

An overview of diversity and equality in the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) at 1 January 2024 and how it has changed over time.

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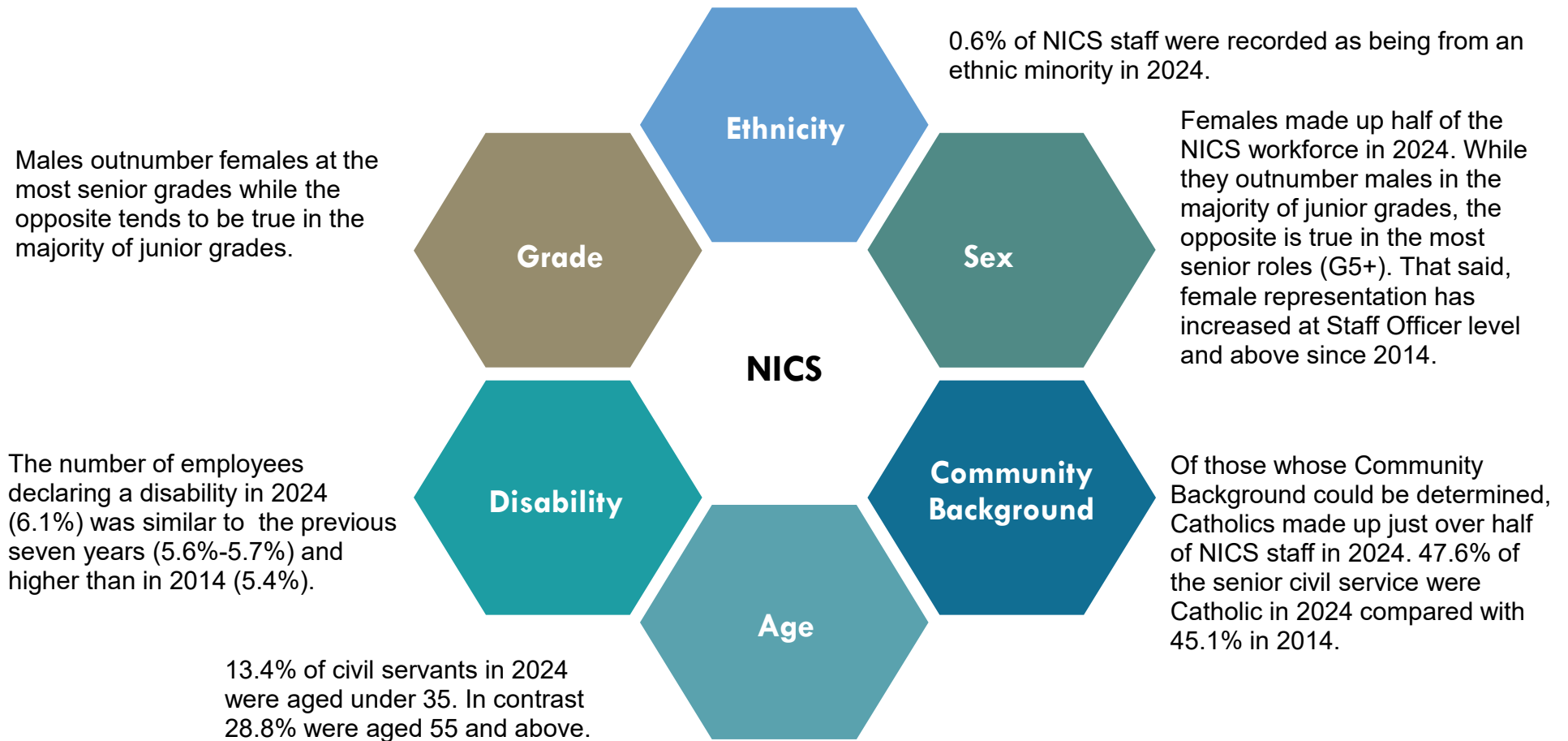
Key Points¹

- Females made up 50.2% of the NICS workforce in 2024, down from 50.5% in 2014 and similar to last year's figure (50.1%). It also closely matches the economically active population (49.5%). Within the most senior grades, female representation has increased since 2014 (34.9%) to 43.8% in 2024. This is up from 42.8% in 2023.
- In 2014 48.3% of the NICS workforce were from a Catholic background, in 2024 this has risen to 50.1%. However, Catholics are still underrepresented in the NICS compared to that of the economically active population with 54.1% of the workforce from a Catholic background. Excluded from these figures are staff whose background could not be determined which accounted for 4.7% of the NICS workforce.
- The NICS has an older age profile in 2024 compared to 2014 with 13.4% of NICS staff aged 16-34 in 2024 compared with 24.3% in 2014. In contrast the proportion of staff aged 55 and over has increased by 12.7 percentage points (2014, 16.1%; 2024, 28.8%). The NICS also has an older age profile than that of the economically active (37.4% aged 16-34 and 17.2% aged 55+).
- In 2024 the median age of staff was 47 years old compared to 2014 when the median age was 44.
- The proportion of staff who declared a disability (6.1%; economically active population, 10.2%) or who were from minority ethnic groups (0.6%; economically active population, 3.0%) continues to be lower than in the economically active population.

¹Comparator information for the economically active populations taken from Census 2021.

Executive Summary

A summary of the main findings by equality category is provided below. Some high-level information on other equality categories (marital status, sexual orientation, dependants) is included in Background Quality Report.



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The [Background Quality Report](#) is available on the NISRA website.

Next publication: Spring 2025

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Composition

At 1 January 2024 there were 23,976 staff in the NICS; 272 (1.1%) were in the most senior grades (Grade 5 and above), lower than the proportion in senior grades in the Civil Service in Great Britain¹ (1.4%). This report provides an overview of the composition of NICS staff in terms of sex, community background, age group, ethnicity and disability.

Contextual figures are provided, using data on the working age population (aged 16-64 years) who are economically active which comprises both the employed and the unemployed. Contextual figures for sex, community background, age, disability and ethnicity have been sourced from the Census 2021. While some jobs in the NICS will have no qualification requirement, most will have at least a basic qualification requirement and so the NICS profile is compared with the economically active population with Level 1 qualifications² or higher.

It is important to note that the contextual figures are 'broad brush' in character, and the comparison is made on data at an aggregate level. Any comparisons should therefore only be taken as general and approximate and we acknowledge that the compositions may have changed since the time of the Census. Further information relating to the limitations of this approach can be found in the [Background Quality Report](#).

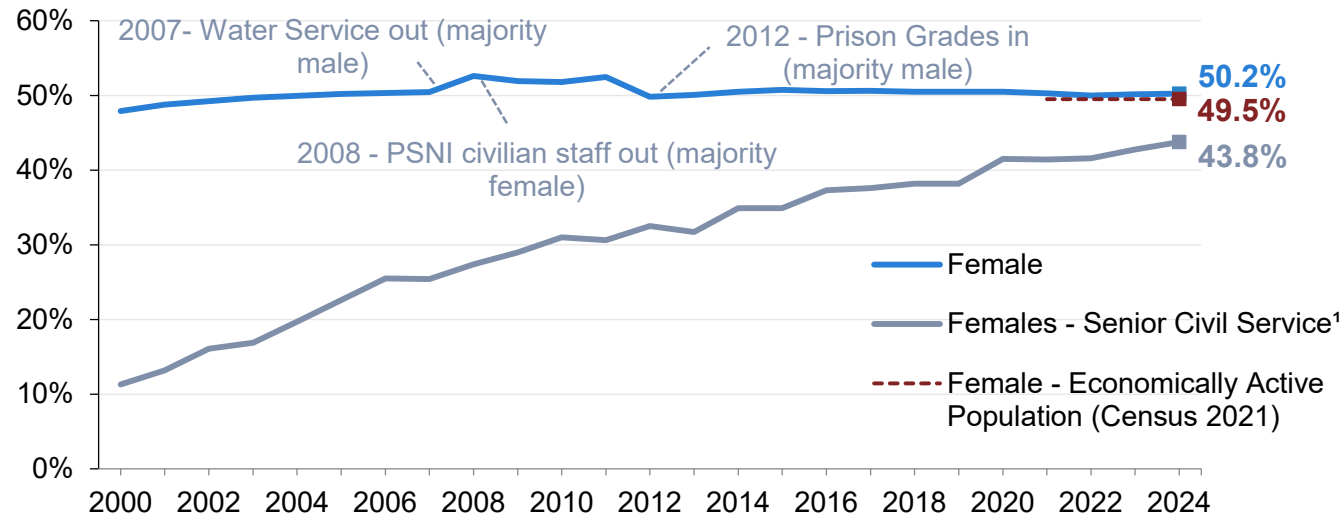
Tables showing the composition of staff overall by sex, community background, age and disability are available via the download option under each figure. Information for ethnicity has not been provided due to the small numbers of staff involved.

¹GB figures as at 31 March 2023.

²GCSE (grades D-G), CSE (grades 2-5, 1-4 CSEs (grade 1), 1-4 GCSEs (grades A-C), 1-4 'O' level passes, NVQ level 1, GNVQ Foundation or equivalents

Composition: Sex

Figure 1: Female representation in the NICS, 2000 to 2024



[Download Data](#)

As shown in figure 1, 50.2% of the NICS workforce in 2024 was made up of female, this was down from 50.5% in 2014 and similar to the 50.1% reported in 2023.

Within the most senior grades (G5+), female representation has increased since 2014 (34.9%). Representation increased from 42.8% in 2023 to 43.8% in 2024.

Economically active comparisons²

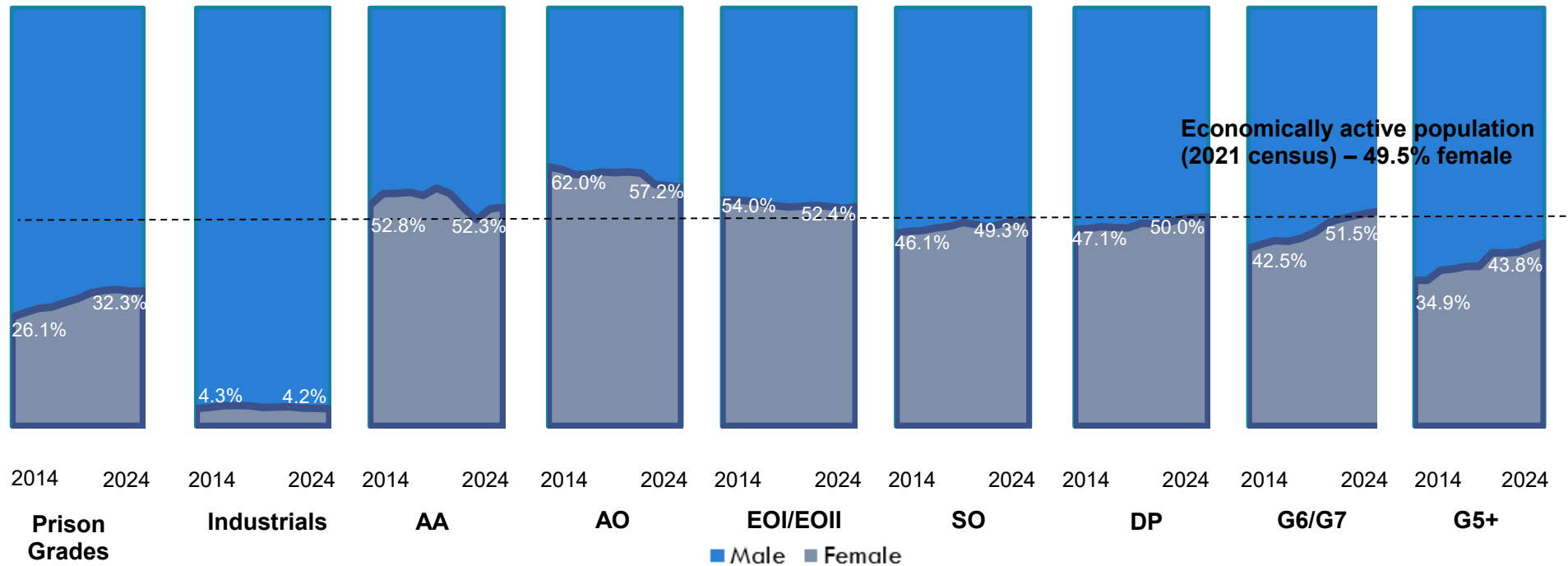
Overall the sex composition of the NICS closely matches that of its comparator population (difference of 0.7 percentage points).

¹Senior Civil Service is comprised of Grade 5 and above.

²Comparator populations are working age population (aged 16-64 years) who are economically active from Census 2021, with Level 1 qualifications or above. i.e. at least GCSE (grades D-G), CSE (grades 2-5, 1-4 CSEs (grade 1), 1-4 GCSEs (grades A-C), 1-4 'O' level passes, NVQ, level 1, GNVQ Foundation or equivalents.

Composition: Sex

Figure 2: Sex balance at each analogous grade level¹, 2014 to 2024



[Download Data](#)

As for previous years, figure 2 shows females outnumber males at the more junior grades. While females make up less than half of all staff at Staff Officer (SO) and Grade 5 and above, they now represent 50% of staff at Deputy Principal (DP) and 51.5% of staff at Grade 6 and 7. Representation of females at Staff Officer (SO), Deputy Principal (DP), Grade 6 and 7, Grade 5 and Prison Grades has increased since 2014.

Economically active comparisons

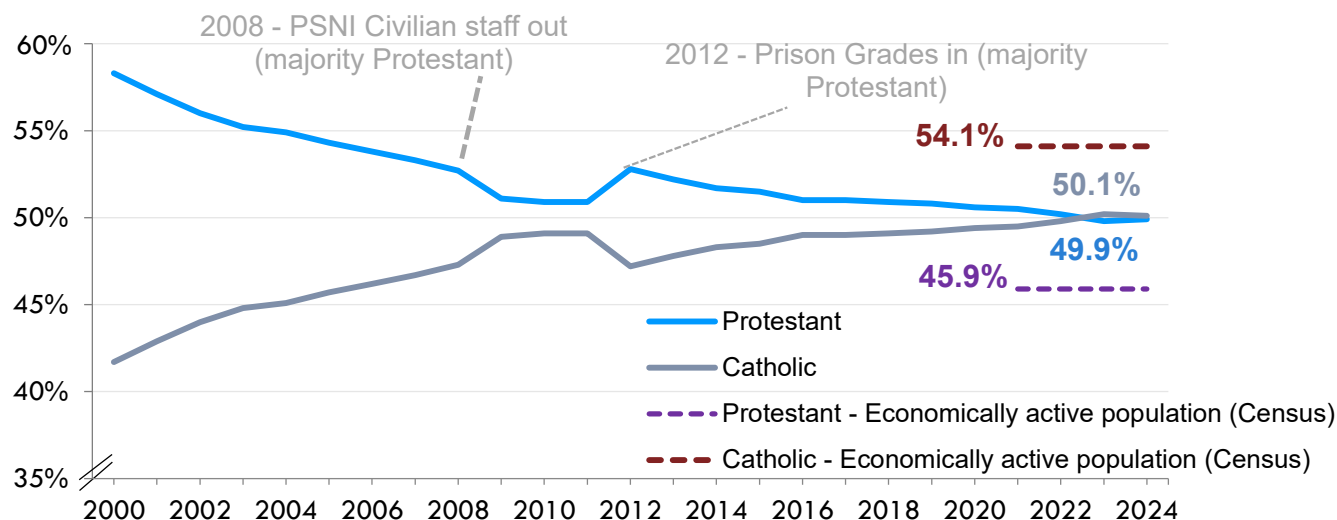
Female representation is above that in the economically active population at all grades apart from Prison Grades, Industrials, SO and G5+. In 2024 female representation in the senior civil service (G5+) remained lower than that in the GB civil service (47.9%). The limitations of comparing the composition of the NICS to contextual figures are detailed in [Background Quality Report](#).

¹See [Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 - Figures \(xlsx\)](#) for a composition breakdown of each analogous grade. This includes individual information for EOII, EOI, Grade 7 and Grade 6.

²GB figures as at 31 March 2023.

Composition: Community Background

Figure 3: Community background in the NICS, 2000 to 2024



[Download Data](#)

At 1 January 2024 the community background (Protestant, Catholic, Not Determined) was available for all staff. Excluding those described as Not Determined, figure 3 shows Catholics made up 50.1% of the NICS workforce. This was 1.8 percentage points higher than the comparative figure at January 2014 (48.3%). Key changes impacting on community background representation are highlighted in figure 3.

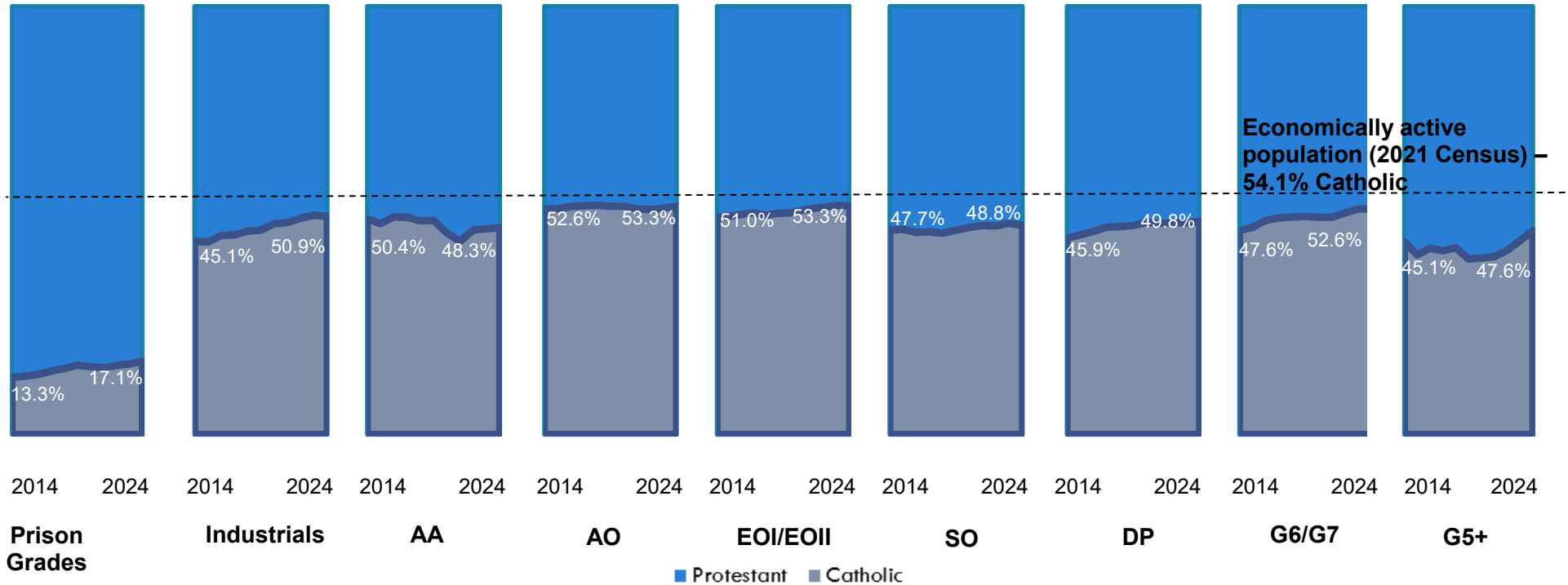
Economically active comparisons¹

Overall there is a 4.0 percentage points difference between the community background composition of the NICS and its comparator population.

¹Comparator populations are working age population (aged 16-64 years) who are economically active from Census 2021, with Level 1 qualifications or above. i.e. at least GCSE (grades D-G), CSE (grades 2-5, 1-4 CSEs (grade 1), 1-4 GCSEs (grades A-C), 1-4 'O' level passes, NVQ level 1, GNVQ Foundation or equivalents.

Composition: Community Background

Figure 4: Community background balance at each analogous grade level¹, 2014 to 2024



[Download Data](#)

Economically active comparisons

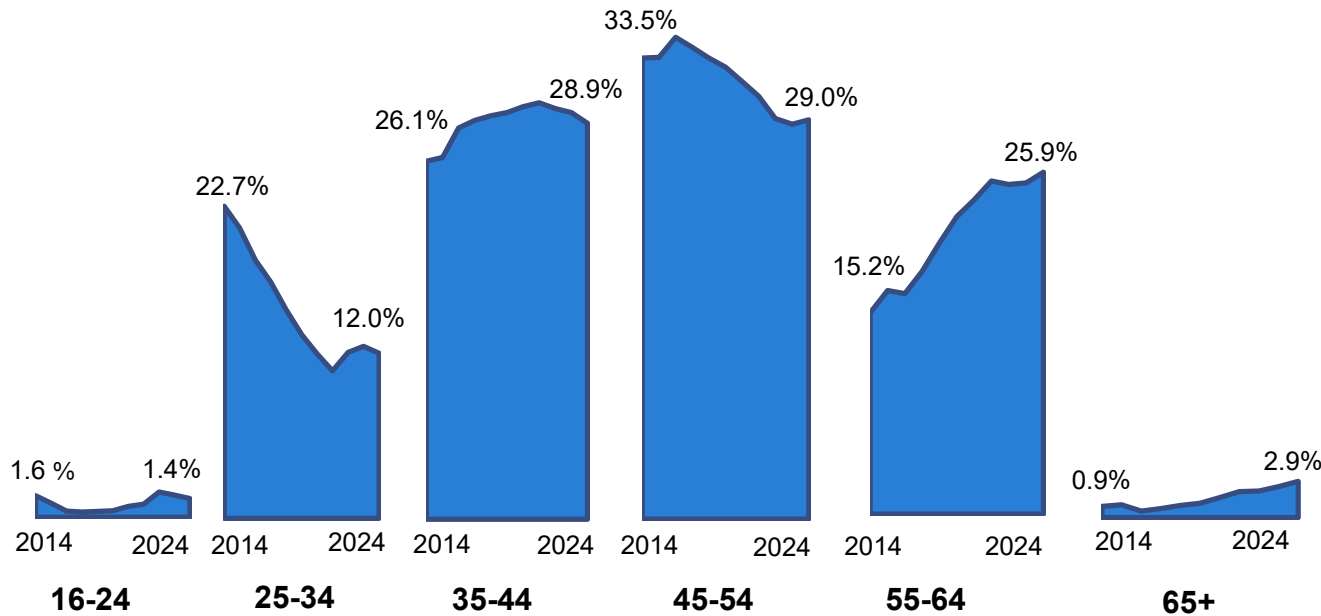
Figure 4 shows that while Catholics made up less than half of staff in five of the nine grade levels in 2024, representation is higher than in 2014 at all grade levels with the exception of AA staff (which has experienced a decrease). Excluding Prison Grades, where 17.1% of staff were Catholic, Catholic representation ranged from 47.6% at Grade 5 and above to 53.3% at AO and EOI/EOII level.

Catholic representation is lower than that in the economically active population at all grades. The limitations of comparing the composition of the NICS to contextual figures are detailed in the Background Quality Report.

¹See [Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 - Figures \(xlsx\)](#) for a composition breakdown of each analogous grade. This includes individual information for EOII, EOI, Grade 7 and Grade 6.

Composition: Age Group

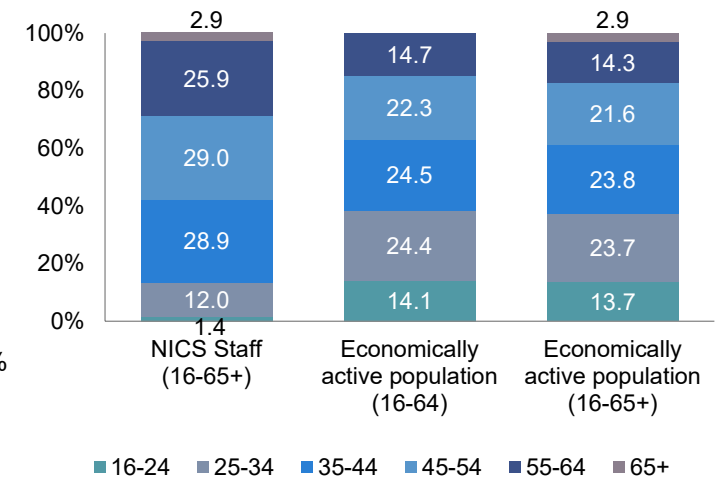
Figure 5: Proportion of civil servants in each age band, 2014 to 2024



[Download Data](#)

As shown in figure 5, the proportion of staff aged under 35 has decreased by 10.9 percentage points between 2014 (24.3%) and 2024 (13.4%). In contrast the proportion of staff aged 55 and over has increased by 12.7 percentage points (2014, 16.1%; 2024, 28.8%).

Figure 6: Comparing 2024 NICS age composition with the economically active population (2021 Census)



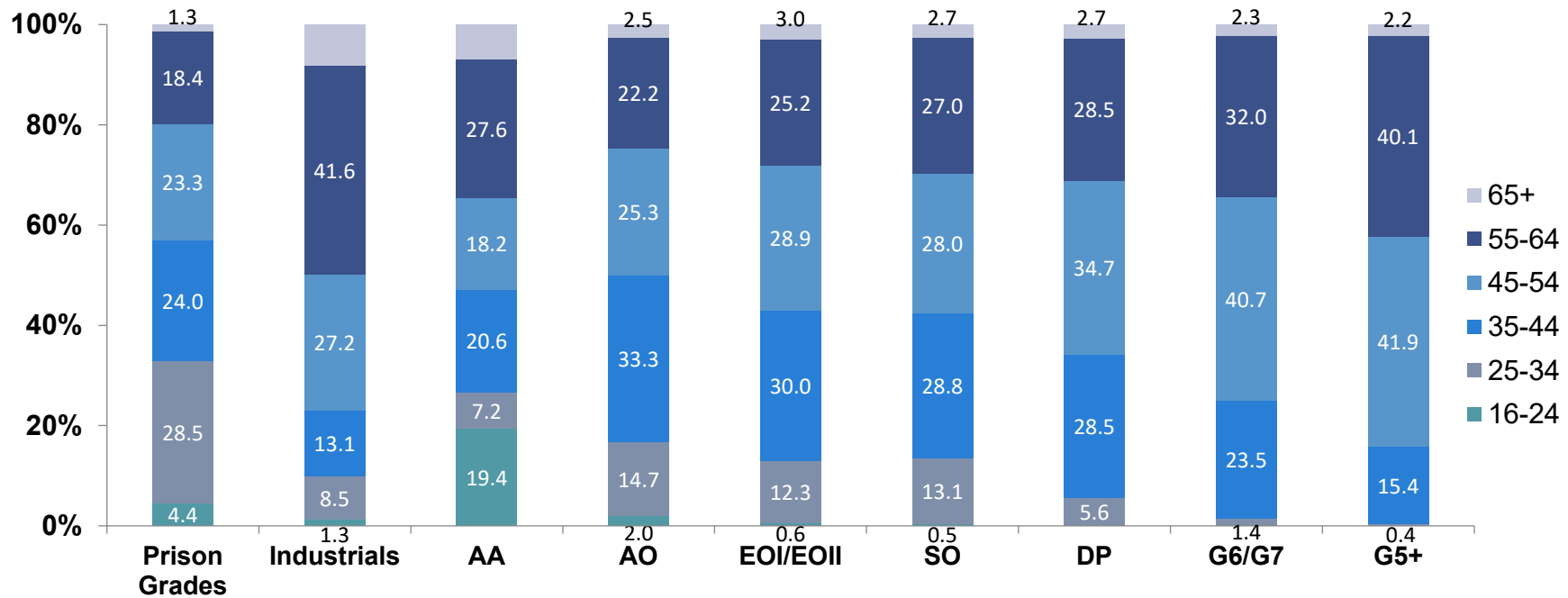
Economically active comparisons ¹

As shown in figure 6, the NICS has an older age profile than the comparator economically active population 16-65+. In particular at January 2024, the proportion of NICS staff aged 55 or over is just over one and a half times that of the economically active population 16-65+.

¹Comparator populations are working age population (aged 16-64 years) and 16-65+ who are economically active taken from Census 2021 with Level 1 qualifications or above. i.e. at least GCSE (grades D-G), CSE (grades 2-5, 1-4 CSEs (grade 1), 1-4 GCSEs (grades A-C), 1-4 'O' level passes, NVQ level 1, GNVQ Foundation or equivalents.

Composition: Age Group

Figure 7: Age group balance at each analogous grade level¹, 2024



[Download Data](#)

As shown in figure 7, in 2024 staff aged 16-24 continued to make up a small minority at all grade levels aside from AA staff, with no staff within this age range at DP level and above.

At AA, G6/G7 level and G5+, over a third of staff are aged 55 and over. This rises to almost half in Industrial Grades.

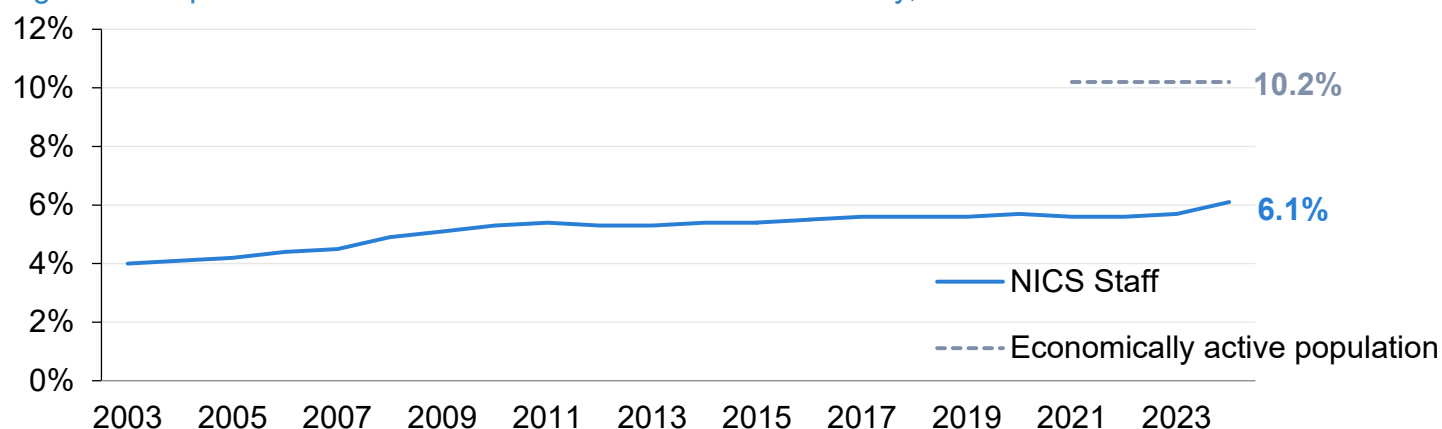
Changes to age profile over time

The median age of staff has increased from 44 in 2014 to 47 in 2024. This is reflected in the increase in the proportion of staff aged 55+ and the decrease in the proportion aged under 35.

¹See [Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 - Figures \(xlsx\)](#) for a composition breakdown of each analogous grade. This includes individual information for EOII, EOI, Grade 7 and Grade 6.

Composition: Disability

Figure 8: Proportion of staff in the NICS with a declared disability, 2003 to 2024



[Download Data](#)

Disability is based on the answers of each member of staff to the monitoring question – ‘Do you consider yourself to have a disability?’ Staff who develop a disability at a later stage however may not update their details.

As shown in figure 8, overall the proportion of employees declaring a disability in 2024 was 6.1%. For the purposes of this report anyone whose disability information is missing (44.5% of staff in 2024) has been allocated to the ‘No disability declared’ category. The true proportion of disabled staff is therefore likely to be higher.

Economically active comparisons

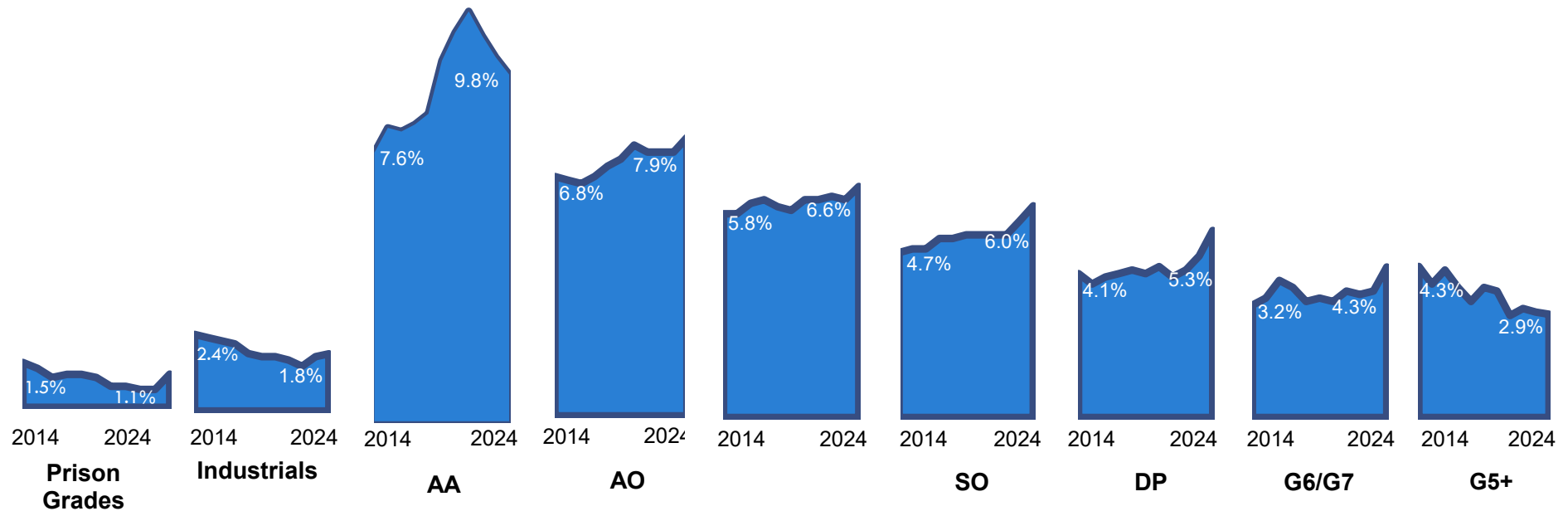
The 2024 figure (6.1%) is lower than that for the comparator economically active population¹ (aged 16-64 years) who have a disability (10.2%). The comparative figure for the GB2 civil service was 15.8%.

¹Comparator populations are working age population (aged 16-64 years) who are economically active from Census 2021, with Level 1 qualifications or above. i.e. at least GCSE (grades D-G), CSE (grades 2-5, 1-4 CSEs (grade 1), 1-4 GCSEs (grades A-C), 1-4 ‘O’ level passes, NVQ level 1, GNVQ Foundation or equivalents. The definition for disability used in Census 2021 reflects the Equality Act 2010 changes to the legal definition of disabled and uses the GSS Harmonised Standard definition. In summary, the GSS Harmonised Standard Definition covers people who report a current physical or mental health condition(s) or illnesses lasting or expected to last 12 months or more; and the condition(s) or illness(es) reduce their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

²Employees who have either not responded or actively chosen not to declare their disability status are excluded from the GB civil service calculation. Employees whose disability information is missing in the NICS are allocated to the ‘No disability declared’ category and included in the calculations. [GB figures](#) as at 31 March 2023.

Composition: Disability

Figure 9: Declared disability at each analogous grade level¹, 2014 to 2024



[Download Data](#)

In 2024, figure 9 shows the proportion of NICS staff who declared a disability was highest in the more junior analogous grades. Ranging from 9.8% at AA level to 2.9% at Grade 5+ level. This was a similar pattern to that observed for the previous ten years.

At 1.1% Prison Grades had the lowest proportion of staff declaring a disability in 2024.

¹See [Equality Statistics for the Northern Ireland Civil Service 2024 - Figures \(xlsx\)](#) for a composition breakdown of each analogous grade. This includes individual information for EOII, EOI, Grade 7 and Grade 6.

Composition: Ethnicity

Ethnicity

Ethnicity data is based on the answers of each member of staff (or applicant) to the monitoring questions -

Are you:

| | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| White | Of Black African origin |
| Of Black Caribbean origin | Of Bangladeshi origin |
| Of Chinese origin | Of Indian origin |
| Of Pakistani origin | Other (please specify) |

Are you a member of a mixed ethnic group?

Yes No

Are you a member of the Irish Travelling Community?

Yes No

At 1 January 2024 data on ethnicity (first question above) was missing for 2,190 staff (9.1%). Excluding these cases from the analyses 0.6% (128 staff) of NICS staff were from an ethnic minority (including members of mixed ethnic groups and the Irish Travelling Community).

The proportion of NICS staff from an ethnic minority is 2.4 percentage points lower than from the economically active population¹ (3.0%). The comparative figure for the GB civil service was 15.4%².

Figures have not been broken down by grade due to the small numbers of staff involved.

¹Comparator populations are working age population (aged 16-64 years) who are economically active from Census 2021, with Level 1 qualifications or above. i.e. at least GCSE (grades D-G), CSE (grades 2-5, 1-4 CSEs (grade 1), 1-4 GCSEs (grades A-C), 1-4 'O' level passes, NVQ level 1, GNVQ Foundation or equivalents.

² [GB figures](#) as at 31 March 2023.

Appendix 1 - About this Report

Context

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) holds data on certain Section 75 equality categories of staff. This data allows the measurement of the effectiveness of equality policies and to assess whether HR policies or practices adversely affect any particular group. It also enables the NICS to fulfil its statutory obligations under the Fair Employment and Treatment (NI) Order 1998 i.e. to carry out triennial Article 55 Reviews and to complete an annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return (FEMR) for the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI), detailing the community background, full/part-time status, occupational group and sex profile of the workforce.

About this Report

This report provides an overview of diversity and equality in the NICS. It includes an analysis of composition and how that composition has changed over time. Where appropriate, comparisons are made with the wider labour market and the Civil Service in Great Britain (GB).

Data Coverage

The primary data source for this report¹, with the exception in part of the NI Prison Service (NIPS), was HRConnect, the Human Resource Service for the NICS. Data for NIPS staff not already on HRConnect was obtained from NIPS's own personnel data systems.

Information is based on data at 1 January each year with the exception of 2016 when the information was based on data at 1 April. This was to provide an overview of the NICS workforce following the departure of staff leaving under the voluntary exit scheme during 2015/2016.

Staff figures relate to employees with an employment contract who are being paid by the Organisation. Employees can be permanent, on a fixed-term contract or employed on a casual basis. Self-employed, contract workers and agency workers are excluded. Staff on career breaks or on secondment outside the NICS are also excluded. Figures are on a headcount basis and include both industrial and non-industrial staff.

The equality categories reported on are sex, community background, age group, ethnicity and disability².

Note that the statistics in this report differ from those contained in the FEMR to the Equality Commission due to the inclusion of additional employee groupings (e.g. Employment Support Staff, Fee Paid Interviewers) in the FEMR.

¹Figures in this report prior to 2009 are based on extracts taken from the Human Resource Management System (HRMS).

²Further information on all equality categories can be found in the Background Quality Report

Appendix 2 – Definitions

Things you need to know

Recruitment Agency staff numbers are not included in these NICS figures. At the end of December 2023, the number of Agency staff working in the NICS was 3,649. This figure includes 1,428 Agency staff working in the NICS on contracts for the Department for Work and Pensions in Great Britain. (Agency staff figures were provided by NICS Workforce Strategy, Data and Analytics Branch on 1 January 2024 and provide the number (headcount) of NICS Agency Workers in post at a point in time. NICS Workforce Strategy, Data and Analytics Branch records do not include Agency Workers recruited directly by Departments).

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) is the civil service of the devolved administration. It includes staff working in the 9 Northern Ireland ministerial departments and staff working in the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (which is a non-ministerial Government department). Civil servants in the Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland and the Office of the Attorney General for Northern Ireland are also included.

Headcount figures count each employee as one member of staff, irrespective of whether they work full or part-time.

External Sources: comparative data sourced from Census 2021. Census Office apply statistical disclosure control methods to ensure individuals cannot be identified. These disclosure control methods can also mean that the totals in Census comparator tables may vary slightly. For more information see [Statistical disclosure control methodology](#). Data can be accessed by clicking on any of the following section 75 categories:

[Sex](#)

[Community Background](#)

[Age \(16-64\)](#)

[Age \(16-65+\)](#)

[Disability](#)

[Ethnicity](#)

Appendix 2 – Definitions

Analogous Grade Levels

Each grade in each occupational group has an associated grade level. The titles of the grade levels are actual grades in the General Service; in other occupational groups the grade names would be different. The grade levels in descending order of seniority are listed below.

Grade Level and Abbreviation

Grade 5 (Assistant Secretary) and higher - G5+

Grade 6 (Senior Principal) & Grade 7 (Principal) - G6/G7

Deputy Principal - DP

Staff Officer - SO

Executive Officer I & Executive Officer II - EOI/EOII

Administrative Officer - AO

Administrative Assistant - AA