

CHILD POVERTY ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND

DATE

16/1/2025

VENUE

ESRI, Whitaker Square,
Sir John Rogerson's Quay,
Dublin 2

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Motivation

- Higher poverty among children compared to other age groups.
- Childhood poverty is associated with current and long-term impacts across a wide range of negative outcomes (health, educational attainment, employment prospects, quality of life, wellbeing etc.)
- Aim to fill the gap in our knowledge and understanding of comparative child poverty across the two jurisdictions

Research Questions

1. How do **patterns** of child deprivation and child income poverty **differ** between **NI & IE** over time?
2. Which **groups** of children are most **vulnerable** to poverty in the two jurisdictions?
3. What is the role of household **labour market** situation in shaping the risk of child poverty in both jurisdictions?
4. How do **policy** approaches to addressing child poverty **differ in NI & IE** and how do these policies **influence** the patterns of child poverty observed?

Data & methods

- **Consultation with Stakeholders**

- Held on 9th September 2024
- 22 participants: 11 IE 11 NI
- NGOs, policy makers, researchers
- Asked about poverty impacts, vulnerable groups and policy

- **Quantitative analysis**

- Family Resources Survey (NI) – circa 700 to 1,700 households (**hh**) per year.
1,138 under 18
- Survey of Income and Living Conditions (IE) – 5,000 – 6,000 hh per year.
3,174 under 18

Poverty impacts - consultation with stakeholders

- **Food** insecurity -> rely more on cheaper, junk food -> **health impacts**
- Difficulty to pay **heating** -> damper houses -> **health** impact
- Difficulty paying bills -> debts/ pressure on **mental health, social exclusion & parenting**
- In **rural** areas:
 - lack of public **transport** -> even higher risks of **social exclusion** (e.g. participation in extracurricular & social activities)
 - Higher **heating** costs (less choice of energy providers)

Poverty Measures

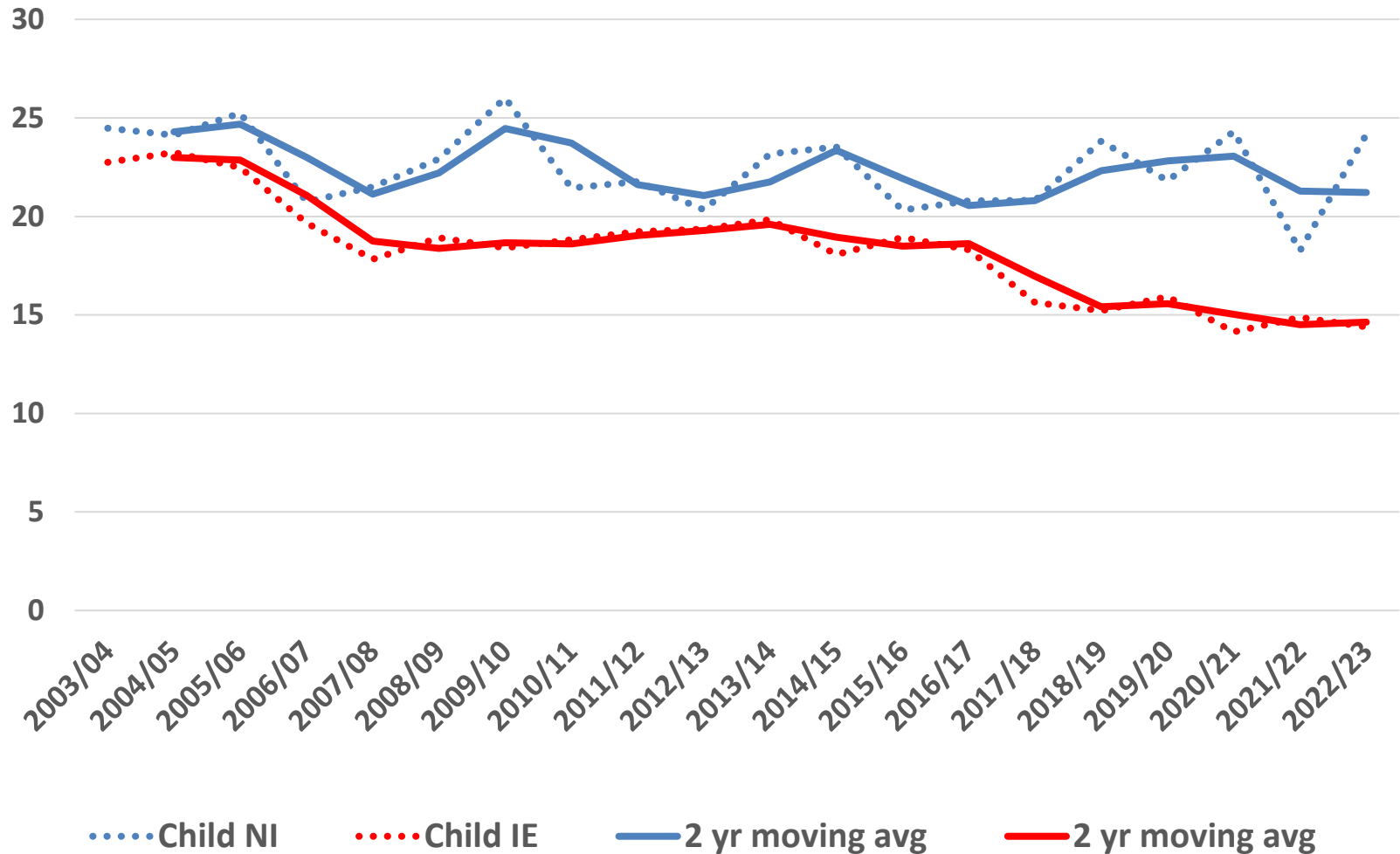
- 1. Income poverty** : Proportion of people with an equivalised household income below 60% of the national median income. Data 2003-2023
- 2. Material deprivation:** Inability to afford essential goods, services or activities which are considered the norm for other people in society. Data 2010-2023

Deprived = experiencing 2 or more of the following 5 items :

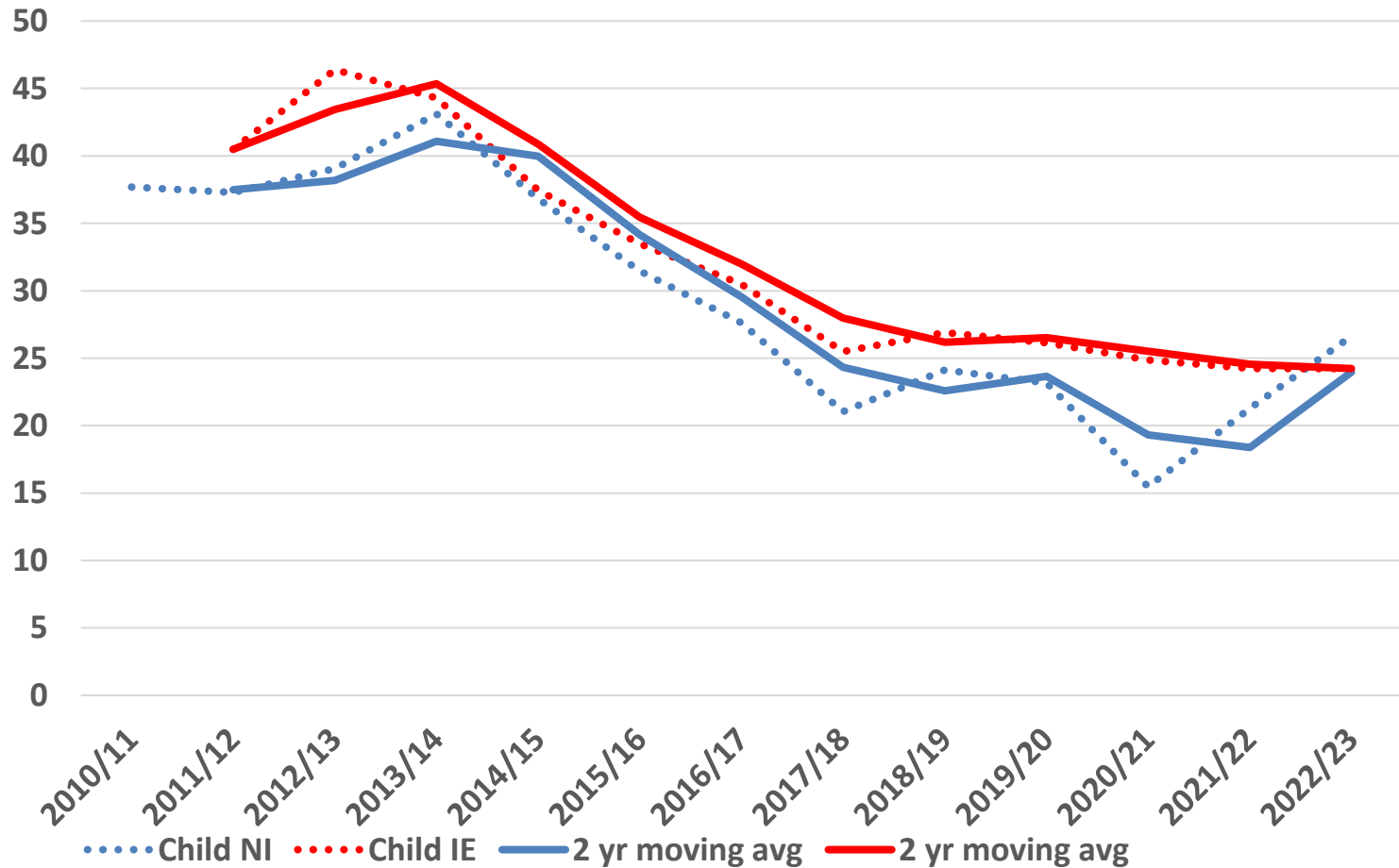
- Arrears (utility bills)
- Unable to afford to replace any worn out furniture
- Unable to afford to keep the home adequately warm
- Unable to spend a small amount of money each week on yourself (head reference person)
- Unable to afford one week annual holiday away from home

RQ 1: How do **patterns of child deprivation and child income poverty **differ** between NI & IE over time?**

Trend Child Income Poverty NI & IE (%)



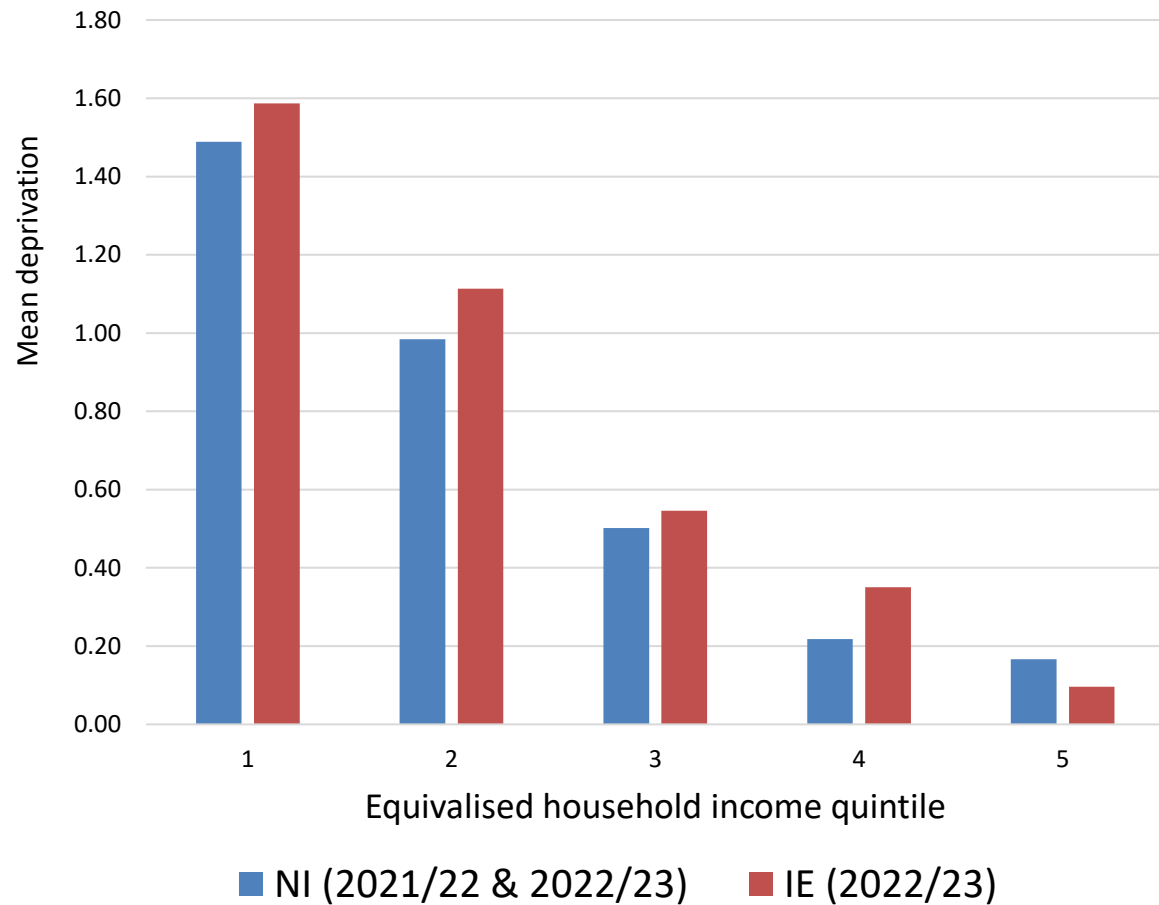
Trend Child Deprivation NI & IE (% lack 2 or more items)



Higher child income poverty in NI and higher deprivation in IE (until 2022/23)

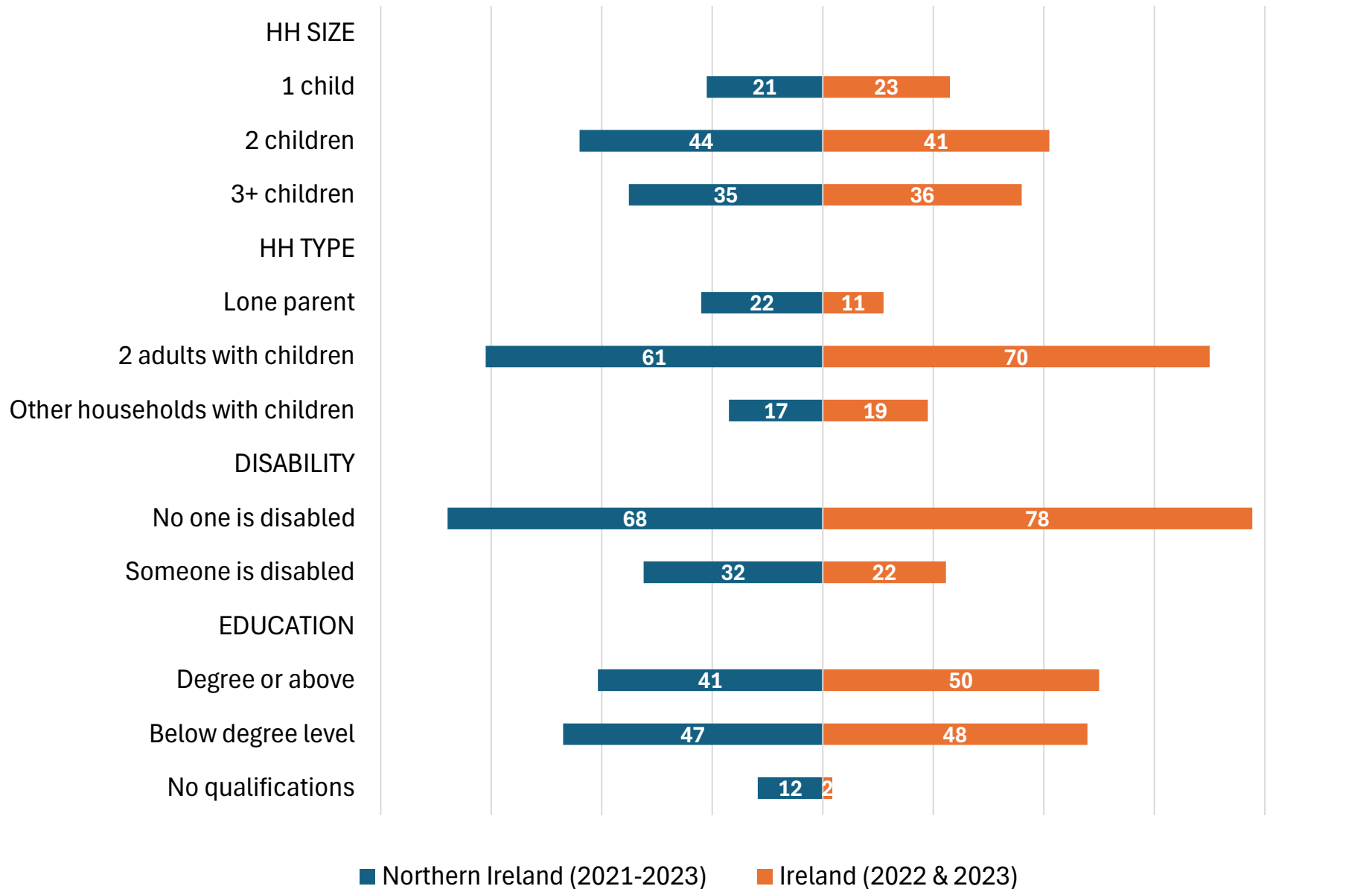
Suggests households in IE less able to convert same level of income into an adequate standard of living

Deprivation Score by Income Quintile



**RQ2: Which groups of children
most vulnerable to poverty in
NI & IE**

Characteristics of children (<18) in Northern Ireland & Ireland



RQ2: Which groups are most at risk ?

Common findings - NI & IE – Model results for whole period

- **Large families** (3+ children). Especially **income poverty rates**:
 - 14 percentage points (**pp**) higher than 1 child households (**hh**) in **NI**
 - 12pp higher than 1 child hh in **IE**
- **Lone parent** families. Especially **deprivation** rates
 - 27pp higher than 2-parents hh in **NI**
 - 30pp higher than 2-parents hh in **IE**
- Where the household head has **low education**
- Having a household member with a **disability** (especially for deprivation)
- In terms of child age:
 - **Older** children (12-17 yrs) higher risk of **income poverty**
 - **Younger** children (< 5 yrs) higher risk of **material deprivation**

Which groups are most at risk? (Cntd.)

Stakeholders – additional groups of children not sufficiently covered by quantitative data:

- Homeless families
- Children in Direct Provision
- Children in care/leaving care
- Traveller and Roma children

Differences between NI and IE

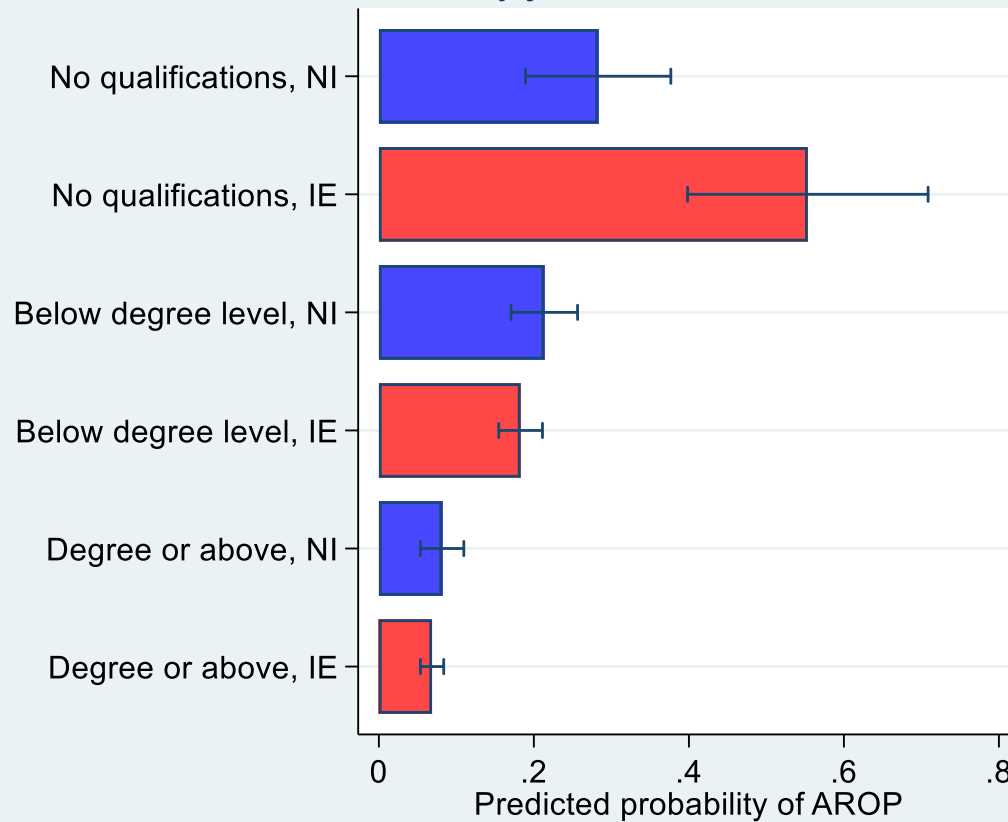
Results from joint model (2019-2023)

Income poverty

- Higher rates for children in **NI** (7 percentage points higher)
 - due to differences in family composition, disability prevalence & educational attainment
- Children with same characteristics -> same income poverty risks in NI and IE
- Higher income poverty for children when head of household has **lower educational attainment in IE**

Child Income Poverty by Qualifications of Household Head (2019-2023)

HRP education level by jurisdiction

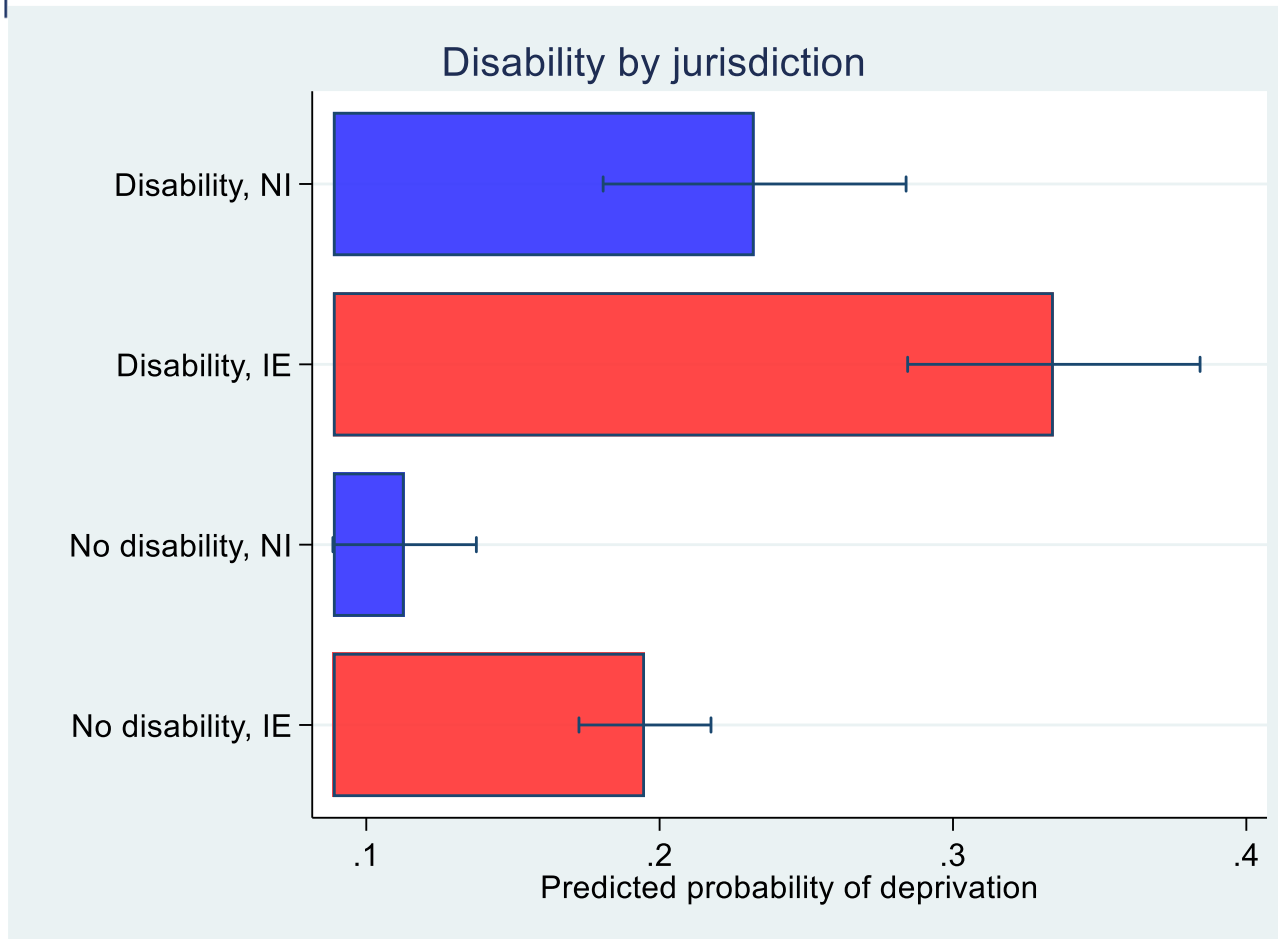


Differences between NI & IE (2019–2023) contd.

Deprivation

- Overall: no difference in child deprivation between NI & IE
- Within characteristics: higher deprivation for children in IE
- Example of **disability**:
 - Children in NI more likely to live with someone with a disability.
 - But amongst the children living in these household have a higher deprivation rate in IE than NI

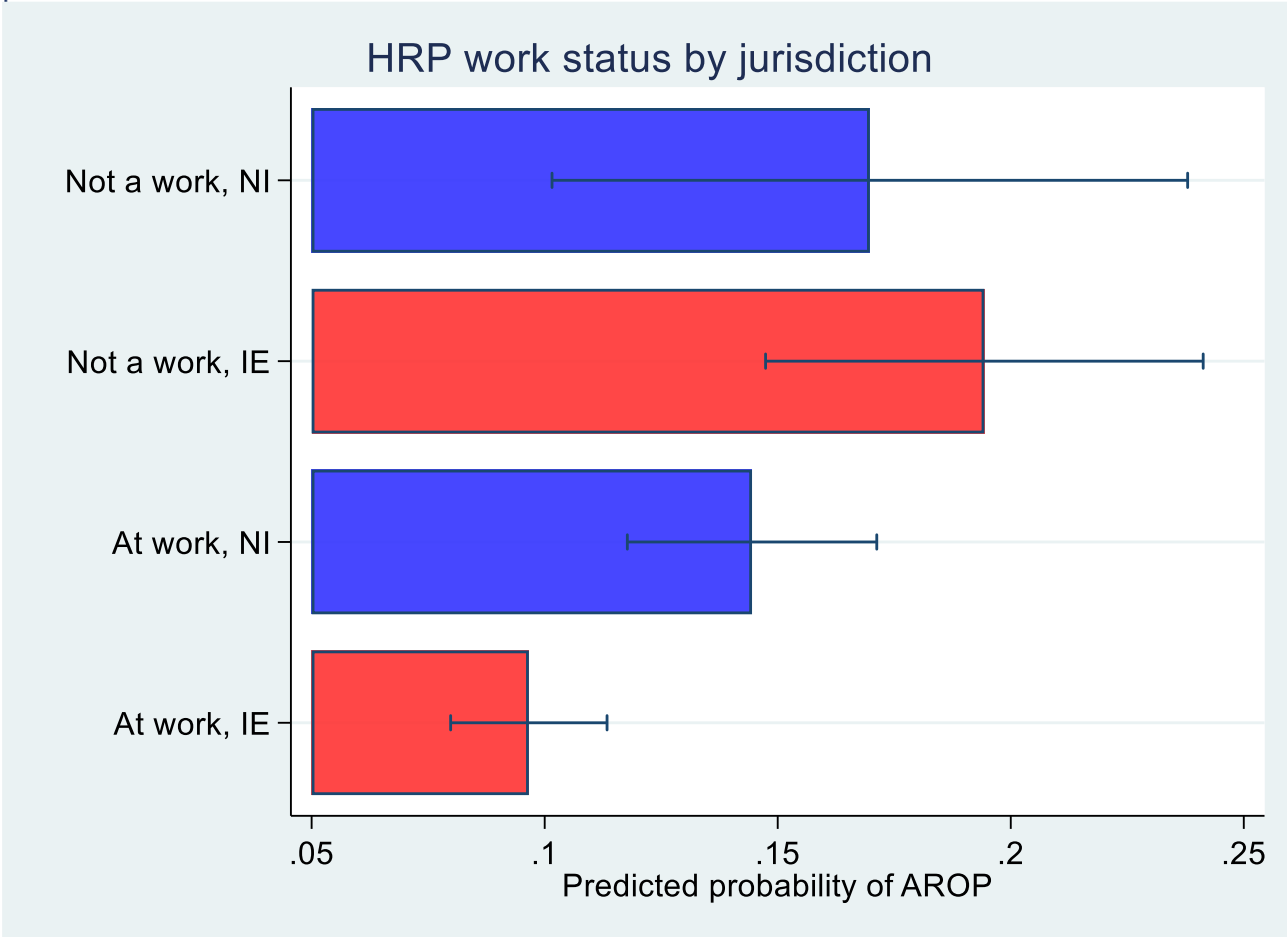
Child deprivation by household member with a disability (2019–2023)



RQ3: What is the role of the labour market situation of adults in hh?

- Higher rate of joblessness in NI
 - 15% all children in NI live in jobless hh vs. 8% in IE
- Strong link between employment of adults and both income poverty & deprivation in NI and IE
- Joblessness has a stronger effect on child poverty in IE: child in jobless hh has **three times** the risk of deprivation of child in working hh.
NI: **twice** the rate.
- But higher **in-work poverty** in NI (see graph)

Child Income Poverty by Employment Status of Household Reference Person (HRP) (2019-2023)



RQ 4: How do **policy** approaches to child poverty compare in NI & IE?

Policy I: Welfare Supports

- Broad similarities
- IE higher child benefits. NI broader access to means-tested benefits (Doorley et al., 2024)
- UK reforms increased poverty, esp. among larger families (NI Expert Advisory Panel, 2020; Stewart et al., 2023)
 - Benefit cap (offset by mitigations package NI)
 - Two-child limit
- IE - temporary measures to address cost of living but no index linking

*In the North, the **two-child policy** drives rising rates of child poverty. Families in Northern Ireland tend to be larger than those in Britain. (Stakeholder NI)*

*We've seen **prices increase** ... [but] we're not linking payments or disregards or means testing to keep up with the national minimum wage here in the South. (Stakeholder IE)*

Policy II: Education & Early Years Policy

- Cost & availability of childcare
- School based supports – expansion of school meals and books in IE, call for universal supports in NI
- Importance of early intervention

*The extension of **free books** to primary school and junior cycle is something that we very much welcome. And interestingly, the first year it was introduced, we had 20 per cent fewer calls with school related requests.*

(Stakeholder IE)

*If we look at **free school meals** ... there's no argument that has had a very positive impact for a lot of children who wouldn't be having a hot meal during the day or wouldn't be getting the nutrition they need. (Stakeholder NI).*

*You can redeem some of your **childcare** costs. But because childcare costs are so exorbitant, who that's helping is people who are already earning quite well.*

(Stakeholder NI)

*In Northern Ireland we would really love to see **universal free school meals**. (Stakeholder NI)*

Conclusions

- Similar groups at risk: large families, lone parents, low education, unemployed/jobless, disabled
- Families face common threats: rising cost of living, rising homelessness & housing costs
- Difference in composition of child population influences NI vs. IE comparison
- Limitations – need comparable data, address data gaps (e.g., homeless, children in direct provision) & additional variables (ethnicity IE; urban/rural NI)

Policy Implications

- Importance of maintaining value of core welfare payments to prevent child poverty
- Welfare support to address the additional needs of some – large families, people with disability, lone parents
 - Second tier means-tested child benefits (Roantree & Doorley, 2023)
- Employment and education/training supports(incl. childcare) - to address unemployment & in-work poverty especially in NI
- Effectiveness of direct supports – school meals/books
- Need for targets, strategy & political will