



Equality Monitoring Report: Survey of complainants to the Police Ombudsman's Office

Annual Survey
2023/24

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Introduction

The Police Ombudsman's Office (the Office) collects data on each of the categories specified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Every person that makes a complaint to the Office is asked to complete an equality monitoring form and completed forms are returned to the Information and Communication Unit within the Office. The data contained within this form are used for statistical purposes only and are not shared with other members of staff.

The survey findings enable the Office to monitor access to the service provided to the public across the categories specified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The questionnaire includes the categories of age, gender, marital status, employment status, sexual orientation, community background, race, country of birth, disability, dependants and political opinion.

This statistical report presents the results from the equality monitoring questionnaires that were issued to complainants for complaints received during 2023/24. During the year, we issued 2,905 survey forms¹ and 710 were completed and returned to the Office. This equates to a 24% response rate based on the number of forms issued and a 22% response rate when based on all public complaints received last year.

The results detailed in this report are based on the 710 completed questionnaires we received, however we have been able to determine age and gender from information provided during the complaints process. Age therefore is known for 84% of all complainants and gender is known for 99%. All other Section 75 information was obtained from the survey forms only.

Official Statistics

This is an Official Statistics publication. Official Statistics are produced to high professional standards set out in the Code of Practice for Statistics. Compliance with the Code gives confidence that the statistics are of public value, are of high quality and that they can be trusted. They are also produced free from any political interference.

¹ See Appendix 2: Data Limitations

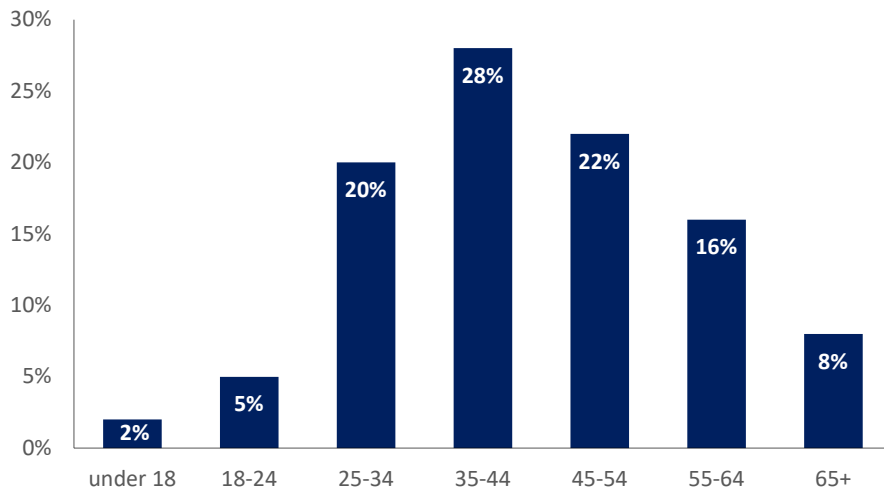
Survey Findings

This section summarises the main findings from the Equality Monitoring Survey carried out during 2023/24. The data is based on the information supplied by complainants who completed the questionnaire. Age and gender was also determined from the complainant's date of birth and salutation which was provided during the complaints process. In Appendix 1, the results are displayed in a series of tables.

Age

During 2023/24, almost three in ten complainants were aged 35 to 44, less than a quarter were aged 45-54 and a fifth were aged 25-34. Smaller proportions of complainants were aged under 25 and 55 & over (Figure 1, Table 1).

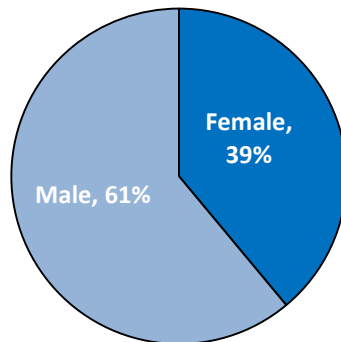
Figure 1: Complainants by age group, 2023/24



Gender

During 2023/24, just over three fifths of complaints were made by males and just under two fifths were made by females (Figure 2, Table 2).

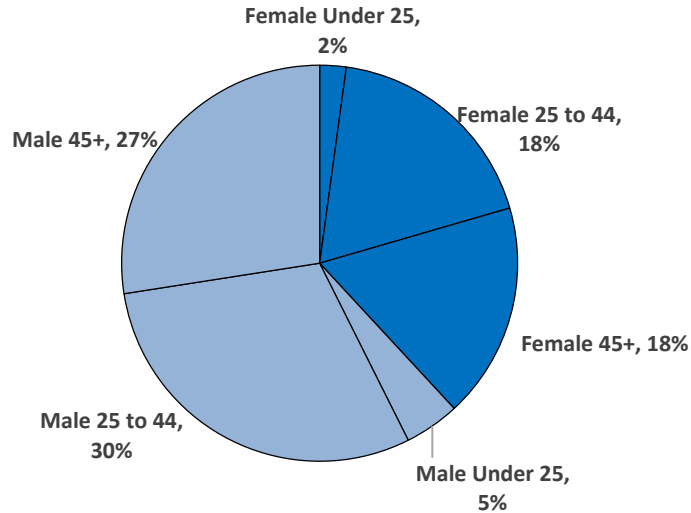
Figure 2: Gender of complainants, 2023/24



Age and Gender

In terms of gender and age combined, over a third of complaints received during 2023/24 were from females aged over 25. Almost three fifths of complaints were made by males aged over 25 during this time (Figure 3, Table 3).

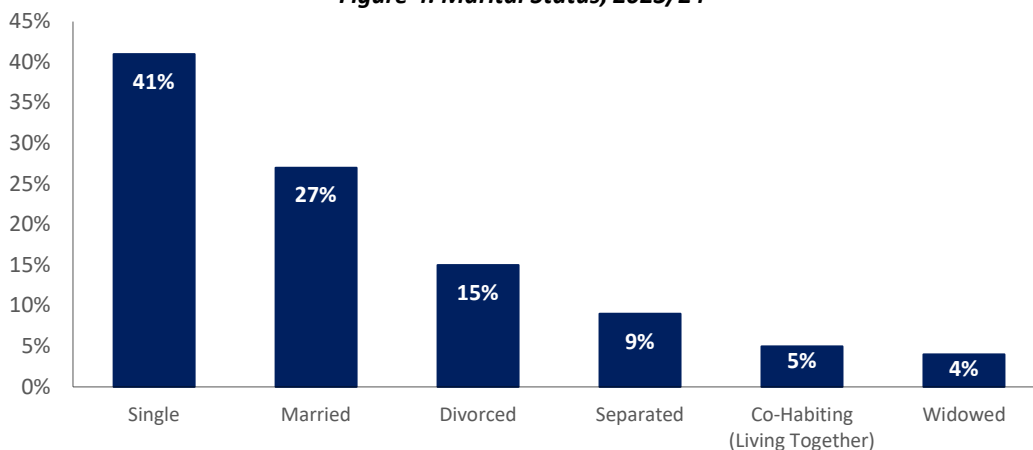
Figure 3: Gender and Age Group, 2023/24



Marital Status

In 2023/24 the largest proportion of complaints were made by single people followed by people who were married or in a civil partnership. Smaller proportions of complaints were made by people who were divorced, separated, co-habiting or widowed (Figure 4, Table 4).

Figure 4: Marital Status, 2023/24



Note: Married includes those in a civil partnership.

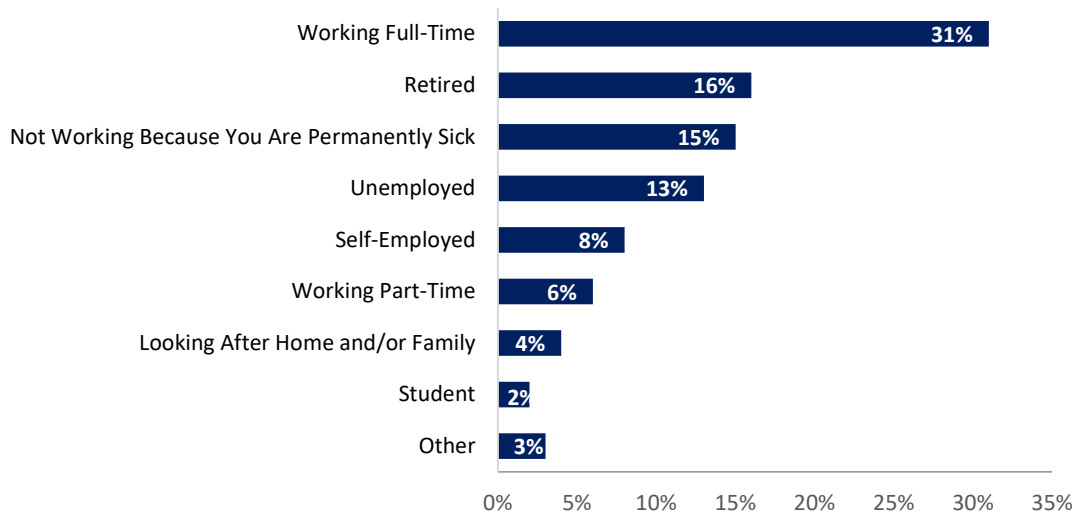
Divorced includes those formally in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved.

Widowed includes those who are a surviving member of a civil partnership.

Employment Status

In 2023/24, less than half of complaints were made by a person who reported that they were working; either full-time, part-time or were self-employed (Figure 5, Table 5). Over a quarter of complainants were unemployed or were not working as they were permanently sick. Smaller proportions of complaints were made by people who were retired, unemployed, looking after their home or family or were studying.

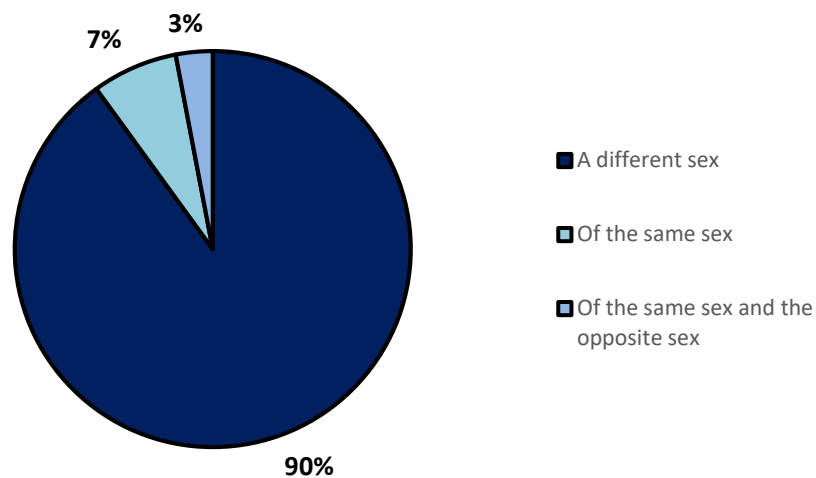
Figure 5: Employment Status, 2023/24



Sexual Orientation

During 2023/24, nine in ten complaints were made by a person who reported that their sexual attraction was towards someone of the opposite sex. Fewer complaints were made by people who reported being sexually attracted to people of the same sex or to people of the same and opposite sex (Figure 6, Table 6).

Figure 6: Sexual orientation, 2023/24



Community Background

In 2023/24, over half (54%) of respondents reported that they were from a Protestant community background and over a quarter (28%) reported they were from a Catholic community background. Almost a fifth (18%) reported that their community background was neither Catholic nor Protestant (Table 7).

Racial Group

In 2023/24, the majority of respondents (95%) reported their race to be White. The remaining 5% reported their race to be either Black African, Black Caribbean, Black Other, Chinese, Indian, Irish Travelling Community, mixed ethnic group, Pakistani or Other (Table 8).

Country of Birth

During 2023/24, the majority of respondents (85%) stated that they were born in Northern Ireland. A further 5% were born in England, 3% in the Republic of Ireland, 2% in either Scotland or Wales and 6% were born in an "Other" country (Table 9).

Disability

Almost six out of ten (57%) respondents in 2023/24 self-reported that they did not have a disability while just over two fifths (43%) self-reported that they had (Table 10).

Disability is a complex concept and there are a number of ways of defining it. For monitoring purposes we provided respondents with a description of disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) which is "a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day to day activities".

Dependants

Just over three fifths of respondents (62%) in 2023/24 stated that they did not have dependants while almost two in five respondents (38%) reported that they did (Table 11).

Political Opinion

In 2023/24, 42% of respondents who answered the political opinion question indicated that 'no political party' best represented their current political opinion. A quarter of respondents (25%) indicated that a Unionist party best represented their current political opinion and less than a fifth (17%) indicated that a Nationalist party did. A sixth of respondents (16%) indicated that either the Alliance party or an "Other" political party best represented their current political opinion (Table 12).

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Age group, 2023/24

Age Group	Percentage
Under 18	2%
18 to 24	5%
25 to 34	20%
35 to 44	28%
45 to 54	22%
55 to 64	16%
65 & over	8%
Base Number	2,692

Table 2: Gender, 2023/24

Gender	Percentage
Male	61%
Female	39%
Base Number	3,176

Table 3: Age group & gender, 2023/24

Age Group	Female	Male
Under 25	2%	5%
25 to 44	18%	30%
45+	18%	27%
Base Number	1,024	1,663

Table 4: Marital status, 2023/24

Marital Status	Percentage
Single (never married)	41%
Married/in civil partnership	27%
Divorced/formally in civil partnership which is now legally dissolved	15%
Separated	9%
Co-habiting (living together)	5%
Widowed/surviving member of civil partnership	4%
Base Number	685

Table 5: Employment status, 2023/24

Employment Status	Percentage
Working full-time	31%
Retired	16%
Not Working because you are permanently sick	15%
Unemployed	13%
Self-employed	8%
Working part-time	6%
Looking after home and/or family	4%
Student	2%
Other	3%
Base Number	665

Table 6: Sexual Orientation, 2023/24

Sexual Orientation	Percentage
Attracted to people of a different sex	90%
Attracted to people of the same sex	7%
Attracted to people of the same and of the opposite sex	3%
Base Number	561

Table 7: Community Background, 2023/24

Community Background	Percentage
Member of the Protestant community	54%
Member of the Catholic community	28%
Member of neither the Protestant nor Catholic community	18%
Base Number	681

Table 8: Race, 2023/24

Race	Percentage
White	95%
Other	5%
Base Number	681

Table 9: Country of Birth, 2023/24

Country of Birth	Percentage
Northern Ireland	85%
England	5%
Republic of Ireland	3%
Scotland & Wales	2%
Other Country	6%
Base Number	685

Table 10: Disability (self-reported), 2023/24

Disabled	Percentage
No	57%
Yes	43%
Base Number	678

Table 11: Dependents, 2023/24

Dependents	Percentage
Complainant does not have dependants	62%
Complainant does have dependants	38%
Base Number	667

Table 12: Political opinion, 2023/24

Political Opinion	Percentage
No political party	42%
Unionist party	25%
Nationalist party	17%
Alliance party	7%
Other	9%
Base Number	421

Appendix 2: Background and Methodology

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was set up by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 in order to provide an impartial and independent system for investigating complaints against the police in Northern Ireland.

The Office is committed to fulfilling the obligations laid upon it by Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998) (the “equality duties”). To help us achieve this a confidential self-completion questionnaire is sent to every complainant², asking for information relevant to the ten categories specified in Section 75 of the Act. In some instances the complainant only provides us with an email address. During the year we emailed a total of 175 forms and nine were returned to us (5% response rate).

As we are committed to providing a service to all individuals and socio-economic groups within our society, we also ask a question on the additional category of employment status, which we consider to be a reliable indicator of economic deprivation.

On receipt of returned questionnaires they are input to the Office’s Case Handling System (CHS) with the complaint data. Only the staff who are directly involved in the processing of the equality monitoring data have data access permissions to this information. Staff involved in the handling and investigation of the complaint do not, at any time, have access to these data.

The equality database is downloaded and analysed using a combination of software including Di Diver, Microsoft Excel and SPSS packages.

The figures in this statistical report are based on the information received between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024. When completing the form not all respondents answered each of the questions. The response rates for each category (excluding gender and age as they were also calculated from salutation and date of birth) ranged from 59% to 96%, when based on the number of forms returned, and ranged from 13% to 21%, when based on the total number of public complaints received in 2023/24. Information on the achieved sample for each question is presented in the tables in Appendix 1.

² Apart from a very small number who have asked not to be contacted by the office or for whom we have insufficient contact information.

There were larger samples of complainants for whom gender and age information was available, from administrative data sources. In addition to those respondents who declared their gender on the monitoring form, it was possible to determine a majority of complainants' gender from their title or salutation, giving a total sample of 99% for whom gender was known. It was also possible to determine complainants' ages from their date of birth, where it was provided, giving an overall sample of 84% for whom age was known.

Figures in the tables may not add up to 100% due to the effect of rounding. Figures may also be subject to minor revision. The Police Ombudsman Revisions Policy is available at http://www.policeombudsman.org/revisions_policy.

The Office has conducted the Equality Monitoring Survey since it opened in November 2000. All survey findings are published annually and are available on the Office website at <http://www.policeombudsman.org/publications/equality>.

Data use

The data collected are used by the Office to monitor access to the service provided to the public across the categories specified in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, and to report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. The data may also be used to answer enquiries from the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Department of Justice, Parliament and the public.

Data quality

Equality Monitoring Survey data are considered to be of high quality. Police Ombudsman staff carry out regular quality assurance reviews of all data input into the CHS. For the Equality Monitoring Survey, staff input the data to the CHS and supervisors undertake a 10% data quality check to ensure that transfer of the information is accurate. Where necessary, data may be corrected. There is a possibility of a small number of errors arising from data input, missing data, failure to update data and errors in communication. The Police Ombudsman estimates that the level of error is so small that it has no impact on the quality of statistical reporting. However, where identified, corrections are made to reports as soon as is practicable.

Caution should be exercised when comparing this report and previous reports to the survey carried out in 2020/21. The number of completed equality monitoring forms

received during 2020/21 was lower than in previous years due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, which resulted in reminder forms not being issued during the year. The data therefore may be less representative of all complaints received during the year than for previous years and also the margin of error around the results may be higher.

Data limitations

Equality monitoring forms are issued to the vast majority of complainants. However, in some cases forms are not issued, for example when it is impossible to identify the complainant, i.e. when the Complaints Officer has recorded the complainant as anonymous or because the complainant's address is not recorded. In other cases, complainants may contact the Office to ask to be excluded from future surveys. While staff aim to encourage the complainant to complete the survey by explaining its purpose, there are some cases where the complainant still wishes to be excluded.

Additional copies of this and other publications are available from:

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