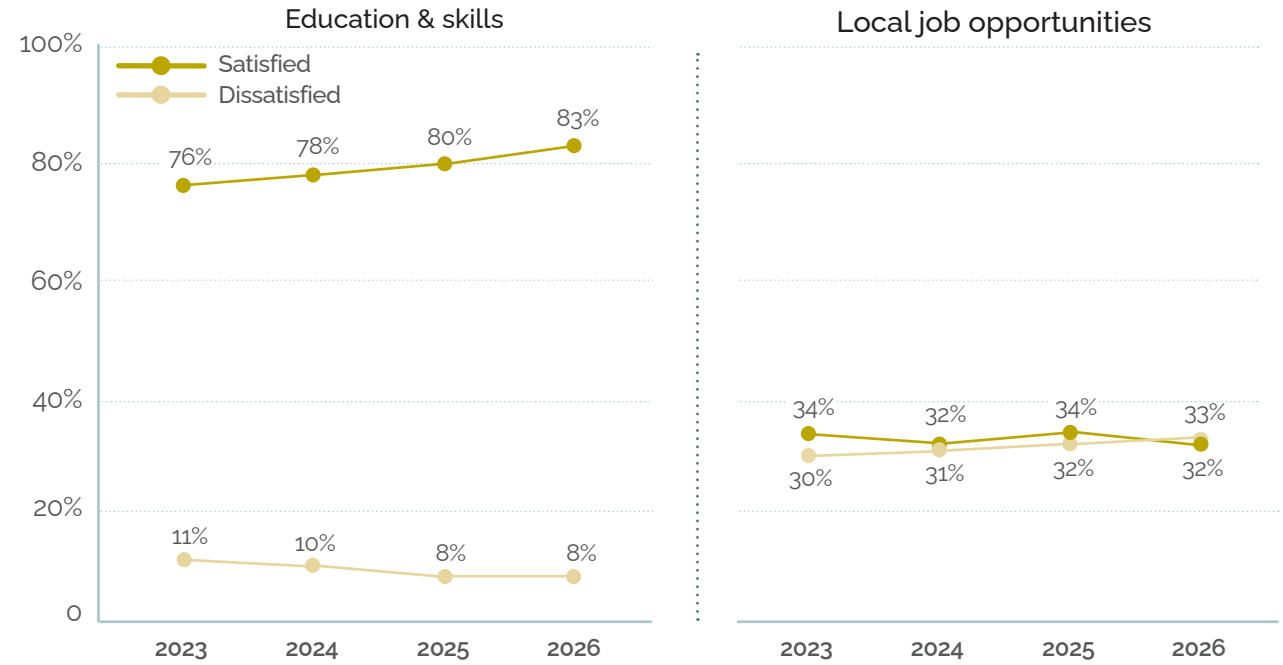


Economic wellbeing: breakdown of results

People feel less able to afford to heat their homes adequately in 2026 than in 2025, falling back to the levels seen in 2023 and 2024. They are also less likely to be able to afford necessities than in other parts of the UK, but are more satisfied with their skills than in 2023 and more satisfied with local job opportunities than the rest of the UK.

The figures below show the trends since 2023 in the questions we ask around economic wellbeing.

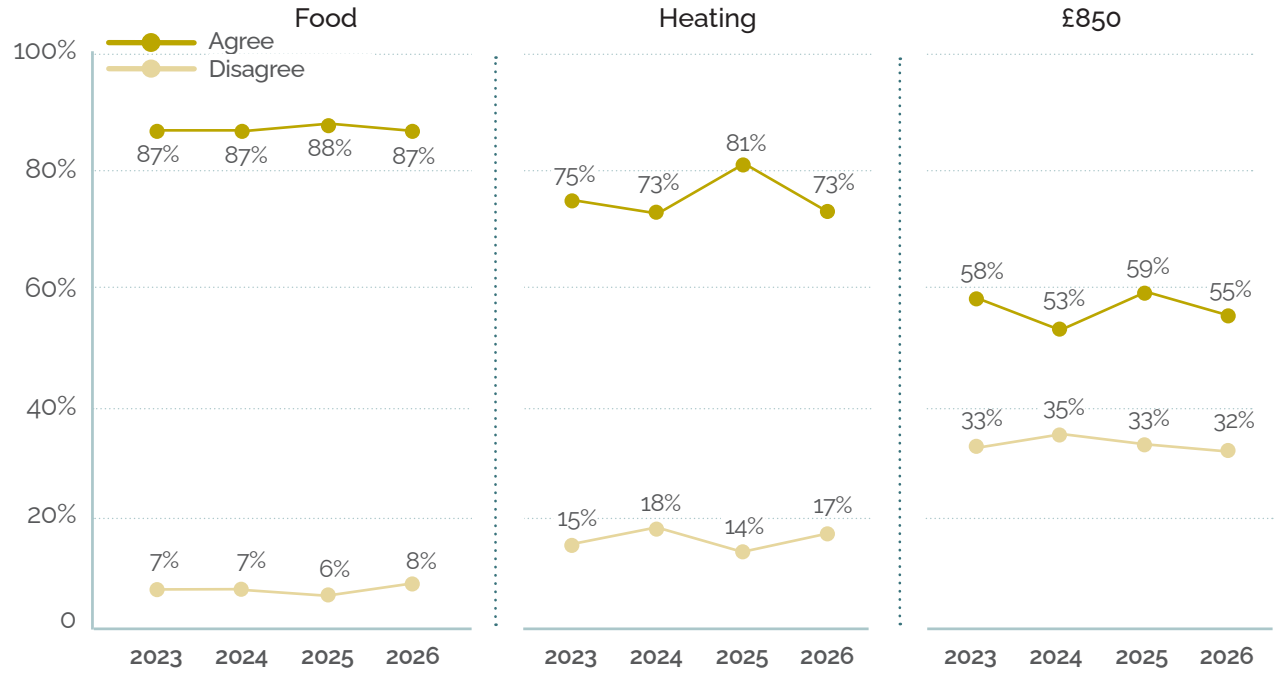
Figure 10. Perceptions of education, skills and local job opportunities



Q: How satisfied are you with your education and skills?
Q: Leaving aside whether you personally are looking for a job, how satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the availability of job opportunities for people in your local area?

- More than four in five (83%) people are satisfied with their education and skills, seven percentage points higher than in 2023.
- A third (32%) of people are satisfied with the availability of job opportunities in their local area, ten percentage points higher than the UK average.

Figure 11. Affordability of essential items



Qs: There are some things that many people cannot afford, even if they would like them. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My household can afford to buy enough food for everyone in the household; My household can afford to keep our home adequately warm (including in the winter months); My household can afford to pay an unexpected, but necessary, expense of £850.

- Just under nine in ten (87%) people can afford to buy enough food for everyone in the household, similar to previous years and the UK average.
- Just under three-quarters (73%) of people can afford to keep their home adequately warm, lower than the UK average of 79%.
- Just over half (55%) of people can afford to pay an unexpected but necessary expense of £850, six percentage points lower than the UK average.

Figure 12. Affordability of leisure activites



Qs: There are some things that many people cannot afford, even if they would like them. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? My household can afford to socialise with friends or family outside of the home once a month if we want to; My household can afford to pay for a week's annual holiday away from home (not staying with relatives).

- One in six (16%) people cannot afford to socialise outside of their home once a month, four percentage points higher than the UK average.
- A quarter (26%) of people cannot afford to pay for a week's annual holiday away from home, similar to previous years and the UK average.



Summary

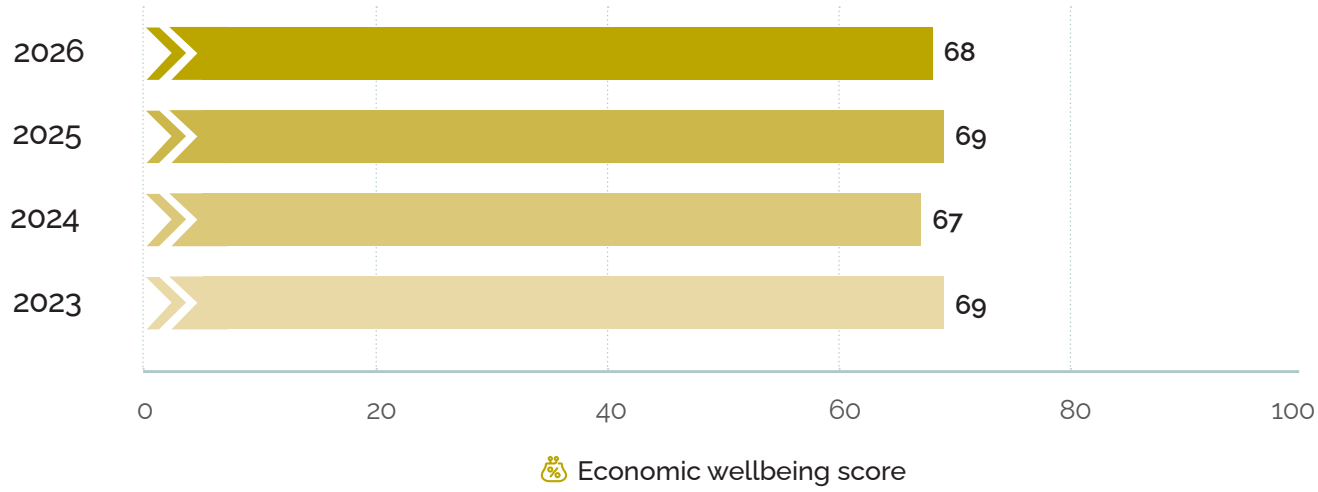
With a score of **68**, people in Northern Ireland no longer face lower economic wellbeing than the UK average. People in Northern Ireland are more satisfied with job opportunities in their local area than people in other parts of the UK, and are more likely to be satisfied with their education and skills than they were in 2023.

However, they are less likely to be able to afford to heat their homes compared to other parts of the UK. While 2025 saw a welcome improvement on this measure in Northern Ireland, in 2026 it has fallen back to the levels seen in 2024.

It is unsurprising that those with the highest incomes have higher economic wellbeing, and the gap between the highest and lowest earners remains vast at 31 points. There are also wide inequalities between homeowners and people who live in social housing, and between graduates and non-graduates.

Other factors such as having children in the household, being disabled, living in an area of high deprivation, or being from a Catholic community background also contribute to lower economic wellbeing scores. Many of these factors are systemic, and individuals cannot address them alone.

Figure 13. Economic wellbeing scores over time

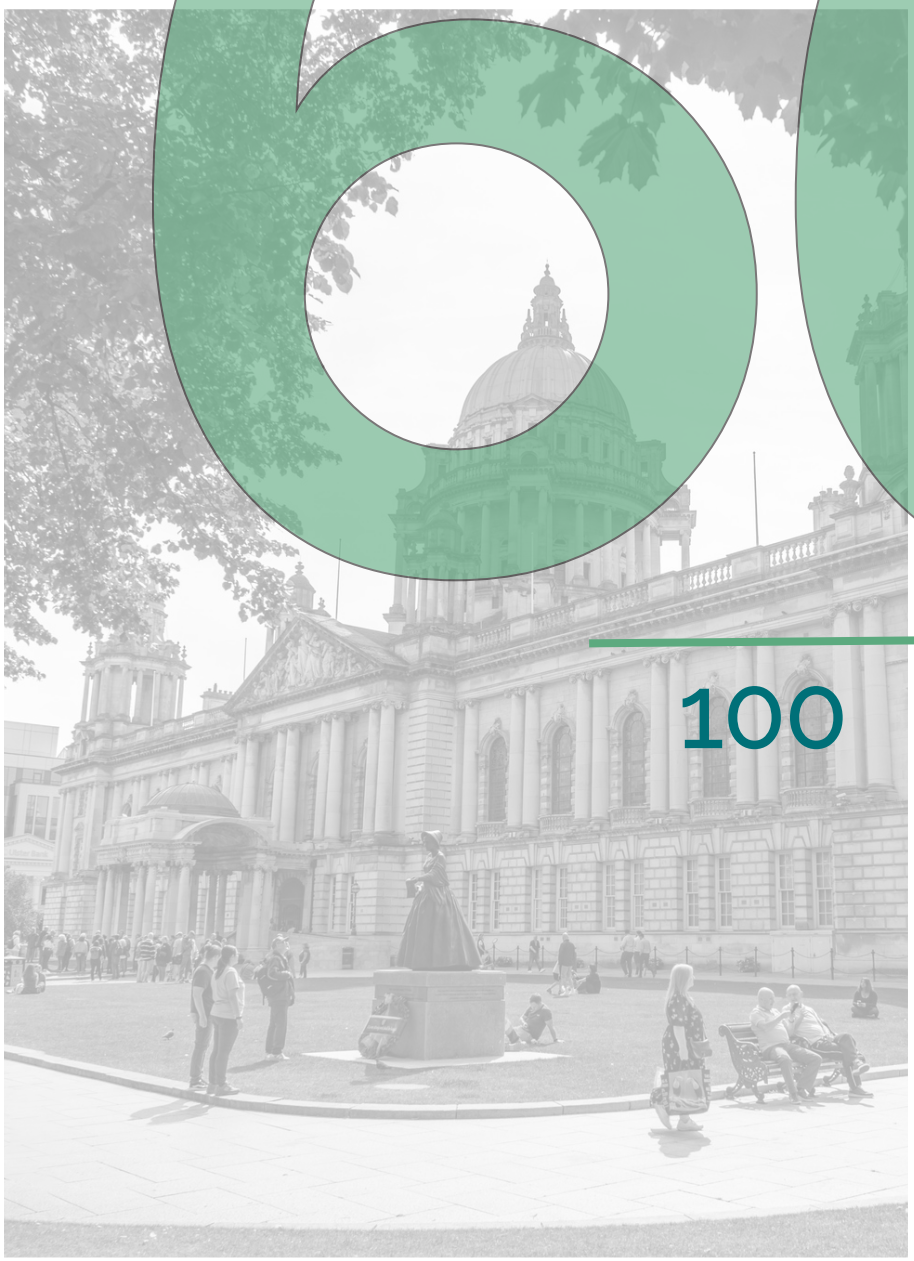


Environmental wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026

We all live within the planet's natural resources.

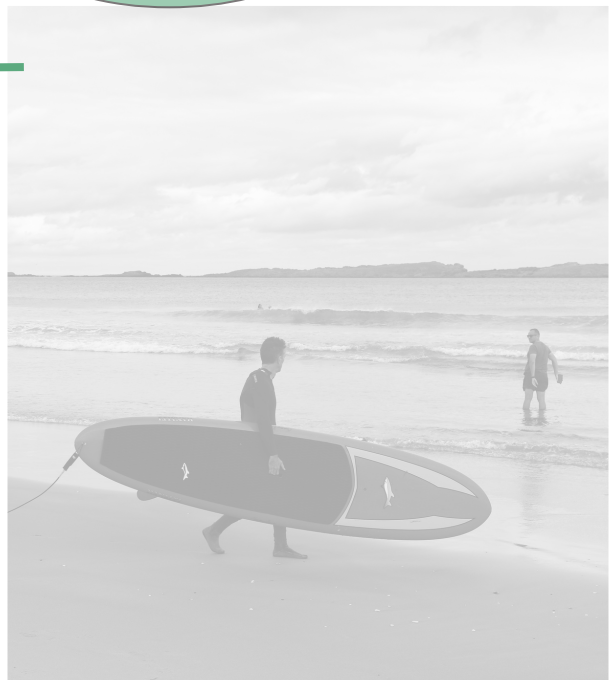


66





100





Northern Ireland scores 66 out of a possible 100 for environmental wellbeing.

Environmental wellbeing means that everyone has access to green and blue spaces and collectively we live within the planet's natural resources, protecting the environment for future generations.

To determine trends in environmental wellbeing across Northern Ireland, we asked questions about access to and the quality of local parks, rivers and other green and blue spaces, and about noise pollution, air pollution, and litter in local areas. We also asked about levels of satisfaction with efforts to preserve the environment.

The people most likely to experience **high** levels of environmental wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

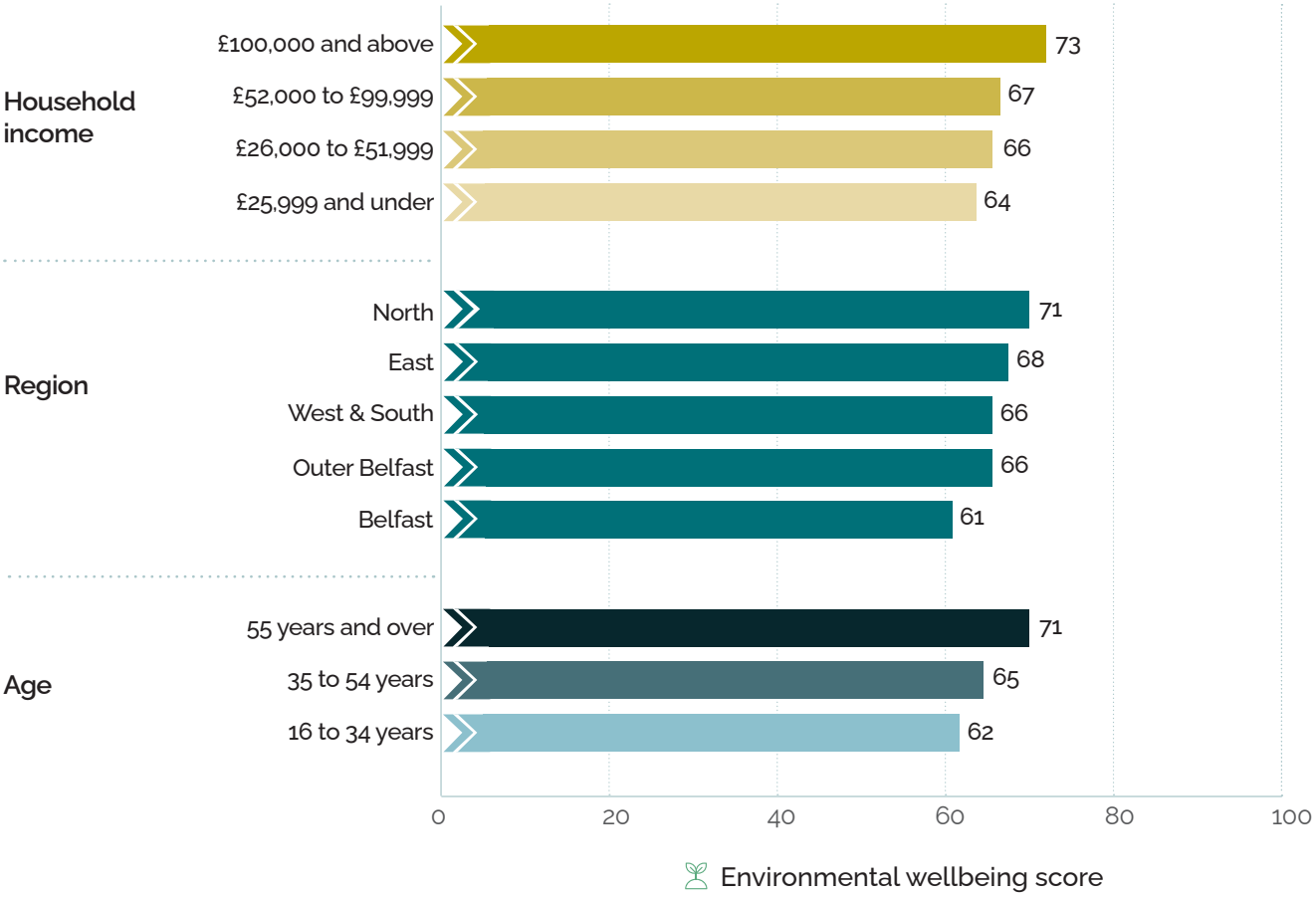
- Those with annual household incomes of £100,000 and above, who have an environmental wellbeing score of **73**, nine points higher than for those with annual household incomes of below £26,000 (**64**).
- People aged 55 and over, who have an environmental wellbeing score of **71**, six points higher than for people aged 35 to 54 (**65**) and nine points higher than for those aged 16 to 34 (**62**).[5]

The groups most likely to experience **low** levels of environmental wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

- People who live in Belfast, who have an environmental wellbeing score of **61**, 10 points lower than for those in the North of Northern Ireland (**71**).[6]

5 The base size for 16- to 34-year-olds was smaller than for other groups at 65 people, so findings should be treated with caution.
6 The base sizes for people in the North of Northern Ireland (93) and Belfast (99) were smaller than for other groups, so findings should be treated with caution.

Figure 14. Factors that have the biggest impact on environmental wellbeing



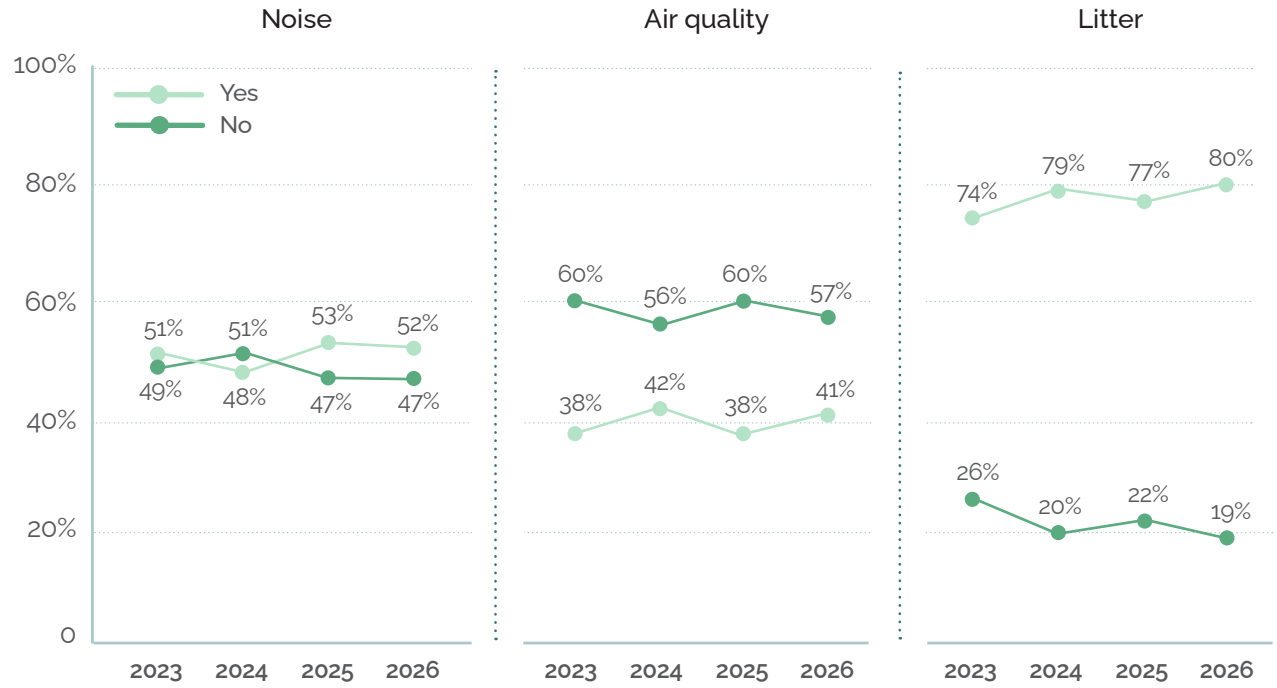


Environmental wellbeing: breakdown of results

Satisfaction with the local area has not improved, while satisfaction with efforts to preserve the environment in the UK is improving.

The figures below show the trends since 2023 in the questions we ask around environmental wellbeing.

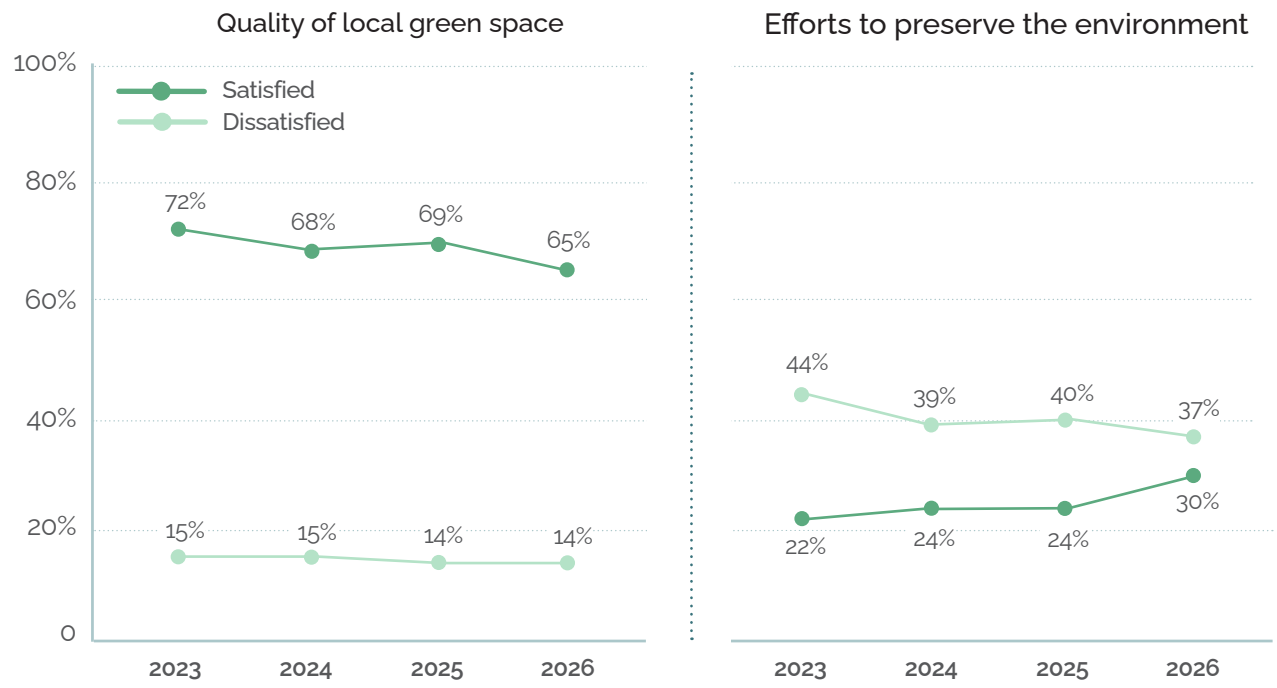
Figure 15. Issues with quality of local environment



Qs: Please think about your local neighbourhood. Do you have major, moderate, minor or no problems with the following? Noise; air quality; litter or rubbish on the street. Major, moderate and minor problems equate to yes; no problems equates to no.

- Just over half (52%) of people experience problems with noise pollution, 12 percentage points lower than the UK average.
- Two in five (41%) people experience problems with air quality in their local area, 12 percentage points lower than the UK average.
- Four in five (80%) people experience problems with litter in their local area, six percentage points higher than in 2023.

Figure 16. Perception of local public, green or open space and efforts to preserve the environment in the UK



Q: Please think about the public, green or open space in your local area that is nearest to your home, for example a park, countryside, wood, play area, canal path, riverside or beach. How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the quality of the space? This might include how well it meets your needs, whether it is safe, attractive, free of litter or other mess, and the quality of the facilities if there are any.

Q: How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with efforts to preserve the environment in the UK?

- Two-thirds (65%) of people are satisfied with the quality of local public, green or open space, but this has seen no improvement since 2023.
- Three in ten (30%) people are satisfied with efforts to preserve the environment in the UK, eight percentage points higher than in 2023.



Summary

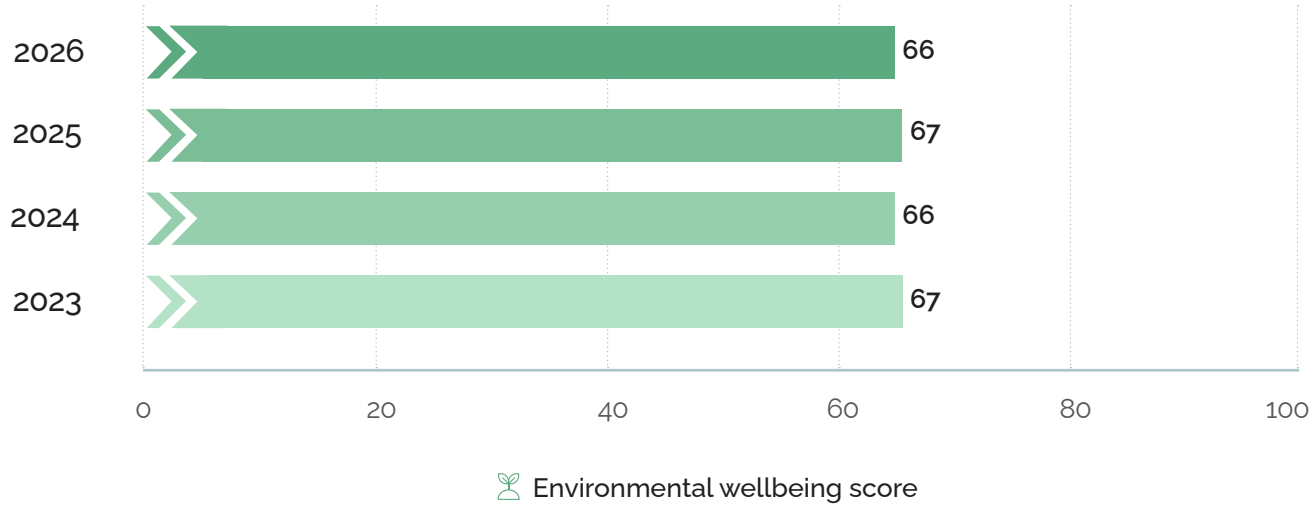
At **66**, environmental wellbeing in Northern Ireland is three points higher than the UK average.

In particular, people in Northern Ireland experience fewer problems with noise pollution and air quality in their local neighbourhood than the UK average. People in Northern Ireland are now more likely to be satisfied with efforts to preserve the environment in the UK than they were in previous years.

However, other areas of environmental wellbeing have declined since 2023, with people more likely to experience problems with litter on the street in their local area, and no real movement in how satisfied people are with public, green, or open spaces near them.

Environmental wellbeing also continues to vary considerably depending on factors such as income, age, and region.

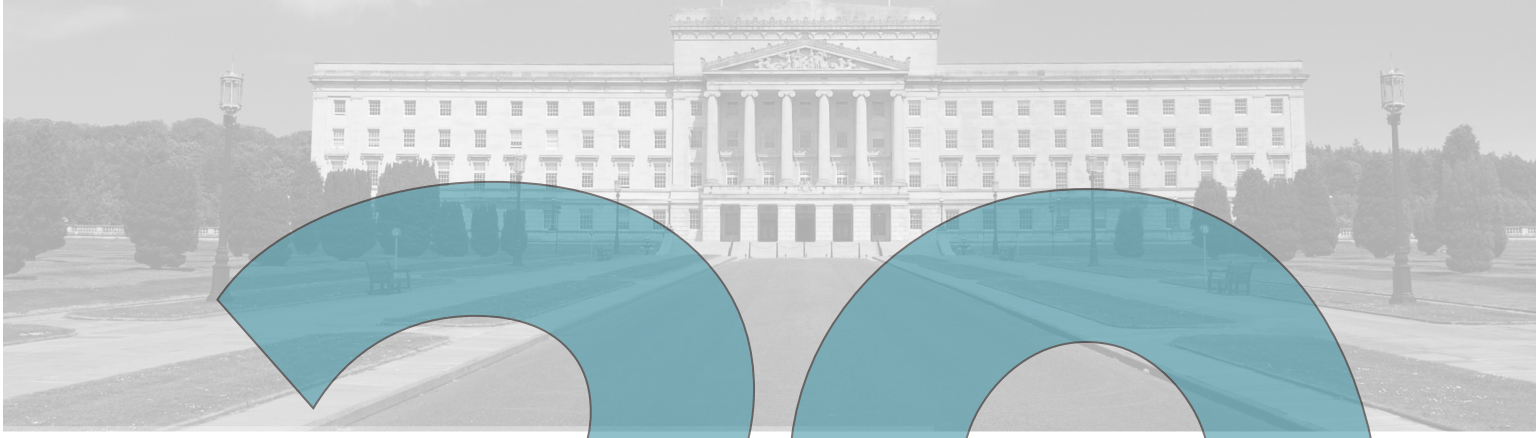
Figure 17. Environmental wellbeing scores over time





Democratic wellbeing in Northern Ireland 2026

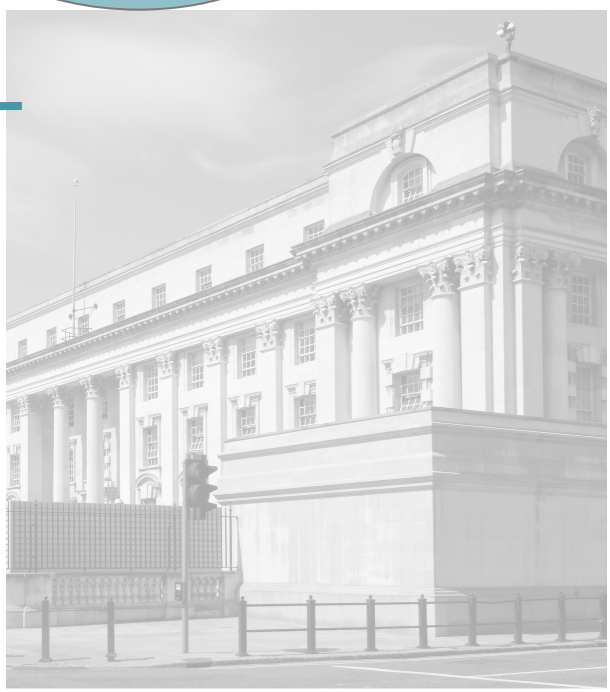
We all have a voice in decisions that affect us.





39

100





Northern Ireland scores 39 out of a possible 100 for democratic wellbeing.

Democratic wellbeing is about everyone having a voice in decisions that affect them. This means having local and national leaders who support participation, foster trust, and encourage diversity.

To understand democratic wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026, we asked questions about levels of trust in local, regional and national government(s) as well as other national institutions, and perceptions of personal ability to influence decisions.

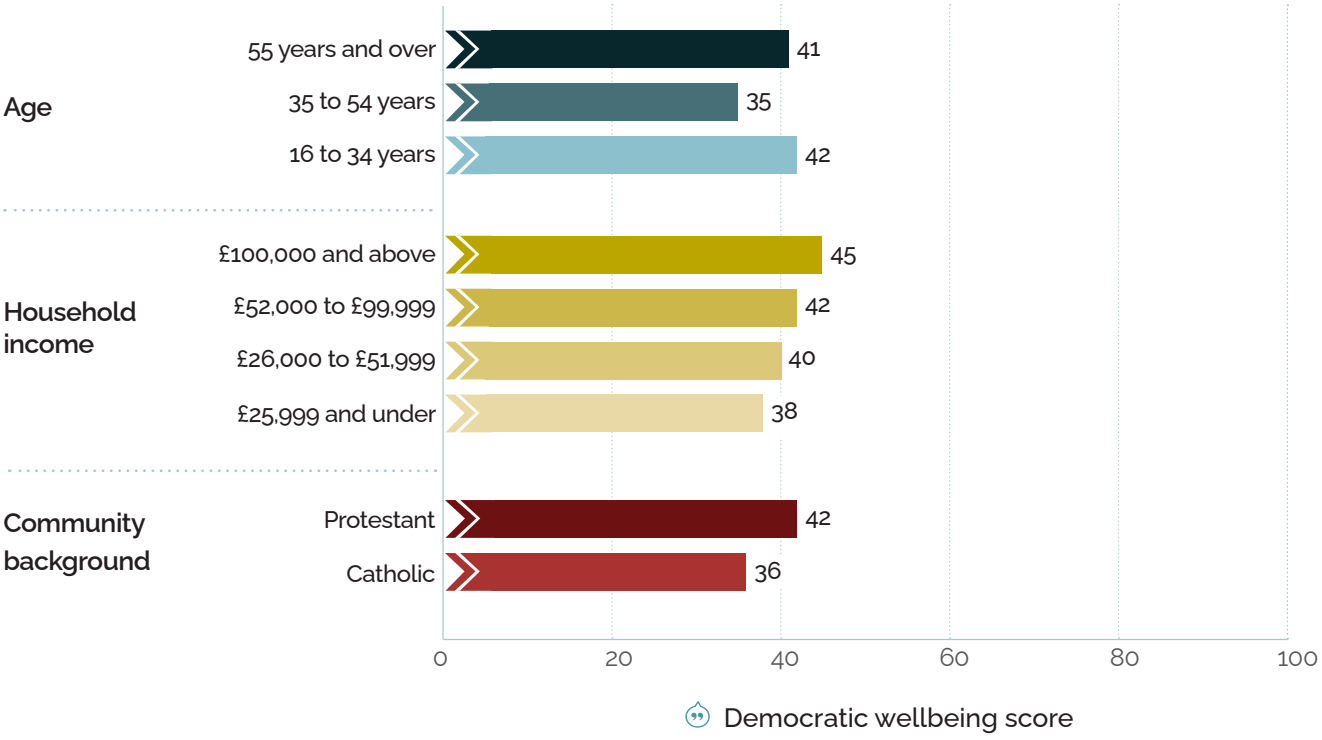
While markedly low across the board, and the lowest of any of our four wellbeing domains, the people with the **highest** levels of democratic wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

- Graduates, who have a democratic wellbeing score of **43**, five points higher than for non-graduates (**38**).
- Those with annual household incomes of £100,000 and above, who have a democratic wellbeing score of **45**, seven points higher than for those with annual household incomes of below £26,000 (**38**).

The groups most likely to experience **low** levels of democratic wellbeing in Northern Ireland in 2026 are:

- People aged 35 to 54, who have a democratic wellbeing score of **35**, seven points lower than for people aged 16 to 34 (**42**).
- People from a Catholic community background, who have a democratic wellbeing score of **36**, six points lower than for those from a Protestant community background (**42**).
- Disabled people, who have a democratic wellbeing score of **36**, five points lower than for people who are not disabled (**41**).

Figure 18. Factors that have the biggest impact on democratic wellbeing



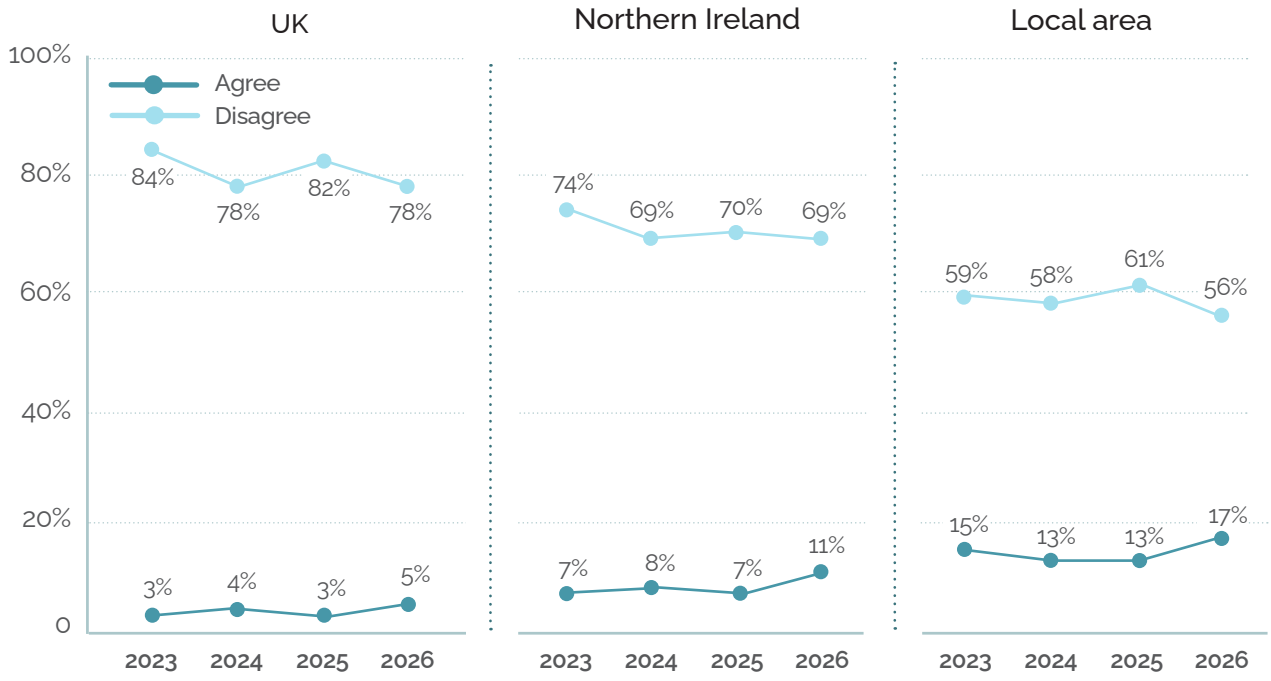


Democratic wellbeing: breakdown of results

Trust in the UK Government and the Northern Ireland Executive have improved since 2023, and trust in institutions like banks is also improving.

The figures below show the trends since 2023 in the questions we ask around democratic wellbeing.

Figure 19. Perceptions of ability to influence decisions[7]

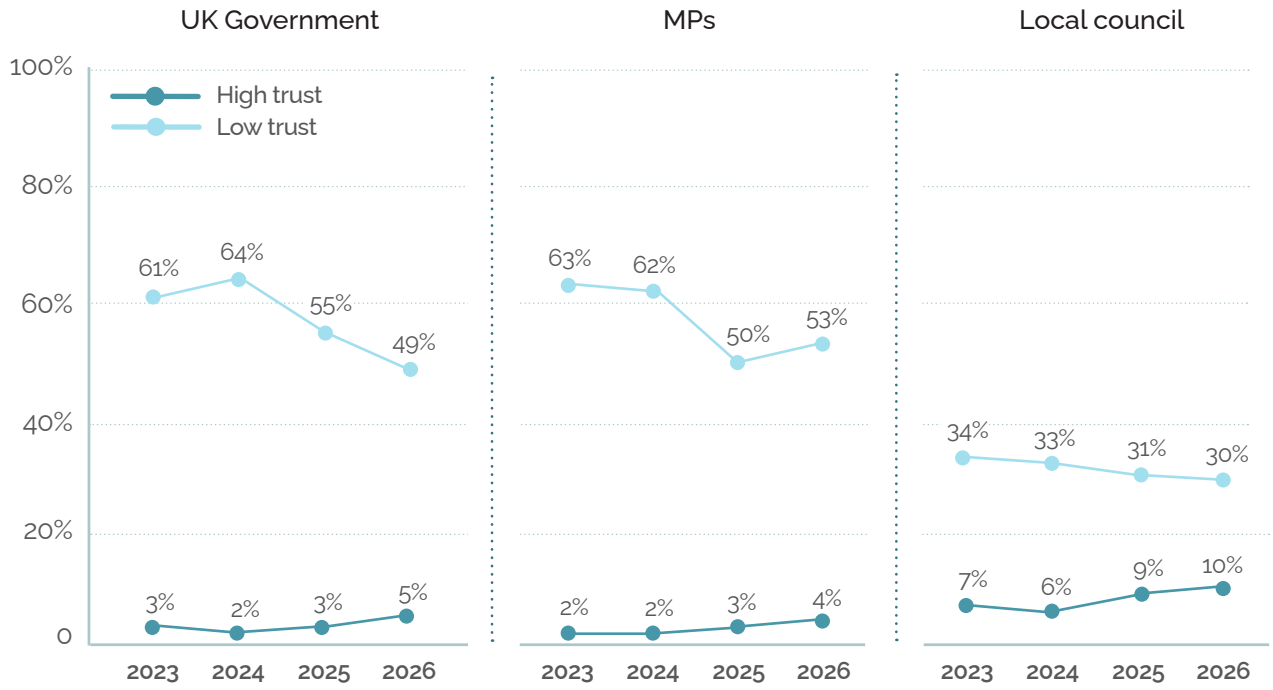


Qs: Do you agree or disagree with the following statements? I can influence decisions affecting the UK as a whole; I can influence decisions affecting Northern Ireland; I can influence decisions affecting my local area.

- Just 5% of people feel that they can influence decisions affecting the UK as a whole, lower than the UK average. However, the proportion of people who **disagree** that they can influence decisions affecting the UK has fallen by six percentage points since 2023.
- Seven in ten (69%) people do not feel that they can influence decisions affecting Northern Ireland, similar to previous years.
- 56% of people disagree that they can influence decisions affecting their local area, similar to the UK average.

7 The question pertaining to influence in Northern Ireland does not contribute to the overall democratic wellbeing score. See the technical report for more detail.

Figure 20. Trust in governments and politicians[8]

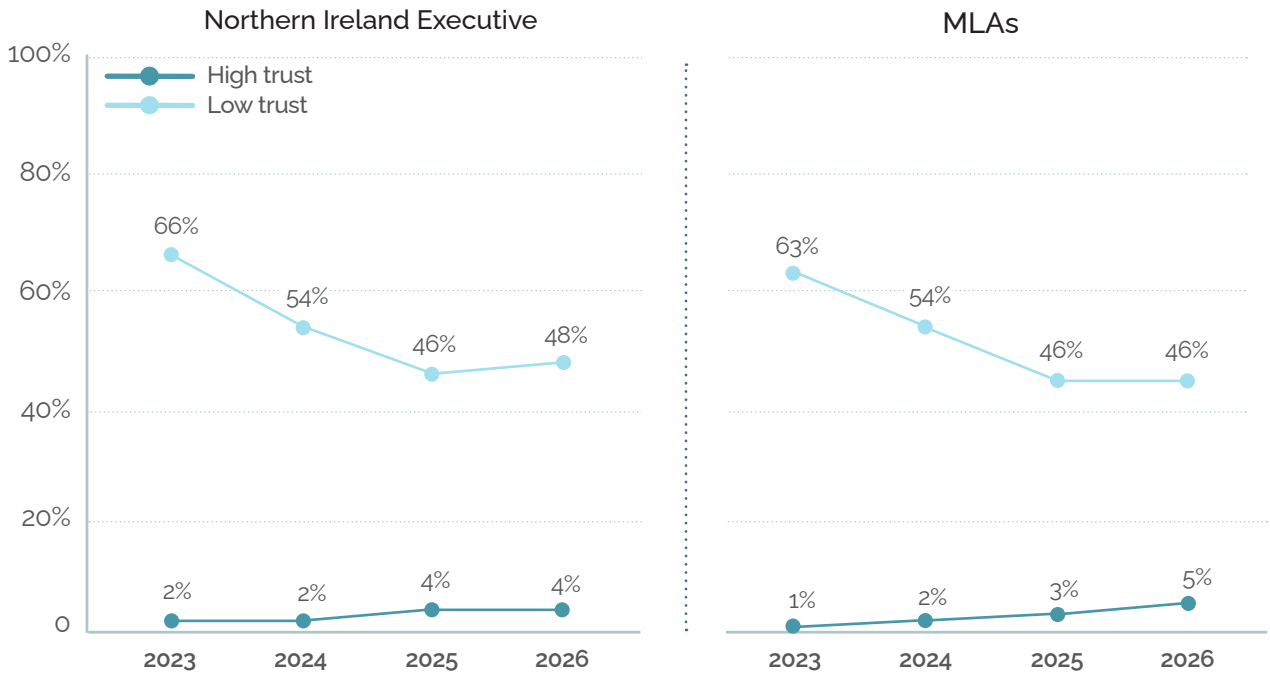


Qs: On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following? UK Government; MPs; the local council for your area. Scores of 1 to 3 equate to low trust; 4 to 7 to medium trust; 8 to 10 to high trust.

- Half (49%) of people have low trust in the UK Government, a twelve percentage-point improvement since 2023.
- Over half (53%) of people have low trust in MPs, similar to last year but an improvement compared to 2023 and 2024.
- Three in ten (30%) people have low trust in the local council for their area, similar to the UK average.

8 The question pertaining to trust in MPs does not contribute to the overall democratic wellbeing score. See the technical report for more detail.

Figure 21. Trust in Northern Ireland Executive and politicians[9]



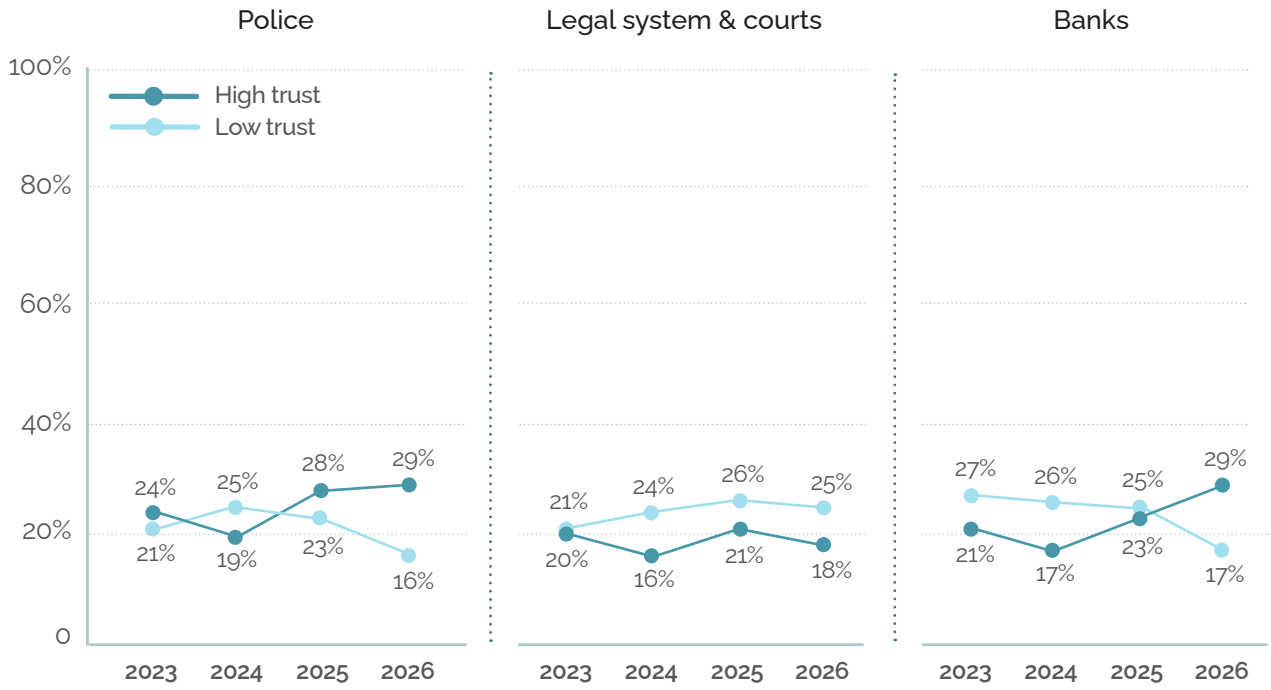
Qs: On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following? Northern Ireland Executive; Northern Ireland Assembly members (MLAs). Scores of 1 to 3 equate to low trust; 4 to 7 to medium trust; 8 to 10 to high trust.

- Just under half (48%) of people have low trust in the Northern Ireland Executive, an eighteen percentage-point improvement since 2023.
- A similar percentage (46%) have low trust in MLAs, a seventeen percentage-point improvement since 2023.



9 The questions pertaining to trust in the Northern Ireland Executive and MLAs do not contribute to the overall democratic wellbeing score. See the technical report for more detail.

Figure 22. Trust in institutions



Qs: Where 1 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following? The police; the legal system and courts; banks. Scores of 1 to 3 equate to low trust; 4 to 7 to medium trust; 8 to 10 to high trust.

- Three in ten (29%) people have high trust in the police, 10 percentage points higher than in 2024.
- A quarter (25%) of people have low trust in the legal system and courts, similar to previous years and the UK average.
- Three in ten (29%) people have high trust in banks, six percentage points higher than in 2025 and the highest rate in Northern Ireland since the Life in the UK index began in 2023.

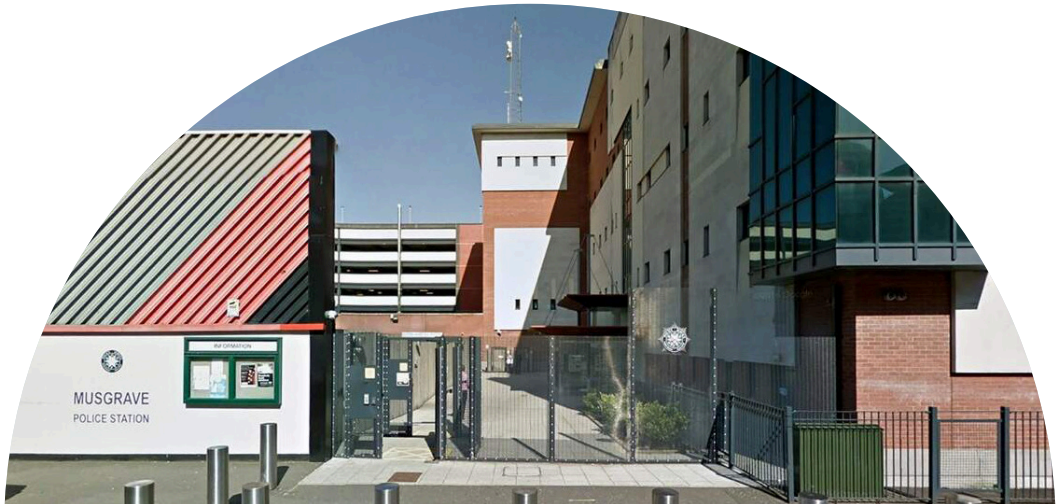
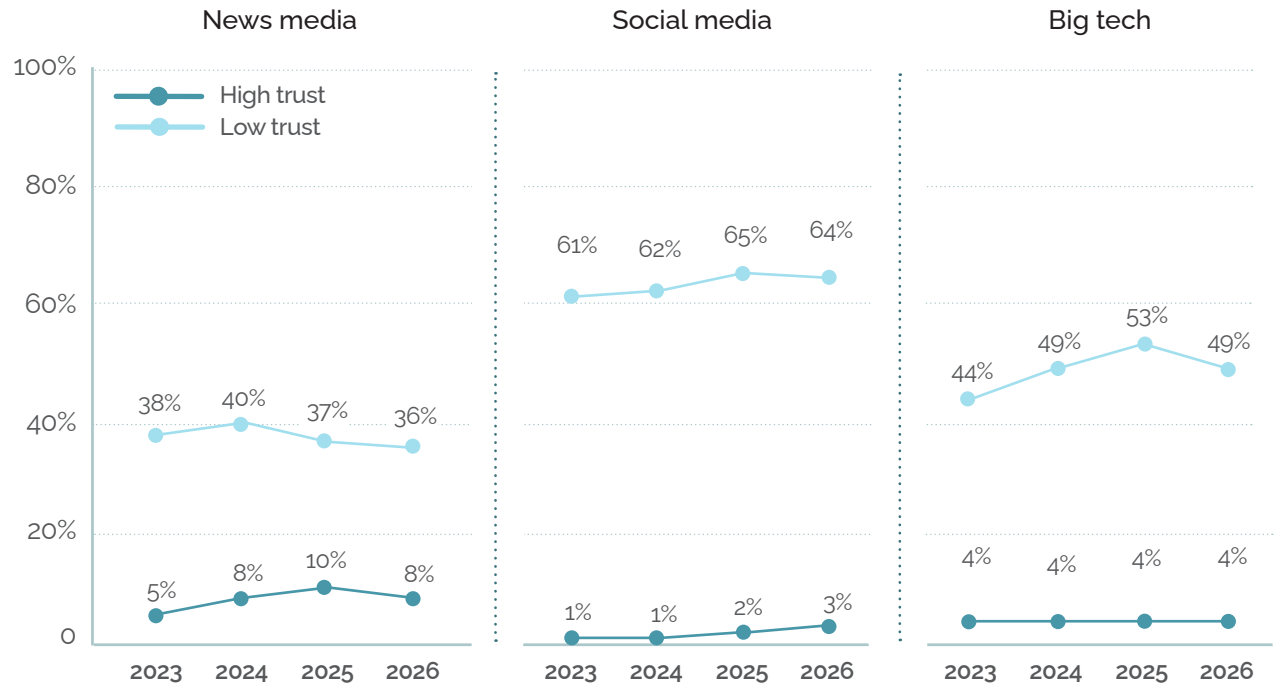


Figure 23. Trust in media and tech[10]



Qs: On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not at all and 10 is completely, how much do you trust each of the following? The news media (e.g. TV, radio, newspapers); social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube, TikTok); big tech companies (e.g. Google, Apple). Scores of 1 to 3 equate to low trust; 4 to 7 to medium trust; 8 to 10 to high trust.

- More than a third (36%) of people have low trust in the news media, similar to previous years and the UK average.
- Nearly two-thirds (64%) of people have low trust in social media (e.g. Facebook, X, Instagram, YouTube, TikTok), similar to previous years and the UK average.
- Half (49%) of people have low trust in big tech companies, similar to previous years and the UK average.

10 The questions pertaining to trust in social media and big tech do not contribute to the overall democratic wellbeing score. See the technical report for more detail.

Summary

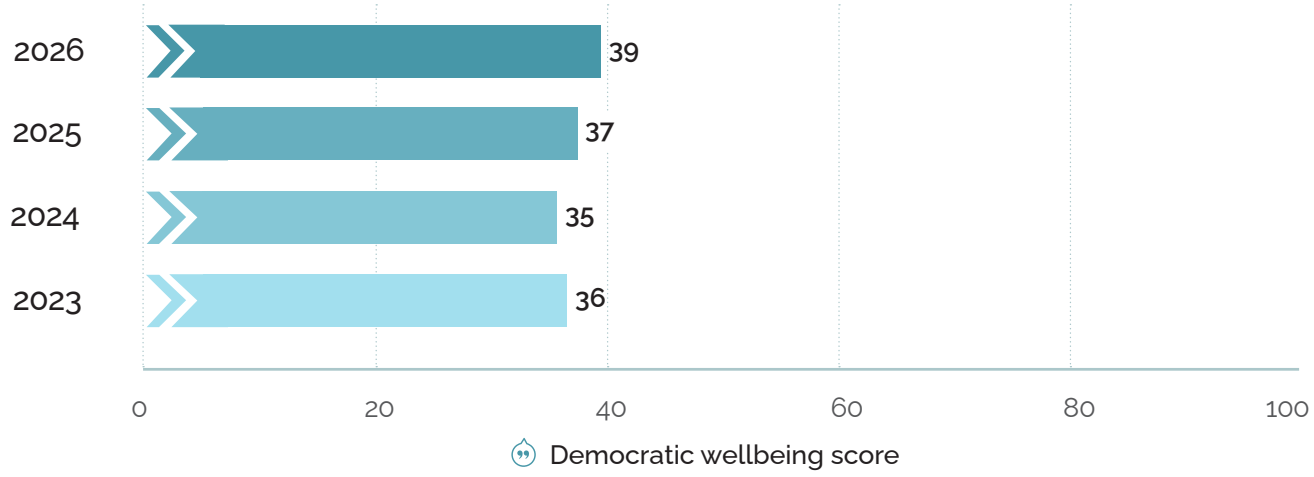
Democratic wellbeing in Northern Ireland has seen a modest but sustained improvement, and at **39** is now four points higher than it was in 2024. This is the largest change seen in any score across all four jurisdictions of the UK.

The improvements we saw last year to trust in the UK Government and the Executive have largely been retained, and in 2026 more people have high trust in MLAs than they did in 2023. While these improvements should not be underestimated, trust remains fragile. Around half of people still say they have low trust in the UK Government and the Executive, and three in ten have low trust in the local council for their area.

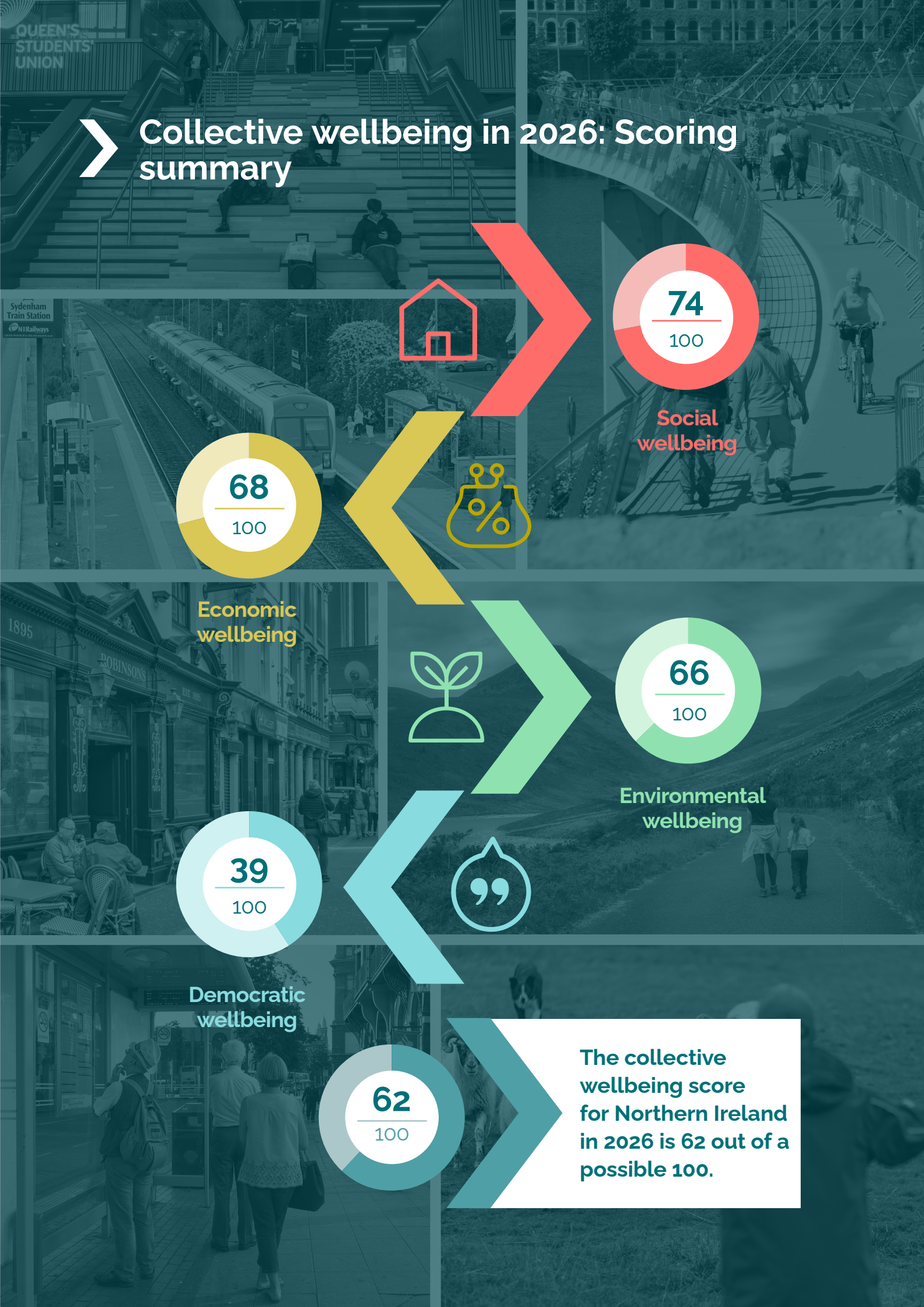
This year has seen an increase in trust in other institutions like banks, which also play a part in our democratic wellbeing, and people are less likely to actively disagree that they can influence the decisions that affect the UK than they were in 2023. However, only five percent feel that they can influence decisions affecting the UK, and 11% that they can influence decisions affecting Northern Ireland. This tells us that people often remain shut out from the decisions impacting their lives.

Low trust in other institutions like social media and big tech point to a society in which people often find it hard to trust the systems they encounter every day and that provide wider context for democratic wellbeing.

Figure 24. Democractic wellbeing scores over time



Collective wellbeing in 2026: Scoring summary



74 / 100

Social wellbeing

68 / 100

Economic wellbeing

66 / 100

Environmental wellbeing

39 / 100

Democratic wellbeing

62 / 100

The collective wellbeing score for Northern Ireland in 2026 is 62 out of a possible 100.

Summary table of domain scores by key demographic characteristics

		Collective wellbeing	Social wellbeing	Economic wellbeing	Environmental wellbeing	Democratic wellbeing
	Total	**62**	**74**	**68**	**66**	**39**
Disability	Not disabled	64	77	72	68	41
	Disabled	56	64	60	63	36
Age	16-34 years*	62	75	69	62	42
	35-54 years	59	71	63	65	35
	55 years & over	65	75	72	71	41
Household Income	£25,999 and under	56	66	55	64	38
	£26,000 to £51,999	62	74	67	66	40
	£52,000 to £99,999	66	79	77	67	42
	£100,00 and above*	72	84	86	73	45
Area deprivation	IMD1 (highest deprivation)	56	68	58	61	38
	IMD2	58	69	63	66	36
	IMD3	64	76	70	66	43
	IMD4	65	77	74	68	40
	IMD5 (lowest deprivation)	67	79	77	72	41
Housing tenure	Social rented*	50	62	46	56	36
	Private rented*	61	71	63	68	42
	Owner-occupiers	64	76	72	68	40
Gender	Women	60	71	66	66	38
	Men	64	77	72	67	41
Children	No children	63	75	71	67	40
	One or more children in household	59	72	63	65	38
Urbanity	Urban living	61	73	68	65	40
	Rural living	63	76	69	68	39
Community	Catholic	59	72	66	64	36
	Protestant	65	76	72	69	42

cont.

		Collective wellbeing	Social wellbeing	Economic wellbeing	Environmental wellbeing	Democratic wellbeing
Education	Graduate	65	77	75	65	43
	Non-graduate	61	73	66	67	38
Religion	Religious	63	74	69	68	40
	No religion	61	73	68	63	39

*The base sizes for 16- to 34-year olds (65), people with a household income of £100,000 and above (62), private tenants (51) and social housing tenants (55), people in the North of Northern Ireland (93) and people in Belfast (99) were smaller than for other groups, so findings should be treated with caution.

The sample sizes for those from an ethnic minority (including white minority) background and for people who are LGB+ in Northern Ireland were below the threshold for both statistical testing and regression analysis and these groups are therefore not shown in this appendix.









Life in the UK

Northern Ireland 2026









Carnegie UK Trust
Andrew Carnegie House
Pittencrieff Street
Dunfermline
Fife, Scotland
KY12 8AW
T +44 (0)1383 721445
www.carnegieuk.org.uk

ISBN: 978-1-917536-20-2

Incorporated by Royal Charter 1917
Registered Charity No: SC012799 operating in the UK
Registered Charity No: 20142957 operating in Ireland

Ipsos

collective wellbeing Carnegie UK