



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Research and Information Service Briefing Paper

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## **Background Information and Statistics on Carers in Northern Ireland**

### **1 Introduction**

This Briefing Note contains background information and statistics on Carers in Northern Ireland, and draws attention to the more pertinent issues facing this group at present.

### **2 Who is a Carer?**

According to Carers UK (2015), “Carers provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, older or disabled family member, friend or partner. It could be a few hours a week, or round the clock, in your own home or down the motorway” (p.1) <sup>1</sup>. In a similar vein, Census 2011 notes that “a person is a provider of unpaid care if they give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of long-term physical or mental health or disability, or problems related to old age.” <sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Carers UK (2015) **Facts about Carers, October 2015**. Available at: [http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/policy/policy-library?task=download&file=policy\\_file&id=5466](http://www.carersuk.org/professionals/policy/policy-library?task=download&file=policy_file&id=5466)

<sup>2</sup> NISRA (2015) 2011 **Census Definitions and Output Classifications**, updated April 2015. Available at: [http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/pop\\_def\\_2011.pdf](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/Census/pop_def_2011.pdf)

### 3 Carers in Northern Ireland

The provision of unpaid care is becoming increasingly common as the population ages, with an expectation that the demand for care provided by spouses and adult children will rise substantially in coming decades. Unpaid care is thus an important social issue; not only does it make a vital contribution to the supply of care, but it can also affect the employment opportunities, and social and leisure activities, of those providing it. Carers are a diverse group, and as the demand for care is projected to grow, people are increasingly likely to become providers of care at some point in their lives.

In 2001, respondents to the Census were asked whether they provided unpaid care to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of long-term physical or mental ill health or disability, or problems related to old age, and for how many hours per week. This question was repeated in 2011, allowing for the examination of trends over time.

Approximately one-in-eight residents in Northern Ireland have caring responsibilities. Table 3.1 shows that a total of 214,000 (12%) people were providing some form of unpaid care on Census Day 2011, compared with 185,066 in 2001, an increase of 16 per cent. Using the latest 2015 mid-year population estimates<sup>3</sup>, this suggests that around 218,000 people currently have some form of caring role.

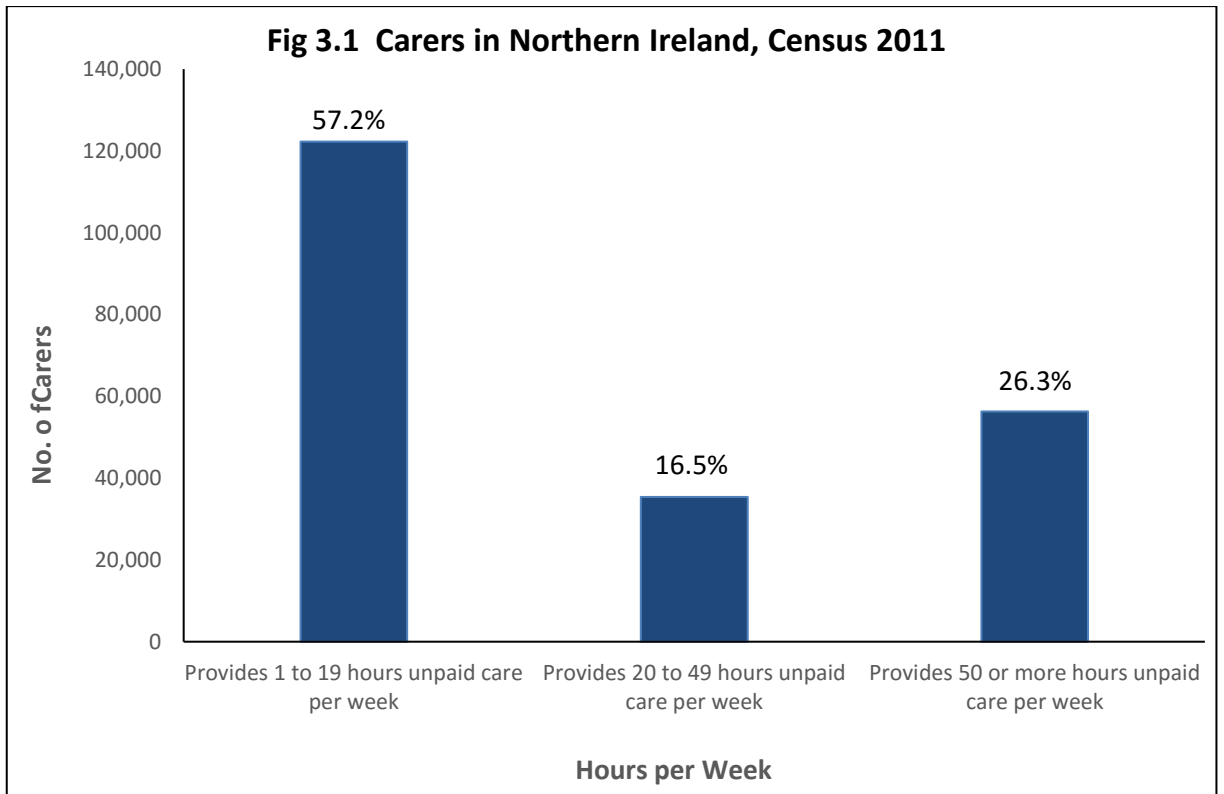
**Table 3.1 Provision of Unpaid Care in Northern Ireland, Census 2011**

Category of Care	Count	% Pop.
Provides no unpaid care	1,596,883	88.2
1 - 19 hours unpaid care per week	122,301	6.8
20 - 49 hours unpaid care per week	35,369	2.0
50 + hours unpaid care per week	56,310	3.1
Total	1,810,863	100.0

Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3304NI

Of the 214,000 carers in Northern Ireland on Census Day 2011, over half (122,000, 57%) were providing care for between 1 – 19 hours per week, while 35,000 were engaged for 20 – 49 hours per week. Just over a quarter of residents (56,000, 26%) had caring responsibilities for 50 or more hours per week (Fig 3.1 overleaf).

<sup>3</sup> NISRA (2016) Historical Population Totals (1821 – 2015), 23 June 2016. Available at: [http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/midyear/Historical\\_Pop\\_1821\\_2015.xls](http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/midyear/Historical_Pop_1821_2015.xls)



Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3304NI

### 3.1 Age Profile of Carers

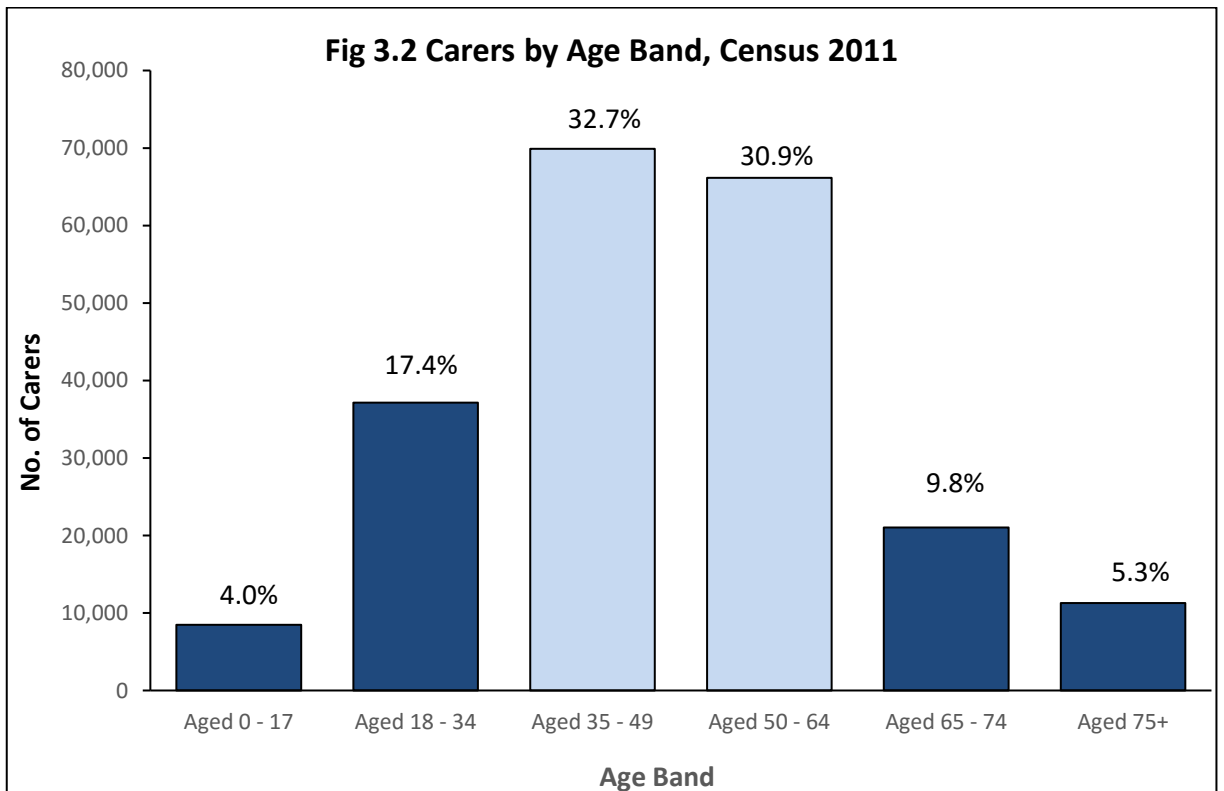


Fig 3.2 (above) shows that the majority of carers lie within the 35 – 64 age band, with one third (33%) aged 35 – 49, and a further 31 per cent aged 50 – 64. There are also a significant number of young carers (those aged under 18). For example, 6,700 young people (aged 0-17) provide between 1 and 19 hours of unpaid care per week, while a further 960 provide 20 – 49 hours, and 820 work for 50 hours or more <sup>4</sup>.

There are also 11,300 older carers (those aged 75 +), more than half (52%) are engaged in caring for 50 hours or more each week.

### 3.2 Carers: Who they Care For

In 2016, the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) found that a parent or a parent-in-law is the person most likely to be cared for, with more than four out of ten (44%) carers citing this as their main caring role. This was followed by spouse or partner (29%), child (10%) and other relative (13%). Only 5 per cent cared for a person outside the family (friend / neighbour), making it clear that caring is largely a family concern <sup>5</sup>.

### 3.3 Carer's Allowance

Carer's Allowance (CA) is a non-contributory benefit for people who look after a severely disabled person for at least 35 hours per week. To qualify for the benefit, the disabled person must be in receipt of either Disability Living Allowance or Attendance Allowance.

Table 3.2 (overleaf) shows statistical trends in CA claimants and recipients for the period 2012 – 2016. At November 2016, there were 46,090 people receiving Carer's Allowance, a rise of 2,160 on a year earlier. Of these, 33 per cent were male and 67 per cent female. Looking at the four-year period as a whole, an upward trend is evident, with the number of recipients increasing from 38,230 in November 2012 to 46,090 in November 2016, a rise of 21 per cent <sup>6</sup>.

Carer's Allowance has attracted criticism on the grounds of its strict eligibility criteria (only one in five carers receive it), and the low level of payment. According to Carers NI: "Carer's Allowance is £62.10 a week for the people who can actually claim it. People find that it's a pittance really. They feel they should be getting something equal to the minimum wage." <sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> NISRA (2013) Table DC3304NI, Census 2011

<sup>5</sup> Devine, P. and Gray, A.M. (2016) The Impact of Caring. ARK, Research Update No. 109, November 2016.

<sup>6</sup> Persons in receipt of Credits only refer to those claimants who may be eligible for CA but do not receive it. This is because they receive another benefit (e.g. Incapacity Benefit for people of working age, or State Pension for people of State Pension age) which equals or exceeds their weekly rate of CA.

<sup>7</sup> The Detail (2016) Who Cares for our Carers? Leslie Fergus, 6 June 2016. Available at: <http://www.thedetail.tv/articles/who-cares-for-our-carers>

**Table 3.2 Carer's Allowance Claimants and Recipients, 2012-16**

Year	Claimants	Recipients	Credits only
2012	62,220	38,230	23,990
2013	64,600	39,910	24,690
2014	67,540	41,780	25,760
2015	70,170	43,930	26,240
2016	72,630	46,090	26,540

Note: Data refers to position at November each year

Source: Department for Communities (2017) *Benefits Statistics Summary, Nov 2016*.

## 4 Issues facing Carers in Northern Ireland

Carers UK carries out an annual survey of carers (*State of Caring*) to build a picture of caring in the UK<sup>8</sup>. In 2016, the survey, which included Northern Ireland, had 6,149 responses from all the UK nations, making it the largest survey of this type ever conducted. This section looks at some of the key issues raised by the Survey, as well as findings from Census 2011.

### 4.1 Health

A substantial proportion of carers have a long-term health issue or disability themselves. Table 4.1 shows the amount of unpaid care provided by those residents in Northern Ireland who reported a long-term illness or disability which impacted on them 'a lot' (215,200).

**Table 4.1 Provision of Unpaid Care by Long-term Illness impacts 'a lot', Census 2011**

Category	Count
Total	215,232
Provides no unpaid care	194,751
Provides 1 to 19 hours unpaid care per week	6,601
Provides 20 to 49 hours unpaid care per week	3,665
Provides 50 or more hours unpaid care per week	10,215

Source: NINIS, NISRA (2013) Table DC3304NI, Census 2011

Table 4.1 shows that half (50%, 10,200) of those who provide unpaid care for 50 or more hours per week have a long-term health issue or disability which limits their day-to-day activities a lot. According to the NHS Information Centre *Survey of Carers in*

<sup>8</sup> Carers UK (2016) *State of Caring 2016*. Available at: [http://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library?task=download&file=policy\\_file&id=5637](http://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library?task=download&file=policy_file&id=5637)

*Households*, 27 per cent of carers in the UK as a whole were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) as a result of their own disability or ill health <sup>9</sup>.

Many carers report that caring results in a negative and often lasting impact on their general physical and mental health, but as with the rest of the population, some people with existing disabilities or long-term conditions also take on caring responsibilities. The 2011 Census shows that, in Northern Ireland, over 9,000 carers reported being in bad or very bad health, over half (52%) of whom were providing unpaid care for 50 or more hours per week <sup>10</sup>.

## 4.2 Financial hardship

Taking on a caring role can result in a sharp reduction in household income, especially when leaving work, or reducing working hours to care for someone. The fall in income can be particularly catastrophic if the carer is looking after a partner who has also left work as a result of illness or disability.

Despite the growing numbers of people providing unpaid care, support for carers and their families from the social security system continues to be reduced. Freezes on most working age benefits, combined with low inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) means that carers and their families are seeing no increase in their benefits, leaving them without the scope to manage rising costs. Working age benefits, including Carer's Allowance, are set to be frozen for the next four years.

The *State of Caring 2016* survey <sup>11</sup> found that:

- Just over half of respondents (51%) are managing on a gross household monthly income of less than £1,500.
- 44% are struggling to make ends meet, rising to nearly half (48%) of those caring for 35 hours or more per week.

Of those who are struggling to make ends meet:

- Over a third (37%) are using up savings to get by, suggesting that their ability to manage is unlikely to be sustainable in the longer term.
- Two thirds (64%) cut back on seeing friends and family to cope.

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<sup>9</sup> NHS Information Centre for Health and Social Care (2010) *Survey of Carers in Households 2009/10*, cited in Carers UK (2015) Facts about Carers, Policy Briefing, October 2015.

<sup>10</sup> NINIS NISRA (2013) Table 3301NI, Census 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Carers UK (2016) *State of Caring 2016*. Available at: [http://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library?task=download&file=policy\\_file&id=5637](http://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library?task=download&file=policy_file&id=5637)

- Nearly half (48%) are cutting back on essentials, such as food and heating; 1 in 6 (16%) are falling into arrears with housing and utility bills; while others are borrowing money on credit cards (35%); taking out loans (13%); or borrowing from friends or family (30%).
- A quarter of carers (26%) report that they have been, are currently, in debt as a result of their caring role.

The Carers UK survey found that concern about finances had a knock-on impact on carers' own health also. Across all carers, whether they were struggling financially or not, 43 per cent reported a level of worry about finances that affects their own health. One respondent wrote:

“Caring for someone and looking after our baby is a massive physical and emotional drain. Adding to this the stress of becoming increasingly in debt, and the knowledge that continuing along this path will end in eviction, and the inability to pay bills, eat and heat the property, causes stress for me and directly impacts on my partner’s health and wellbeing.” (p.13)

Another reported that:

“The increased stress has left me with depression, high blood pressure and anxiety. Headaches, low self-esteem, emotionally crippled. All hidden behind a smile.”

Welfare reform is being implemented in Northern Ireland throughout 2016-17 under the Northern Ireland (Welfare Reform) Act 2015. Some of the changes may impact on carers. Changes to disability benefits, for example, may affect eligibility for Carer’s Allowance. If the person cared for currently claims Disability Living Allowance and is reassessed for Personal Independence Payment, if they do not qualify under the new criteria the carer will no longer be eligible for Carer’s Allowance <sup>12</sup>.

A new mitigation scheme means that carers who suffer loss will receive a supplementary payment to cover the financial loss for a period of one year. This will provide time to seek expert advice and submit fresh benefit claims if appropriate <sup>12</sup>.

## 4.2 Caring and Work

Census 2011 found that 119,400 (15%) residents in Northern Ireland aged 16 – 74 in employment were providing unpaid care. In other words, one-in-seven of the workforce are juggling work with unpaid care. Table 4.1 provides a breakdown.

<sup>12</sup> Carers NI (2016) Welfare Reform: What does it mean for Northern Ireland?, 31 August 2016. Accessed from: <https://www.carersuk.org/northernireland/news-ni/welfare-reform-what-does-it-mean-for-carers>

**Table 4.2 Residents in Employment providing Unpaid Care, Census 2011**

Unpaid Care	Count	% Workforce
1-19 hours per week	83,087	10.4
20-49 hours per week	18,072	2.3
50+ hours per week	18,296	2.3
Total	119,455	15.0

Source: Table DC3601NI, Census 2011

The table shows that 10 per cent of those in employment are providing 1 – 19 hours of unpaid care, while 2.3 per cent are involved for 20 – 49 hours. A total of 18,300 (2.3%) employees provide 50 or more hours of unpaid care per week.

According to Carers UK (2016), many working carers find they go months or even years without a real break. Seven in 10 (70%) respondents to the *State of Caring* survey said they used their annual leave to care and almost half (48%) have done overtime to make up hours spent caring <sup>13</sup>.

Many carers leave work altogether when they feel they cannot cope any longer, and many more reduce their hours, turn down promotion, or take lower paid, flexible work that can fit around their caring responsibilities. Half (49%) of carers responding to the *State of Caring 2016* survey have given up work to care. Nearly a quarter (23%) reduced their working hours, while 17 per cent had to take a less qualified job, or turned down promotion to fit around caring. When asked what would make the difference in enabling more people to remain in work, more support from care workers coming to the home of the person they care for was the top choice of most carers (28%). Support with household chores, such as shopping was also high on the list <sup>14</sup>.

According to Carers UK (2016), 8 out of 10 (78%) carers buy or receive some form of practical support with their caring role, be that equipment, technology, a break from caring or help from family and friends. However, one in five carers (20%) who are providing 50 hours or more of care each week are receiving no practical support with their caring role.

### 4.3 Young Carers

As noted above, around 6,700 young people (aged 0-17) provide between 1 and 19 hours of unpaid care per week, while a further 960 provide 20 – 49 hours, and 820 work for 50 hours or more. Taken together, young carers account for 4 per cent of all carers in Northern Ireland.

Questions on young carers were asked of 16-year-olds in the Young Life and Times Surveys of 2007, 2010 and 2015. In 2015, 1,156 young people aged 16 were surveyed

<sup>13</sup> Carers UK (2016) *State of Caring 2016*. *Op Cit.*

<sup>14</sup> Carers UK (2016) *State of Caring 2016*. *Op Cit.*



about their caring responsibilities<sup>15</sup>. It was found that around 9 per cent of the young people were engaged in caring. An earlier survey in 2007<sup>16</sup> found an association between caring responsibilities and income, in that young carers were more likely to come from lower income families. In addition, young carers were more likely to attend secondary, rather than grammar schools. This was still the case in 2010. Seventeen percent of those respondents who declared they lived in low income families had a caring role, compared with 5 per cent of respondents from more affluent families. Similarly, just over half (51%) of young carers attended secondary school, compared with 39 per cent who went to grammar school<sup>17</sup>.

Results from the 2015 survey indicate that the respondent's grandparents were the people most frequently cared for (42%), followed by brother or sister (32%), mother (28%), father (10%) and others (10%). Some young people provided care for more than one person. Caring can often entail a long-term commitment, and the 2015 survey found that nearly three quarters (71%) of young people providing care had been doing so for over one year, with more than one in four (29%) doing so for over five years. While three-quarters of young carers (75%) say they enjoy caring to some degree a lack of free time is an issue for many. Sources of support lay mainly within the family, with only 19 per cent saying they were aware of a person or organisation they could go to for help if feeling stressed.

According to Devine and Lloyd (2011), it is important to note that: "like their adult counterparts, these young people provide support, on an unpaid basis, for their elderly and disabled relatives carrying out tasks that would otherwise have to be provided by outside agencies and perhaps paid for from tax revenue." (p.4).

#### 4.4 People Living Longer

The population structure of Northern Ireland is changing. While the number of children and people aged 16 to 64 are both projected to fall over the next 25 years, the number of people aged 65 and over is projected to increase<sup>18</sup>.

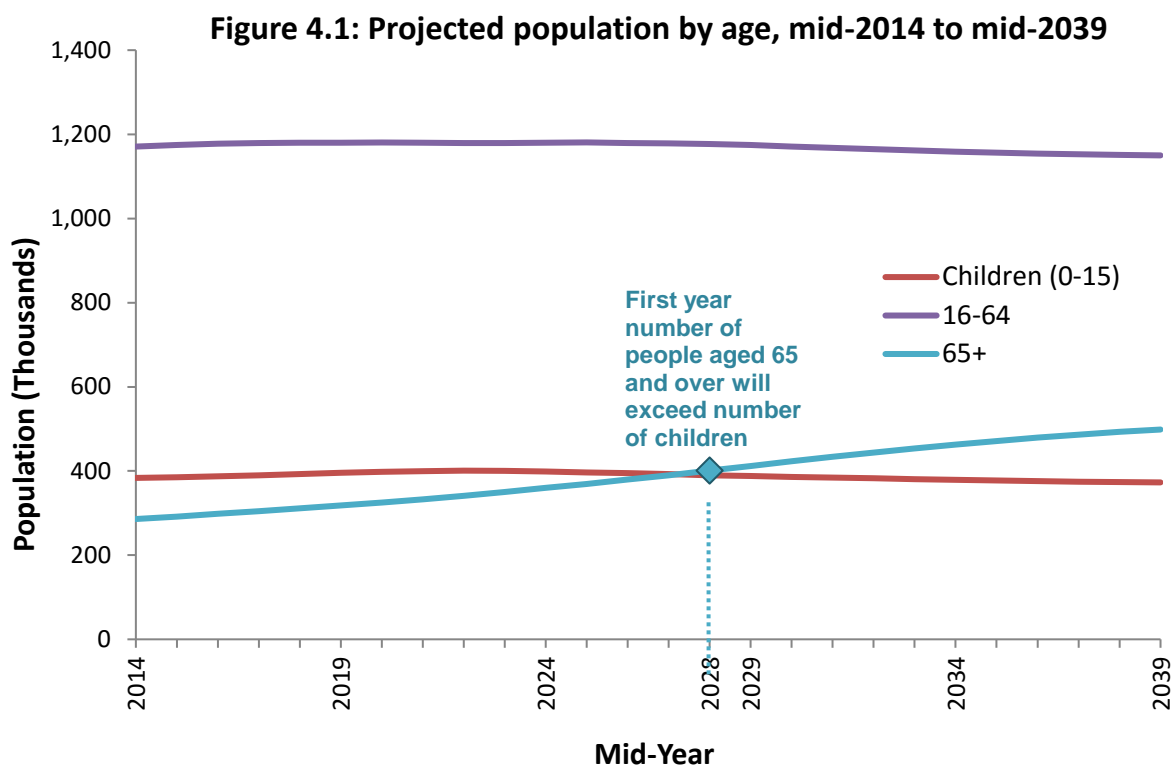
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<sup>15</sup> ARK (2016) Young Life and Times Survey 2015 results. Available at:

<sup>16</sup> Devine, P. and Lloyd, K. (2008) *Young Carers*, ARK, Research Update No. 56. Available at: [www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update56.pdf](http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update56.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Devine, P. and Lloyd, K. (2011) *Young Carers Too*, ARK, Research Update No. 76. Available at: [www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update76.pdf](http://www.ark.ac.uk/publications/updates/update76.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> NISRA (2015) 2014-based Population Projections for Northern Ireland. Statistical Bulletin. Available at: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/demography/population/projections/NPP14-Bulletin.pdf>



Source: NISRA (2016) Statistics Bulletin, 2014 NPP, Fig 3a

In 2014, there were an estimated 285,000 older people (age 65+) who accounted for 15.5 per cent of the population. By 2039, this age cohort is expected to number just under half a million (499,000) and account for a quarter (25%) of the population. By contrast, the proportion of the population aged 0 – 64 years is expected to fall from 85 per cent in 2014 to 75 per cent in 2039. The demographic imperative is clear: in the coming decades, an ageing population, a proportion of whom may have chronic complaints and disabilities, is likely to lead to an increased demand for caring services of all types.

## 5 Summary

This Briefing Note has provided some background statistics on carers in Northern Ireland. The number of carers in Northern Ireland rose by 16 per cent during the decade 2001 – 2011 to 214,000, and currently stands at around 220,000, or one-in-eight of the population. Around 4 per cent of carers are young people aged under 18. As life expectancy continues to increase, and people live longer, the demand for carers is projected to increase substantially in coming decades.

There are a series of issues facing carers in Northern Ireland, including finances and debt, health, and problems with juggling work and caring responsibilities.