

# CENSUS ESTIMATES OF THOSE WHO HAVE EVER LIVED OUTSIDE NORTHERN IRELAND

March 2015

Guidance Note

## Introduction

Northern Ireland has historically experienced net outward migration, and subsequently there is interest in determining the extent to which people who leave Northern Ireland return to Northern Ireland (so called returning migrants). To address this, the 2011 Census included a question, addressed to every usual resident, asking (Q10) 'Have you ever lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more?'. The question specified 'one year or more' because this is the basis of international definitions for migration and usual residence.

There is a similar policy interest in the Republic of Ireland, where an identical question (save substituting 'the Republic of Ireland' for 'Northern Ireland') is asked.

In the 2011 Northern Ireland Census, some 213,276 usual residents indicated that they had lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more. These 213,276 people, having indicated that they had at some stage in their lives lived elsewhere, were asked when they had last moved to Northern Ireland and what their country of previous residence had been. Of the 213,276 who had lived elsewhere, 105,650 (50 per cent) were born in Northern Ireland, while the remaining 107,626 (50 per cent) were born elsewhere.

## Quality issue with the data

There is an issue with the number of people who have ever lived outside Northern Ireland. The Census question on country of birth (Q7) indicated that 202,010 people were born outside Northern Ireland. However, among these 202,010 people, only 107,626 (54 per cent) indicated that they had lived outside Northern Ireland. Consequently, 94,384 Census respondents born outside Northern Ireland had never lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more. While this may be true for some people born elsewhere but coming to Northern Ireland within the first year of life, it is improbable that this applies to more than a very small percentage of all people born outside Northern Ireland.

It is noted that a similar quality issue was found in the 2011 Republic of Ireland Census, which reported 352,000 non-Irish people who had ever lived elsewhere, but 777,000 people born outside Ireland. The Central Statistics Office Ireland reports note, "When analysing these results, it must be borne in mind that a high percentage of residents who were born abroad failed to answer the question on previous residence abroad – repeating patterns seen in 2006."

March 2015

For Northern Ireland, it is estimated that 307,660 usual residents have ever lived outside Northern Ireland, made up of the following groups:

Group	Country of birth	Lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more	Population size
A	Northern Ireland	Yes	105,650
B	Elsewhere	Yes	107,626
C	Elsewhere	No	94,384
All who have ever lived outside Northern Ireland			307,660

This question on 'lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more' was included in the 2011 Census Quality Survey (CQS), the report of which was published in July 2013. While the overall Agreement Rate for this question was reported as 89.3%, this was largely driven by the very large proportion of the population who had never lived outside Northern Ireland. In contrast, however, when responses from those who stated (in either the Census or the CQS) that they had lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more are examined, it is clear that there was a high level of ambiguity around the responses. For example, of the 424 respondents in the CQS sample who said in their Census return that they had lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more, only 254 (59.9%) confirmed in the CQS that they had lived outside Northern Ireland for a continuous period of one year or more.