Northern Ireland consumers more worried in November, suggesting careful Christmas spend

- **November sees renewed weakness in Northern Ireland consumer sentiment**
- **Worries about economic outlook build again**
- **Concerns around Household finances increase on Budget fears and pick-up in food prices**
- **NI consumer sentiment more resilient than elsewhere in past year**

- ***Special survey questions find that 44% of Northern Ireland consumers say they have less money to spend on Christmas than last year, with just 12% saying their Christmas spending power has risen***
- ***Special questions suggest Northern Ireland consumers still likely to cut back Christmas spend but slightly less than in recent years***
- ***One in two Northern Ireland consumers say they will fund their Christmas spending from their income while one in three will use savings***

Summary

Northern Ireland consumer confidence fell materially between August and November 2025, reversing all of the improvement seen in the previous three months**.**

Increased negativity about the global and local economy coupled with the impact of stubbornly high inflation and a tough Budget on household spending power **combined to produce a notably gloomier Northern Ireland consumer of late.**

Some part of the weakening evident in the November data may simply be a correction from the pronounced, and possibly premature, positivity evident in the August survey as **recent developments at home and abroad suggest 2026 could be another challenging year in economic and financial terms.**

It should also be noted that **Northern Ireland consumer sentiment looks to be broadly similar at end 2025 as it was a year ago.** Reflecting ongoing uncertainty and continuing cost of living pressures, it seems that **the past twelve months have been a case of one step forward and one step back for Northern Ireland consumers.**

The weakening in Northern Ireland consumer sentiment between August and November was comparable to that seen in corresponding confidence measures for the UK and US over the same period while consumer sentiment in the Republic of Ireland was largely unchanged. **The largely unchanged level of consumer sentiment in Northern Ireland now to that of a year ago contrasts with clearly weaker consumer confidence readings elsewhere through that time**.

Section I; Pullback in sentiment suggests renewed worries for NI consumers about their household finances and the economic outlook.

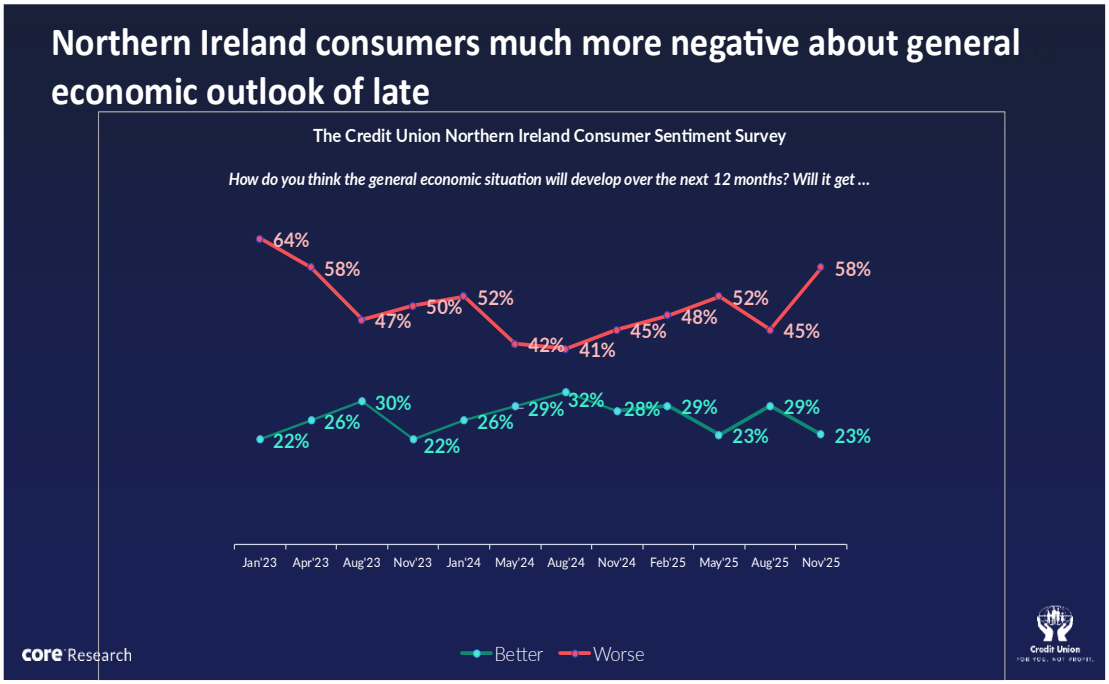
Overall, **the Northern Ireland consumer sentiment reading for November 2025 shows a reversal of the significant gains seen in the August survey**. In what is an unclear but still threatening environment, it is not entirely surprising to see this sort or scale of correction.

While the Northern Ireland economy has proven more resilient than widely expected and cost of living pressures are no longer intensifying in the manner of a couple of years ago**, economic and financial conditions in Northern Ireland remain challenging. The balance of survey responses suggests an acute awareness on the part of Northern Ireland consumers of the shape and scale of local and global difficulties as 2025 comes to an end**.

Concerns about the economic outlook have increased notably of late

The sentiment survey asks Northern Ireland consumers both 'macro' questions in relation to the general economic outlook and 'micro' questions in relation to their own household finances.

Below are responses from the November and previous surveys asking Northern Ireland consumers whether they expect general economic conditions to get better or worse in the next twelve months.



As the diagram above illustrates, **the balance of thinking among Northern Ireland consumers about the economic outlook has become much more negative of late.** Indeed, the share of consumers expecting a worsening of the economic environment rose to its highest level since April 2023.

While **the deterioration** in this element of the survey **was primarily driven by a marked increase in the number of consumers who expect economic conditions to worsen in the coming year**, there was also a notable decline in the number of consumers envisaging an improvement.

Most data and commentary suggest that **the challenges facing the Northern Ireland economy has increased of late for a wide range of reasons.**

First of all, there are signs of a loss of positive momentum in activity of late. While official data point to a strong growth performance by the Northern Ireland economy in the second quarter of 2025, recent purchasing manager surveys point to a decline in output since the summer.

Although it might be argued that there is tentative evidence that ongoing strains in the global economy have not argued as much as had been feared, developments closer to home have become increasingly negative.

Most emerging news on the UK economic outlook has been disappointing and the tone of related commentary that would have informed Northern Ireland consumer thinking has been altogether more pessimistic.

Our sense is that the negative news-flow around the UK economy in the run-up to the UK Budget on November 26th could have been particularly influential in framing a view that weak British economic activity would weigh heavily on conditions in the Northern Ireland economy in the coming year and beyond.

In the same vein, in spite of the continuing relatively strong performance of the Republic of Ireland's economy, **there has been a substantial increase in warnings around the concentration of growth and the dependence of the public purse on the activities of a small number of US multinationals based in Ireland.**

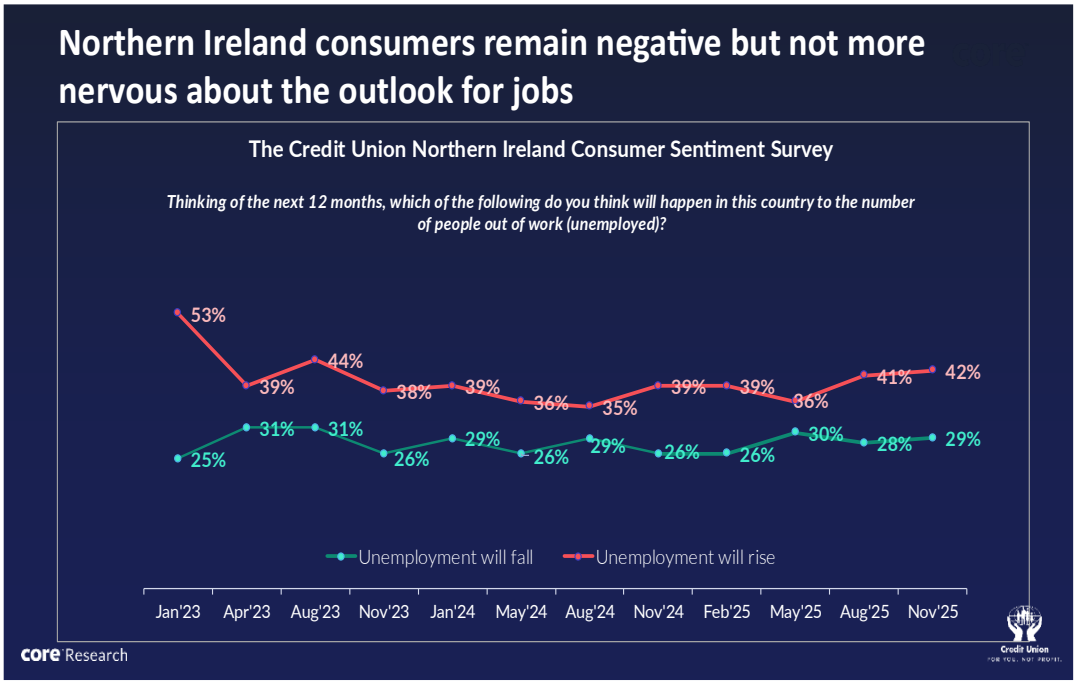
On the domestic front, the run-up to the UK Budget also saw an increased focus on the major funding shortfall faced by Stormont. Given the central role of the public sector in economic life in Northern Ireland, it might be expected that this would translate into a poorer outlook for the local economy.

A final recent concerning development that may have influenced the thinking of at least some consumers is the emerging threat to the agricultural sector in Northern Ireland from the outbreak of Bird flu although the outbreak of Bluetongue was reported just after the survey completed.

Against this backdrop, it is scarcely surprising that the thinking of Northern Ireland consumers on the economic outlook has weakened of late. Our sense is that the key element in the downgrade has been almost continuous negative news-flow on developments in the UK economy and public finances, but we would also see the change from the August survey results as partly reflecting a correction from a possibly excessive improvement in thinking on economic prospects at that point.

Employment outlook holds steady in spite of nervousness elsewhere in the survey.

Although Northern Ireland consumers were markedly more negative about general economic prospects in November, their thinking on the outlook for jobs was little changed in the last three months, as the diagram below illustrates.



As the diagram shows **Northern Ireland consumers remain clearly negative on the outlook for employment** but, unlike the change in thinking on prospects for activity, they don't appear more concerned now than they were in August.

The effectively unchanged assessment of the Northern Ireland labour market over the past three months coincided with mixed news on the jobs front of late. While numbers at work have declined of late, this coincided with a spate of new job announcements and a slight easing in redundancies. PAYE data also show that the number of employee jobs has continued to increase of late.

It may be worth discussing the apparent disconnect between the downgrade in consumer thinking on the general economic climate and the largely unchanged view on the labour market. First of all, the November survey continues to show a strongly negative balance in consumers assessment of jobs that is broadly in line with expectations of poorer economic prospects.

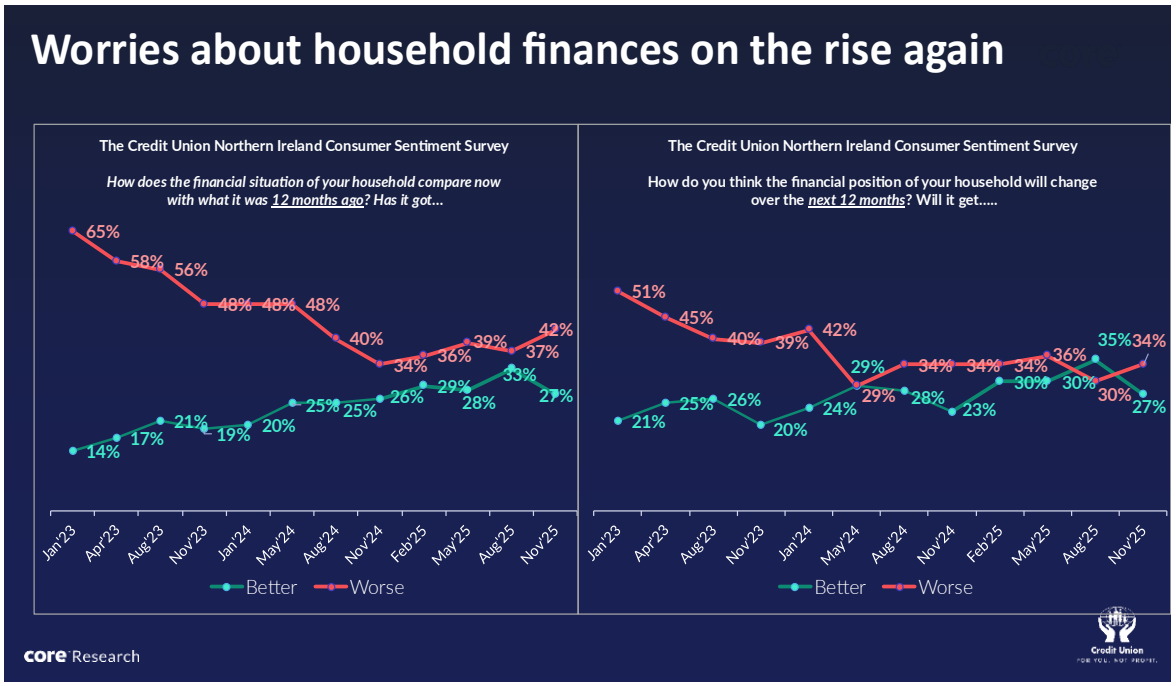
Second, we would also note that the jobs component was the weakest element of the survey in the August reading. So, it could be suggested that recent developments aren't seen as dramatically changing the prospects for employment. In this context, the latest survey period saw some encouraging new job announcements that may have featured in consumer thinking.

Finally, and possibly of limited importance, it should also be recognised that the recent drop in employment in Northern Ireland in labour force survey data was largely reflected in an increase in economic inactivity rather than a spike in unemployment. Elevated levels of inactivity may already reflect some 'discouraged worker' behaviour (as well as longstanding structural issues) that makes unemployment somewhat less sensitive to changes in activity levels.

Renewed cost-of-living concerns worry Northern Ireland consumers

It remains the case that the major factor impacting the day-to-day lives of Northern Ireland consumers, and consequently influencing consumer sentiment has been a large and lasting increase in living costs through recent years.

This has meant that the Northern Ireland Consumer Sentiment Survey has consistently shown markedly negative assessments of household financial circumstances, a view clearly illustrated by the diagram below.



While the intensity of the surge in inflation through 2022 and 2023 has faded, the level of living costs remains elevated meaning that **many Northern Ireland consumers remain concerned about continuing weakness in their spending power.**

Although headline inflation has eased somewhat over the past three months, **there has been a notable increase in food price inflation and a firmer trend in electricity prices**. These developments might be expected to have a particular impact on consumers assessments as to how their household finances were developing at present.

Perhaps in part reflecting disappointment that living costs are still moving upwards, the November survey saw the share of Northern Ireland consumers who felt their financial circumstances had worsened through the past year increase to its highest level in a year and a half. That said, the current reading is substantially less negative than those seen in 2023 and early 2024 when the surge in living costs was most pronounced.

As the survey was completed before the Budget of November 26th, the favourable impacts of the removal of green levies on energy bills and the lifting of the two-child benefit cap are unlikely to have figured in Northern Ireland consumer thinking on their household finances.

However, **reflecting the tone of commentary in the run-up to the Budget, Northern Ireland consumers may have been braced for a range of measures that were widely predicted to deliver a painful squeeze on spending power.**

Significantly, the deterioration in the consumer thinking as to how household finances might develop in the year ahead was driven primarily by a drop in those expecting an improvement in their circumstances. So, the survey seems to reflect an element of disappointment that conditions are unlikely to improve materially any time soon.

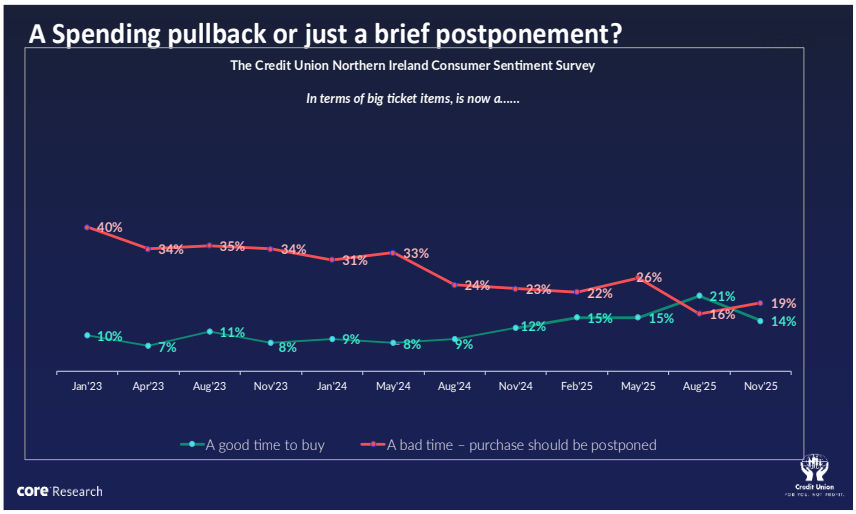
While fewer consumers expect their personal finances to worsen in the next twelve months than say they worsened in the past year, the November survey results show just over one in four Northern Ireland consumers (27%) expect an improvement in their circumstances in the coming year, the same portion as say things improved through the past twelve months.

Drawing these elements together, the tone of **this element of the survey might be interpreted as signalling disappointment at a lack of any clear signs of improvement in spending power rather than a marked further worsening of household finances of late.**

Northern Ireland consumers more cautious in spending plans, perhaps still saving preparing for Christmas?

In keeping with the generally more negative tone of the November sentiment survey, Northern Ireland consumers also signalled a pullback in spending plans. As the diagram below illustrates, this marks a significant correction from the August reading but does appear more consistent with previous readings in this element of the survey.

Importantly, while clearly weaker than the August reading, November 2025 spending plans are the second strongest in the three years of the survey, driven by a comparatively low number of Northern Ireland consumers who say that now is a bad time to make major purchases.

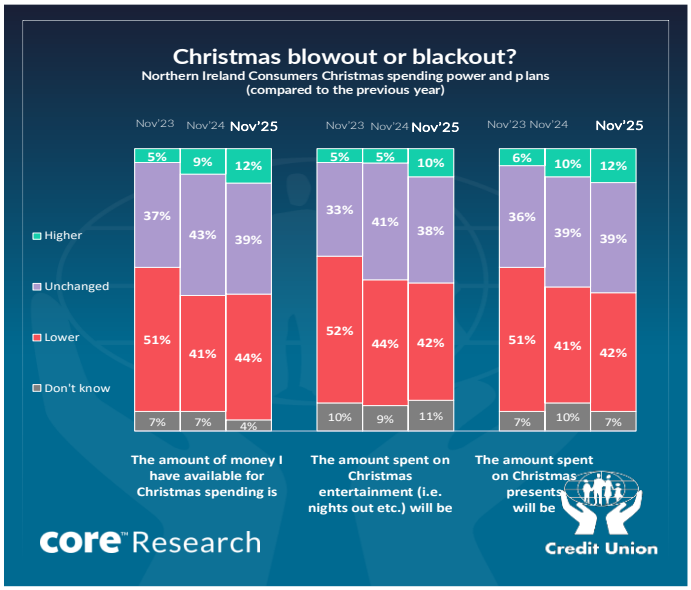


Some element of the pullback in buying plans relative to August may reflect a postponement of spending until closer to Christmas. That interpretation would seem consistent with the responses given to a special question asked alongside the November sentiment survey.

Section II; Northern Ireland consumers planning slightly fewer cutbacks this Christmas

As usual, The November 2025 Credit Union Northern Ireland Consumer Sentiment Survey (in partnership with Core Research) included supplementary questions on topics of current interest.

As in recent years, Northern Ireland consumers were asked about their Christmas spending power and plans. A comparison of the responses to this question for the years 2023 and 2024 is given in the diagram below.



As in previous years, **notably more Northern Ireland consumers say their spending power will be lower rather than higher this year compared to last**. **Some 44% of consumers saying the money they have for Christmas has reduced and just 12% of consumers saying they have more money than last year for seasonal extras**. This means that nearly four times as many Northern Ireland consumers say Christmas 2025 will be tougher financially for them as say it will be easier.

As the graph above shows, **the financial circumstances of Northern Ireland consumers appear to be diverging somewhat in terms of Christmas spending power, with an increase in both the share of consumers who say they have less funds available,** to 44% compared to 41% in the 2024 survey, **and in** the share of **consumers with more funds available** to 12% from 9% in 2024.

While those saying they had less money were drawn widely across demographic groups, female consumers, those aged under 55, and those on low incomes all tended to have above average numbers giving this response. Those who said they had difficulty making ends meet were four times more likely to say they had less money this Christmas than last compared to those with no difficulties in this regard. In contrast, male consumers were nearly twice as likely as females to say they had more money to spend this Christmas.

However, the results also emphasise differences in circumstances within demographic groups, as well as particular variability in circumstances in younger age groups. Although younger consumers were more likely than average to say they had less spending power than a year ago, there were also more than average numbers in this age group reporting increased spending power.

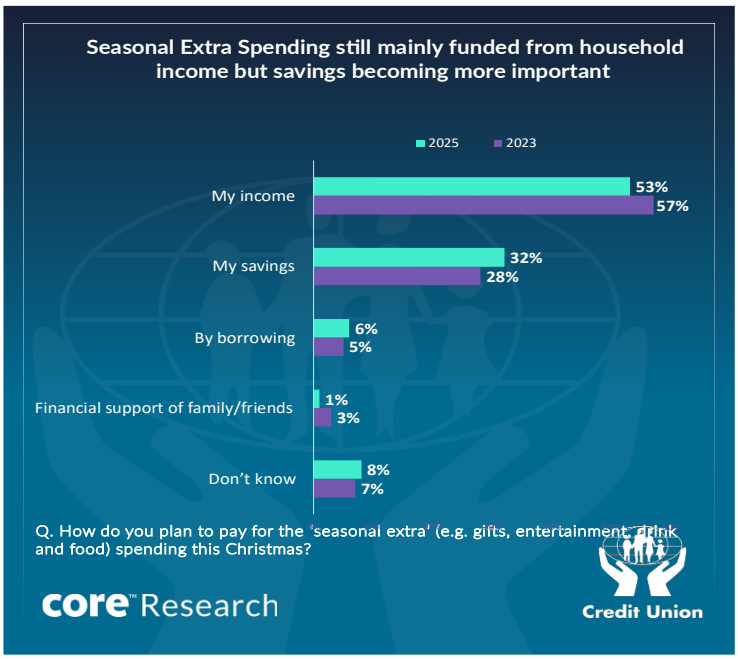
In contrast, fewer than average numbers of those aged over 55 were likely to say they had either more or less money to spend this Christmas, hinting at a greater consistency/predictability in financial circumstances from year to year at older ages.

The diagram above also suggests that **while cutbacks in planned Christmas spending are quite widespread, they are slightly less prevalent than in recent years**. The share of consumers planning to spend more on entertainment in 2025 remains modest at 10% but it is twice as much as reported in either the 2023 or 2024 surveys. In the same vein, planned cutbacks in Christmas present buying are also marginally less than planned in recent years.

Christmas 2025 spending will rely more heavily on savings

With financial strains continuing to be an issue for many Northern Ireland households, it may be instructive to explore how consumers plan to finance their Christmas spending.

We asked consumers how they would pay for their additional seasonal spending. The responses are shown in the diagram below. As we asked the same question in 2023, those responses are shown for comparison.



Just over half of Northern Ireland consumers (53%) plan to fund their Christmas spending from their current incomes. Roughly one in three consumers (32%) will use savings, while the remainder will fund through various means or do not know how they will pay for their Christmas spending.

Reliance on income for Christmas outlays tended to increase with incomes and was more common among male than female consumers. While it was less common among very young consumers, it was more prevalent among the over 55's.

The demographic breakdown of those indicating they would fund their Christmas spend through savings suggests a broadly based and likely needs-driven careful preparation in many instances for the additional costs that Christmas brings.

Survey responses suggest a broadly similar reliance on savings for Christmas spending between those indicating difficulty making ends meet and those making ends meet with ease, between male and female consumers, and across income groups. These results

suggest that **those using savings to finance Christmas include both those putting a small amount by when they can as well as those drawing from their significant financial assets.**

In contrast, borrowing for Christmas was nine times more prevalent among those indicating difficulty making ends meet than among those without problems in this regard. Those currently facing financial problems were also four times more likely to say they did not know how they will finance their Christmas spend. As a result, for a small but not insignificant group of Northern Ireland consumers, Christmas 2025 is far more likely to be a worrying rather than a wonderful time.

The Northern Ireland Credit Union Consumer Sentiment Survey is a quarterly survey of a representative sample of 350 adults. Core Research undertake the survey administration and data collection for the survey. This tranche of the survey was live between the 5th and 25th November 2025