



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

## Research and Information Service Briefing Note

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Paper 129/13

17 October 2013

NIAR 773-13

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# **Statistics on Blind and Partially-sighted people in Northern Ireland**

## **1 Introduction**

This Briefing Note provides a short summary of currently available statistics on blind or partially sighted persons living in Northern Ireland.

The Note includes statistics on demography (age and gender profile), labour market activity, household tenure, welfare benefit uptake (DLA) and educational enrolment and attainment.

## 2 Age and Gender Profile

Census 2011 provides an indication of the number of blind or partially sighted persons in Northern Ireland. However, the information is somewhat limited, as it is based upon the answer to a single question (see Q. 23 opposite), and should be treated with some caution <sup>1</sup>.

On Census Day 2011, a total of **30,862** persons declared they were either blind or partially sighted (1.7 per cent of the resident population) <sup>2</sup>.

An analysis of constituency data reveals that the proportion of blind/partially-sighted persons is highest in the three Belfast Constituencies of Belfast North, East and West. South Antrim, Mid Ulster and Lagan Valley contain the lowest proportion (Table 2.1).

**23** Do you have any of the following conditions which have lasted, or are expected to last, at least 12 months?  
 Tick all that apply.

- Deafness or partial hearing loss
- Blindness or partial sight loss
- Communication difficulty (a difficulty with speaking or making yourself understood)
- A mobility or dexterity difficulty (a condition that substantially limits one or more basic physical activities such as walking, climbing stairs, lifting or carrying)
- A learning difficulty, an intellectual difficulty, or a social or behavioural difficulty
- An emotional, psychological or mental health condition (such as depression or schizophrenia)
- Long-term pain or discomfort
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing (such as asthma)
- Frequent periods of confusion or memory loss
- A chronic illness (such as cancer, HIV, diabetes, heart disease or epilepsy)
- Other condition
- No condition

**Table 2.1: Prevalence of Blind /Partially-sighted persons by Constituency, Census 2011**

	Number of Blind or partially sighted	Per cent of Resident Population
Northern Ireland	30,862	1.7
Belfast North	2,231	2.2
Belfast East	1,935	2.1
Belfast West	1,932	2.1
North Down	1,648	1.8
Strangford	1,588	1.8
West Tyrone	1,600	1.8
Foyle	1,752	1.7
East Antrim	1,553	1.7
Fermanagh and South Tyrone	1,761	1.7
Newry and Armagh	1,902	1.7
Belfast South	1,819	1.6
Upper Bann	1,851	1.6

<sup>1</sup> . It is difficult to ascertain the true level of blindness or visual impairment in Northern Ireland. The Census data, for example, is self-reported and could conceivably include such diverse conditions as people who wear glasses right through to total blindness.

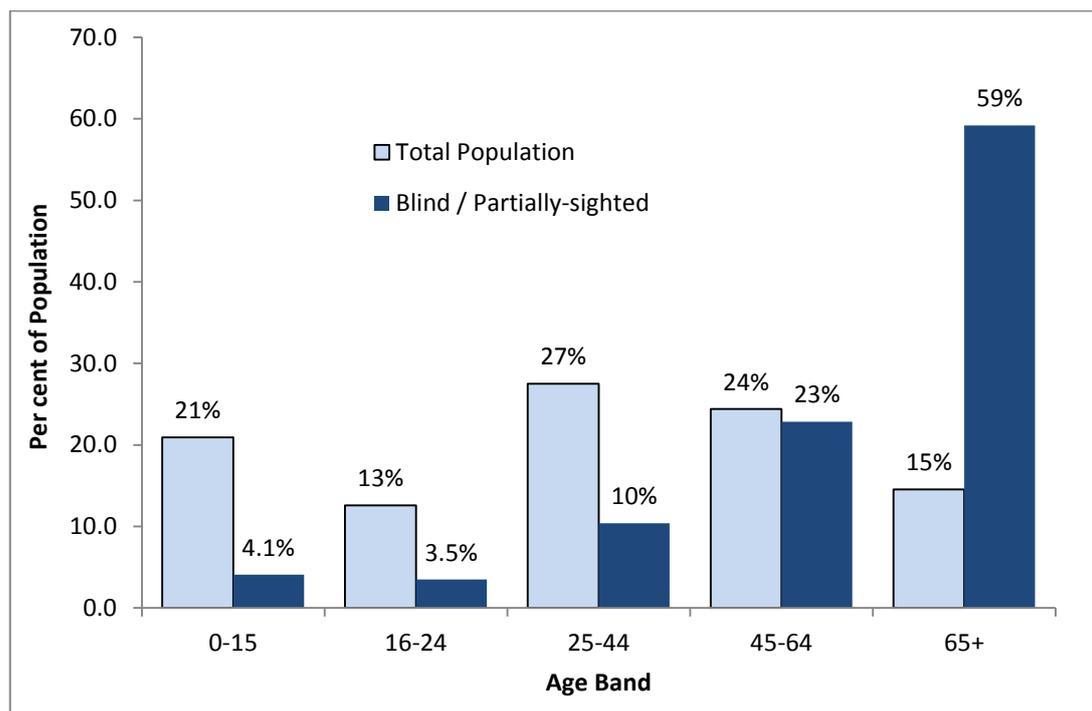
<sup>2</sup> NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3101NI: Type of long-term condition by age and sex.

	Number of Blind or partially sighted	Per cent of Resident Population
North Antrim	1,694	1.6
South Down	1,691	1.6
East Londonderry	1,542	1.5
Lagan Valley	1,541	1.5
Mid Ulster	1,447	1.5
South Antrim	1,375	1.4

Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table KS302NI

The age profile of blind / partially-sighted people in Northern Ireland differs from that of the resident population as a whole (see Figure 2.1). In general terms, they tend to be older than the general population.

**Figure 2.1: Age profile of Blind/partially-sighted population compared with total population, Census 2011**

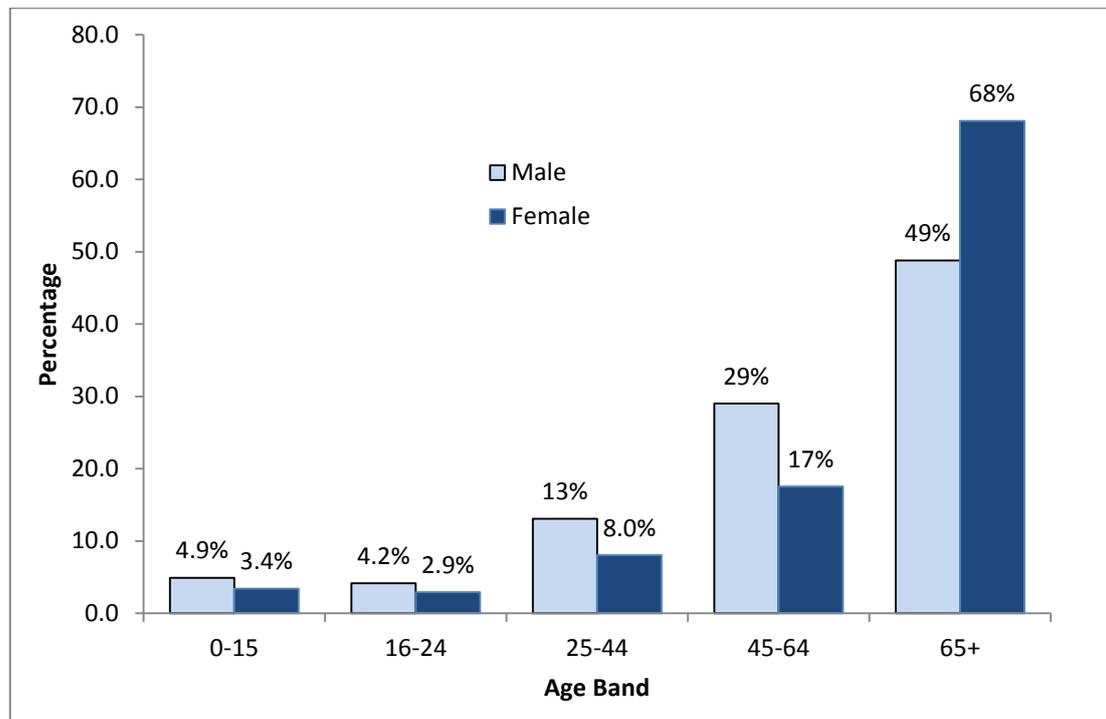


Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3101NI

For example, while 21 per cent of the resident population are aged 0 – 15 years, only 4.1 per cent of blind or partially sighted persons are in this age category. In contrast, 59 per cent of the blind or partially sighted population are aged 65 or over, compared with 15 per cent of usual residents.

In relation to gender, 14,273 of blind or partially sighted persons are male (46 per cent), while 16,589 (54 per cent) are female. Females have an older age profile than males, with over two thirds (68 per cent) of females aged 65 or over, compared with just under a half (49 per cent) of males, see Fig 2.2.

**Figure 2.2: Age profile of Blind/partially-sighted population by Sex, Census 2011**



Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3101NI

### 3 Economic Activity and Inactivity

Economic activity refers to whether or not a person was working or looking for work in the week before Census Day 2011. The economically active include the employed, self-employed, the unemployed actively seeking work, and (economically active) full-time students.

Table 3.1 presents a comparison between all usual residents aged 16-74 and the blind or partially-sighted (aged 16-74). As one might expect, given the older age profile of this population, the labour market profile of the blind / partially-sighted is different from that of the general population.

Two-thirds (66 per cent) of usual residents aged 16 to 74 years in Northern Ireland were economically active in the week before Census Day 2011. These were composed of full-time employees (36 per cent), part-time employees (13 per cent), the

self-employed (8.9 per cent) and the unemployed (5.0 per cent). The remaining 3.7 per cent were economically active full-time students.

In contrast, only 32 per cent of the blind / partially-sighted were economically active in March 2011, less than half the figure for the general population as a whole (66 per cent). The largest group were full-time employees (16 per cent), followed by part-time employees (6 per cent), the self-employed (5.0 per cent) and full-time students (1.1 per cent). A total of **559 persons** (3.4 per cent) were unemployed and actively seeking work.

Similar differences are evident for economic inactivity. While a third of the general population aged 16-74 is economically inactive, this figure rises to over two-thirds (68 per cent) for those who are blind / partially sighted (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.1: Blind and partially-sighted persons (aged 16-74) and economic activity/inactivity, Census 2011**

Economic Activity	Total Pop. aged 16-74 (%)	Blind / Partially-sighted (%)
<b>Economically active (count)</b>	<b>869,767</b>	<b>5,188</b>
<b>Economically active (per cent)</b>	66.2	31.7
Employee, Full-time	35.6	16.3
Employee, Part-time	13.1	6.0
Self-employed	8.9	5.0
Unemployed	5.0	3.4
Full-time student	3.7	1.1
<b>Economically inactive (count)</b>	<b>443,653</b>	<b>11,187</b>
<b>Economically inactive (per cent)</b>	33.8	68.3
Retired	12.9	33.2
Long-term sick/disabled	7.3	25.9
Student	6.2	2.7
Looking after home/family	4.4	2.5
Other	2.9	4.0

Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3606NI

A third (33 per cent) of blind / partially-sighted people are retired, compared with 13 per cent of the general population aged 16-74, while over a quarter (26 per cent) are sick/disabled (7 per cent of the general population).

## 4 Household Tenure

Table 4.1 shows the number and proportion of usual residents on Census Day 2011 who are either blind or partially-sighted by household tenure. The table reveals that, while the majority of blind/partially sighted persons are living in owner-occupied households (64 per cent), they are disproportionately represented in social housing.

Twenty-two per cent of the blind/partially-sighted are living in social housing (including sheltered accommodation), compared with 12 per cent of the overall population living in households.

**Table 4.1: Blind and partially-sighted persons by Tenure, Census 2011**

Category	All usual residents in households (Count)	Owner occupied (%)	Social rental (%)	Private rental (%)	Total (%)
All usual residents in households	1,788,339	71.9	12.3	15.9	100.0
Blind and partially-sighted persons	28,402	64.5	22.1	13.5	100.0

Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3401NI

## 5 Disability Living Allowance and Prescriptions

Figures from the Department of Social Development (DSD, May 2013) show that a total of 3,090 people with a visual disease were in receipt of the Care or Mobility Component of Disability Living Allowance (DLA). This represents 10 per cent of all persons who are blind or partially sighted.

**Table 5.1: Blind and partially-sighted DLA recipients, May 2013**

Assembly Area	Frequency
Belfast North	250
Belfast West	200
Upper Bann	200
West Tyrone	200
Belfast East	190
Foyle	190
North Antrim	180
Belfast South	170
Newry and Armagh	170
South Down	170
East Londonderry	160
Fermanagh and south Tyrone	160
Mid Ulster	160
South Antrim	150
East Antrim	140
Lagan Valley	130
North Down	130
Strangford	130
Unknown	40
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,090</b>

Source: DSD, October 2013, personal communication

Analysis of the data by Assembly Area (Table 5.1), shows that the highest number of DLA recipients with a visual disease were living in Belfast North (250), followed by Belfast West, Upper Bann and West Tyrone (200). The lowest number of DLA recipients with a visual impairment were living in Strangford and North Down (130).

In 2011, 559,207 prescriptions were issued in Northern Ireland for diseases of the eye, at a total cost of £3,999,028 (BSO, Prescription Cost Analysis, 2011).

## 6 Educational Enrolment and Attainment

### 6.1 School Enrolments

Figures provided by the Department of Education show a total of 561 blind or partially-sighted pupils enrolled across all schools in Northern Ireland in the school year 2012/13 (Table 6.1). The majority of pupils were evenly spread across primary (175), post-primary (196) and special schools (165), with a small number in pre-school and nursery environments.

**Table 6.1 Number of blind or partially-sighted pupils in all schools in Northern Ireland, 2012/2013**

School type	Blind	Partially sighted	Total
Voluntary and private preschools	0	7	7
Nursery schools	0	18	18
Primary	9	166	175
Post-primary	8	188	196
Special	30	135	165
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>514</b>	<b>561</b>

Source: DENI (2013) School Census, personal communication

### 6.2 Educational Attainment – Key Stage 4

Table 6.2 presents a comparison of Key Stage 4 results (5 or more GCSEs at A\*- C grade or equivalent) between visually impaired pupils, those with special educational needs, and all school leavers, for the three-year period, 2009 – 2012.

The table highlights a number of findings, namely:

1. The number of visually impaired (only) school leavers is relatively small, ranging from 17 – 21 per year.

2. In all three years, visually impaired (only) pupils as a group achieved better GCSE results than SEN pupils.
3. In one of the three years (2010/11), the results for visually impaired pupils (78.9%) were better than for all school leavers (73.2%).

**Table 6.2 Comparison of Key Stage 4 results: visually impaired, SEN, and all pupils, 2009 – 12**

Year	Visually impaired only		SEN <sup>3</sup>		All school leavers	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<b>2009/10</b>						
5+ GCSEs A*-C	10	58.8	1,321	35.1	16,414	71.9
Total leavers	17		3,766		22,826	
<b>2010/11</b>						
5+ GCSEs A*-C	15	78.9	1,649	39.9	16,949	73.2
Total leavers	19		4,137		23,160	
<b>2011/12</b>						
5+ GCSEs A*-C	14	66.7	1,797	45.4	17,263	76.5
Total leavers	21		3,956		22,568	

Source: DENI (2013) School Leavers Survey, personal communication

### 6.3 Further Education

Table 6.3 details the number of blind or partially sighted students who were enrolled in Northern Ireland Further Education colleges in the academic years 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12. The figures combine blind and partial sight loss as there is no differentiation in the Further Education datasets.

**Table 6.3 Number of blind/partially-sighted students in FE colleges, 2009/12**

FE College	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
Belfast Metropolitan	110	40	41
Northern Regional	36	26	46
South Eastern Regional	52	63	43
Southern Regional	55	43	30
South West Regional	65	59	47
North West Regional	44	58	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>362</b>	<b>289</b>	<b>257</b>

Source: Northern Ireland Assembly (2013) AQ 24813/11-15, 28 June 2013

<sup>3</sup> SEN = Special Educational Needs

## 6.4 Higher Education

Table 6.4 presents the number of blind or partially sighted students who were enrolled in Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions in the academic years 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12. As per further education, the figures combine blind and partial sight loss as there is no differentiation in the Higher Education datasets.

**Table 6.4 Number of blind/partially-sighted students in Northern Ireland Higher Education Institutions, 2009/12**

Institution	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12
The Queen's University Belfast	35	34	26
University of Ulster	28	60	55
Stranmillis / St Mary's	8	3	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>83</b>

Source: Northern Ireland Assembly (2013), AQ 24813/11-15, 28 June 2013

In 2010/11, there were 13 full-time undergraduate **entrants** in Northern Ireland universities who were either blind or partially sighted, 10 in 2009/10 and 14 in 2008/09. Of these 37 blind or partially sighted new entrants across the 3 years of entry, 4 dropped out and did not continue onto the next year of their course (AQ 24815/11-15).