

# The **Northern Ireland Sonar** Geo-Demographic System

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## Introduction

Sonar is a truly unique segmentation system that divides the population of Northern Ireland into 30 mutually exclusive groups according to the types of neighbourhood in which they live. The main data source used to create these clusters was the 2021 Census.

The 30 Sonar codes are organized into 5 broad lifestage groups, which are

- Group A – Pre-Family
- Group B – Young Families
- Group C – Older Families
- Group D – Empty Nesters
- Group E - Retired

This is the first character of the three character Sonar code

They are also organized into 4 quartiles representing wealth or affluence.

- Group 1 – Affluent
- Group 2 – Comfortable
- Group 3 – Less Comfortable
- Group 4 - Struggling

This is the second character of the three character Sonar code. Thus, from the first two characters it is possible to identify the lifestage group and the wealth quartile. As an example, Sonar code C11 – “Established Professionals”. The C represents an older post family group whilst the second digit the wealth quartile 1 indicates the most affluent 25% of the country. The third and final digit is just the numbering of clusters within each combination of lifestage and affluence. It only serves to create a unique code for each cluster.

## A: Pre-Family 8.6%

This group of clusters tends to consist of young singles and childless couples. These are mainly concentrated within the major urban areas. Many are living in rented accommodation or are first time buyers. Because they tend to be young or strongly career oriented, geographical mobility is very high. Again, because of their age, households within this lifestage are often students, of which there has been an increase since the 2011 Census.

### A11 – Highly Educated Young Professionals (18)

Percentage of Total Households: 1.9%

Lifestage : A

Wealth Quartile : 1

This is a cluster that is strongly biased towards city centre neighbourhoods. They consist of young, hardworking, individuals on the first rungs of their career ladder. The group contains a very high number of professionals working in finance and the public sector. They tend to live in rented properties, they make the most of city life and enjoy going to theatres, restaurants, art galleries and cinemas as well as to the health club.

### A21 – First Time Buyers (10)

Percentage of Total Households: 2.5%

Lifestage : A

Wealth Quartile : 2

These are mainly the suburban areas clustered to the East of Belfast where couples are settling down, getting married and buying their first home. Many are in professional or managerial occupations often within the public sector. Many are first time buyers and properties tend to be flats or terraced properties.

### A31 – Students (30)

Percentage of Total Households: 1.2%

Lifestage : A

Wealth Quartile : 3

Heavily concentrated in the South of Belfast just over a half of all residents in this group are students. This, as you would expect, is a very young group with just over 40% of all residents being aged 20-24. Some live in halls of residence but many are in private rented accommodation that is often within walking distance of the university or college. It is noteworthy that a sizeable minority have come to Northern Ireland for study reasons.

## **A41 – Struggling Single Renters (15)**

Percentage of Total Households: 3.0%

Lifestage : A

Wealth Quartile : 4

There are many young singles in this group with above average numbers in their late twenties and thirties who are single. Many are private renters living in terraced properties or flats. There are above average numbers in elementary or routine occupations working in distribution or for public administrations roles. Levels of unemployment and deprivation are well above the average and given their age, a surprising number are reporting health problems.

## B: Young Families 12.0%

This grouping tends to consist of families with younger children. This is sometimes a stage in life, which is difficult financially. It may be difficult for both partners to work and it is often the case that the main breadwinner is still quite young and not commanding a very high salary or wage. Moreover, there could be a mortgage to pay as well as all the new and additional costs associated with nursery provision and caring for the family. For those who cannot afford a place of their own or pay a commercial rent, council accommodation is often the only alternative and here accommodation may be of quite poor quality.

### B11 – Settling Down (21)

Percentage of Total Households: 1.9%

Lifestage : B

Wealth Quartile : 1

There are many married couples in these semi-detached suburban areas predominately close to Belfast. For many, family formation has yet to start but there is a sizeable minority of couples with very young children aged 0-4. In many households both partners are often working, in administrative, managerial or associate professional roles. This is a highly educated group.

### B12 – Family Oriented Professionals (23)

Percentage of Total Households: 1.4%

Lifestage : B

Wealth Quartile : 1

These are areas concentrated around Antrim where many young professional couples with children live. Properties tend to be larger and detached or semi-detached and are being brought on a mortgage. This is a highly educated group working in professional and managerial occupations often in the public sector.

### B21 – Younger Mortgagees (22)

Percentage of Total Households: 3.3%

Lifestage : B

Wealth Quartile : 2

Geographically these are suburban areas within easy commuting distance of Belfast where much of the property is semi-detached. About 2/3 of all properties are in owner occupation but most are still paying off the mortgage. There are also above average numbers of private renters. Numbers of children are well above the national average. For many households both adults work often in the public sector in lower managerial roles.

## **B22 – Young White-Collar Couples (24)**

Percentage of Total Households: 0.6%

Lifestage : B

Wealth Quartile : 2

These are areas where many young couples with children live. Properties tend to be semi-detached or terraced and are being brought on a mortgage. This is a reasonably well qualified group with many working in associate professional or white-collar occupations.

## **B31 – Small Town Communities (17)**

Percentage of Total Households: 3.2%

Lifestage : B

Wealth Quartile : 3

Geographically these are reasonably small communities concentrated in Newry and Armagh. There are above average numbers of families. Many of the properties are semi-detached with many in owner occupation but there are also above average numbers of private renters. There is a spread of occupational groupings and industries in which they work.

## **B41 – Lone Parent Hardship (26)**

Percentage of Total Households: 1.6%

Lifestage : B

Wealth Quartile : 4

With many single parents these are areas where life is a struggle. There is a strong geographical bias towards Much ese Much of the accommodation is socially rented from housing associations. Levels of deprivation and unemployment are well above the norm. For those in employment. many are employed within the caring and service sector

## C: Families 31.9%

This grouping tends to consist of families. It contains many middle-aged couples with children of school age. For professional and white-collar groups this is a time of life, which often represents a rise in earnings because they now hold more senior and responsible positions. It is also a time when the burdens of looking after the family can be at a maximum and hardship is very real.

### C11 – Hard Working Professionals (16)

Percentage of Total Households: 2.0%

Lifestage : C

Wealth Quartile : 1

These are affluent suburban areas spread throughout Northern Ireland. There are many professional couples, with older children. They are keen to provide a comfortable and prosperous lifestyle for their children which is why it is common for both partners to work. Properties tend to be detached and larger and two car ownership is well above the norm.

### C21 – Commuting Couples (14)

Percentage of Total Households: 4.2%

Lifestage : C

Wealth Quartile : 2

This group contains many families living in small towns. Much of the accommodation is semi-detached with about 30% of households owning their homes and around 44% still buying a home on a mortgage. It is common for both partners to work and many are employed in public sector managerial and lower professional roles. Commuting to work is common.

### C22 – Rural Communities (20)

Percentage of Total Households: 6.4%

Lifestage : C

Wealth Quartile : 3

Geographically these are small rural communities with a mix of ages. Levels of owner occupation are high, with many owning their home. Properties are mainly detached and a little larger than more urban properties. There are many skilled tradesmen and small employers often working in agriculture. Being very rural, levels of car ownership are extremely high.

### **C31 – Self-Employed Skilled Tradesmen (19)**

Percentage of Total Households: 6.1%

Lifestage : C

Wealth Quartile : 3

Geographically these are rural areas where above average numbers of traditional families with children live. Many properties are detached with a mix of households who own their property and those where they are still paying off the mortgage. Many, commute and are self-employed skilled tradesmen. Car ownership levels are well above the norm.

### **C41 – Manufacturing and Construction Workers (25)**

Percentage of Total Households: 3.2%

Lifestage : C

Wealth Quartile : 4

For many, work is routine or semi-skilled often in manufacturing or construction occupations. Properties tend to be terraced and are often rented from either private sector landlords or the NI housing executive. Levels of deprivation such as unemployment and lack of qualifications are well above the national average.

### **C42 – Struggling Social Renters (27)**

Percentage of Total Households: 5.9%

Lifestage : C

Wealth Quartile : 4

These are areas spread throughout the country where deprivation is extremely high. There are significantly above average numbers who are unemployed. Work for people who are in work is often unskilled. Single parenthood is common. Much of the property is terraced and social rented.

### **C43 – Inner City Hardship (29)**

Percentage of Total Households: 4.1%

Lifestage : C

Wealth Quartile : 4

Heavily concentrated in parts of Belfast and Londonderry these are areas where deprivation is extremely high. Levels of deprivation and hardship are amongst the highest in the country. Unemployment is running at 26% of adults. Many properties are terraced and in social renting.

## D: Older Post Family 25.1%

In general, this is a growing group which represent areas where there are more older households often at the peak of their career and where the children have left home. Many have now paid off the mortgage and this gives them the freedom to undertake major home improvements, go on that long planned for special holiday, or help the kids financially. It is also a chance to renew those neglected hobbies and interests. However, not everybody is affluent, and this group does also contain some poorer clusters.

### D11 – Established Professionals (1)

Percentage of Total Households: 3.7%

Lifestage : D

Wealth Quartile : 1

These are leafy suburban areas often in areas like Belfast South and North Down. Properties tend to be detached and larger. Many are long established older professionals at the peak of their career. Levels of wealth and consumer activity are well above the national average, and this is a group who enjoy a high standard of living.

### D12 – Senior Public Sector Managers (2)

Percentage of Total Households: 2.8%

Lifestage : D

Wealth Quartile : 1

With a strong bias towards Belfast South and East these areas contain many semi-detached properties. Nearly all the properties are in owner occupation and split between being owned outright and mortgagees. There are many professionals/associate professionals working in public administration, education or health

### D13 – Professional and White-Collar Workers (3)

Percentage of Total Households: 3.5%

Lifestage : D

Wealth Quartile : 1

This is another group of prosperous households spread throughout the country. For many the family are on the cusp of leaving home. Households often have two adults in employment and in managerial or professional roles. Properties tend to be larger and well maintained. Over 80% of all properties in this group are detached. Nearly all properties are in owner occupation and fairly evenly split between being owned outright and still paying off the mortgage.



## **D21 – Empty Nesters (5)**

Percentage of Total Households: 3.9%

Lifestage : D

Wealth Quartile : 2

These are areas spread throughout the country, they are often quite rural in nature. They contain many older couples who now own larger detached properties. There is a mix of occupational groupings with both professionals and skilled tradesmen. Many are commuters.

## **D31 – Settled Elders (11)**

Percentage of Total Households: 3.2%

Lifestage : D

Wealth Quartile : 3

There are many households in these areas where the householder is aged 55 or over. Properties are often semi-detached with many but not all having paid off the mortgage. Many are in suburban areas to the South of Belfast and also in the suburbs of Londonderry. There are a mix of occupational groups. These are traditional areas where some are struggling to make ends meet.

## **D32 – Working Hard to Make Ends Meet (12)**

Percentage of Total Households: 3.6%

Lifestage : D

Wealth Quartile : 3

Spread throughout the country this is a group of households who live in smaller terraced and semi-detached properties. Levels of home ownership are just a little below the national average whilst levels of private renting are a little above. The work force is a little older with many working in semi-routine and routine occupations. Catering and construction are industry sectors where many find employment.

## **D41 – Industrial Heritage (13)**

Percentage of Total Households: 4.8%

Lifestage : D

Wealth Quartile : 4

With many smaller terraced properties these are areas that were once the industrial heartbeat of the country. Many are rented from the Northern Ireland Housing Executive but there are also properties where the tenants, in the past, have exercised the right to buy and are now home owners. Measures of deprivation and hardship are well above the national average.

## E: Retired 22.0%

This group of clusters consists of older people who have retired. This is one of the fastest growing sections of the population. On retirement many couples face a choice, do they move to a more desirable area or do they stay in the home in which they have lived for many years? Some choose to move and live out retirement in another area, often by the sea or close to family, but others remain in the family home either through choice or expediency. This is one of the key differences between the groups. Another is household composition: does more than one person still live in the family home and how active are they? Can they still maintain the home and garden and do they still run a car? Financially, this group are often portrayed as affluent because they have paid off the mortgage and their children have all grown up but the reality is that for all too many old age is a struggle with inadequate resources to pay for anything but life's essentials and health issues to deal with

### E11 – Comfortable Elders (8)

Percentage of Total Households: 2.2%

Lifestage : E

Wealth Quartile : 1

These are areas to be found within small towns and villages. They contain many elderly residents living in flats that they own outright. There are also above average numbers of professionals. This is a group who enjoy a reasonably high standard of living.

### E12 – Older Home Owning Couples (4)

Percentage of Total Households: 4.9%

Lifestage : E

Wealth Quartile : 1

There are many retired couples in reasonably good health who own their homes. The properties tend to be detached and fairly modest in size but fairly rural and with a garden .

### E21 – Rural Retreats (7)

Percentage of Total Households: 5.4%

Lifestage : E

Wealth Quartile : 2

These tend to be more rural areas to the South of Belfast with many older retired couples. Properties tend to be large and detached. Around 54% of all households have paid off the mortgage meaning that for many, life is reasonably comfortable and they can afford to pursue hobbies and take holidays.

## **E31 – Semi-Detached Suburban Older Couples (6)**

Percentage of Total Households: 4.9%

Lifestage : E

Wealth Quartile : 3

This group are more likely to be found in traditional suburban areas with older couples many of whom are still working. Children tend to have left home. Properties tend to be semi-detached with a mix of those who have paid off the mortgage and those who have still to do so. Occupationally, many work in lower managerial and intermediate type occupations.

## **E41 – Older Single Person Households (28)**

Percentage of Total Households: 3.4%

Lifestage : E

Wealth Quartile : 4

These are areas with many single, mainly older households, but there is also a minority of younger childless single households as well. Nearly 74% of households have no children. Properties tend to be small flats that are rented from housing associations. About 54% of households have no adult in work and other measures of deprivation are above the norm as well.

## **E42 – Elderly Social Renters (9)**

Percentage of Total Households: 1.2%

Lifestage : E

Wealth Quartile : 4

These are suburban residential areas with many elderly residents living in small flats that are socially rented often from housing associations. Many are widowers, struggling with health needs and the cost of living.

**David Griffiths 21<sup>st</sup> December 2024**

**TRAC Consultancy**

**Email [daveowengriffiths1@gmail.com](mailto:daveowengriffiths1@gmail.com)**

**Website [www.tracconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.tracconsultancy.co.uk)**

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