

**census**  
2021

**Topic report**

**Research on measuring gender identity**

February 2021

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) held a public consultation on the questions to be included in the 2021 Census in 2015/16. At that time there was limited user need for a question on gender identity - therefore no gender identity question is included in the 2021 Census form. However NISRA have been considering how to provide better official statistics on gender identity.

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT)<sup>1</sup> run by Queen’s and Ulster Universities, has included a gender identity question. This research has indicated that the number of people living in Northern Ireland who would self-identify as transgender is small. Over the last three years of the NILT (2016-18) less than five persons in a total sample of 3,600 survey respondents have identified as transgender (or around 0.1%). The gender identity question (below) is in the part of the survey which is fully self-completing.

**Table 1 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey gender identity question**

What is your gender identity?  
*(Please tick one box only ✓)*

	✓	
Male	1	Ask Q19
Female	2	
Male to female transgender	3	Skip to end
Female to male transgender	4	
Other (please write in)	5	Ask Q19
I do not wish to answer this question	8	

From April 2019 a gender identity question has been included in the Northern Ireland Continuous Household Survey<sup>2</sup>. This was the first time a gender identity question has been included in a government run survey in Northern Ireland. In 2019 the Continuous Household Survey was collected on a voluntary basis via a face-to-face household interview. The survey interviewer asks the interviewee the gender identity question (GenderID). If the interviewee answers ‘no’ to the gender identity question then they are routed to a follow-up question (shown below). This is answered by the respondent directly.

<sup>1</sup> [Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey](#) is run and managed by academics at Queen’s and Ulster Universities - in style and substance it is similar to the British Social Attitudes Survey.

<sup>2</sup> The questions overleaf are included - a separate binary sex question is also included.

## Figure 1 Official voluntary household surveys - gender identity question in Northern Ireland

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"Is your gender the same as the sex you were registered at birth?"  
INSTRUCTION "IF RESPONDENT SAYS 'NO' TO THIS QUESTION PLEASE PASS THE COMPUTER<NEWLINE>  
    TO THE RESPONDENT AND ASK THEM TO TYPE IN THEIR GENDER<NEWLINE>  
    AT THE NEXT QUESTION" :  
    (a1 "Yes",  
    a2 "No (PLEASE ENTER GENDER AT NEXT QUESTION)",  
    a3 "Prefer not to say")  
  
GenderIDoth"Please type in your gender"  
WATERMARK "Current gender" : STRING[100]
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Of 5,600 adult returns made to the 2019/20 Continuous Household Survey only a very small number of adults (less than 5) answered “No” to the gender identity question (<0.1% of respondents). To gain a better understanding gender identity questions are also now being included in the 2020/21 Continuous Household Survey, Health and Community Safety Survey and a wider roll-out is planned for 2021/22. This will give an increased achieved sample size and should provide a more robust estimate of the size of the population who have different gender to their sex registered at birth.

There are however a number of challenges in measuring gender identity, three of the main challenges are noted below:

- (i) all survey questions have systematic errors and some people may answer self-completion questions inaccurately. As an example research after the 2011 Census showed that the level of systematic error in the binary sex question was up to 0.3% - thus the size of any systematic error in a self-completion questionnaire may be large if the size of the population we are trying to measure is small;
- (ii) under statute, data collection on gender identity must be undertaken in a manner that cannot either lead to or would require individuals with a Gender Recognition Certificate to reveal their previous identity<sup>3</sup>. Thus survey questions need to be either voluntary or have a “prefer not to say” option;

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<sup>3</sup> For example s22 of Gender Recognition Act (2004), makes it is an offence for a person who has acquired protected information to disclose information on a person’s gender history to any other person.

- (iii) even within an anonymous survey there is likely to be reticence for some people self-identifying with a different gender to their sex registered at birth.

NISRA note that further work is ongoing to research the most accurate way of measuring gender identity. The Scottish Government is undertaking research on how to address measuring both sex and gender in administrative systems<sup>4</sup>. In addition important work is also going on in Australia and New Zealand on this matter<sup>5</sup>.

For the 2021 Census, the 2015/16 consultation identified only a limited user need for a question on gender identity. NISRA wished to ensure that the 2021 Census included no more questions than the 2011 Census and the European Union noted no requirement for data on gender identity for the 2020 Census round. In this context a gender identity question was not included in the 2021 Census in Northern Ireland. This is in line with the Republic of Ireland<sup>6</sup>. NISRA note that there are plans for gender identity questions in the 2021 Census in England & Wales<sup>7</sup> and a question on transgender status history in the 2022 Census in Scotland<sup>8</sup> - the three Great Britain based censuses have therefore adopted different question forms and approaches to measuring gender identity/ transgender status.

NISRA would be happy to receive comments on this paper to ensure that future developments on this topic are managed effectively. All comments should be emailed to [census@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:census@nisra.gov.uk).

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<sup>4</sup> [Scottish Government research](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Australian Government guidelines on the recognition of sex and gender](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Details of the questions on the 2022 Republic of Ireland Census](#)

<sup>7</sup> [Details of the gender identity questions planned for the 2021 Census in England](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Details of the transgender question planned for the 2022 Census in Scotland](#)