



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

**Annual Survey
2025/26**

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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 survey form and completed forms are returned to the Information and Communication Unit within the Office. The data contained within these forms 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 2025/26. During the year, we issued 2,631 survey forms¹ and 522 were completed and returned to the Office. This equates to a 20% response rate.

The results detailed in this report are based on the 522 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 93% of all complainants and gender is known for 100%. 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.

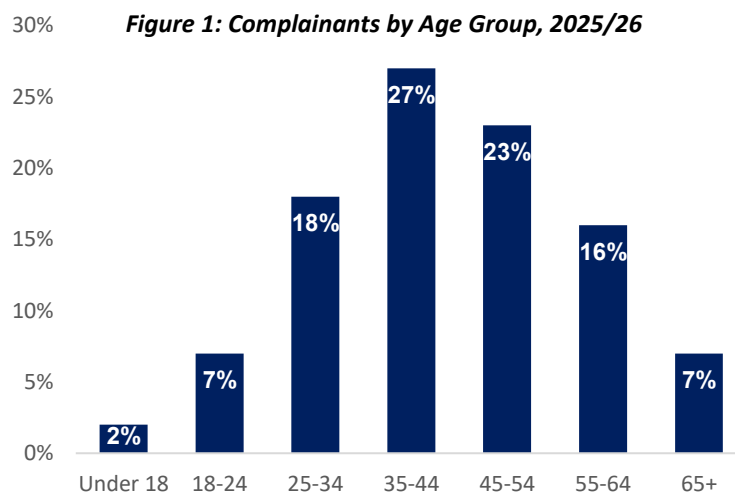
¹ See Appendix 2: Data Limitations

Survey Findings

This section summarises the main findings from the Equality Monitoring Survey carried out during 2025/26. The data is based on the information supplied by complainants who completed the questionnaire. Age and gender were 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

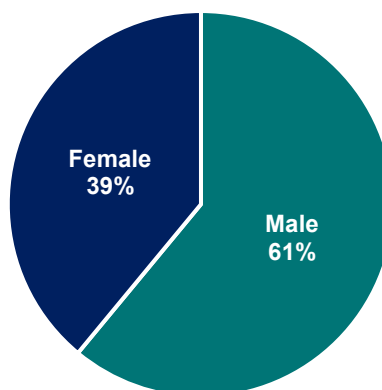
During 2025/26, almost three in ten complainants were aged 35 to 44, less than a quarter were aged 45-54 and just under a fifth were aged 25-34. Less than a fifth of complainants were aged 55-64 while smaller proportions of complainants were aged under 25 and 65+ (Figure 1, Table 1).



Gender

During 2025/26, over three fifths of complaints were made by males and under two fifths were made by females (Figure 2, Table 2).

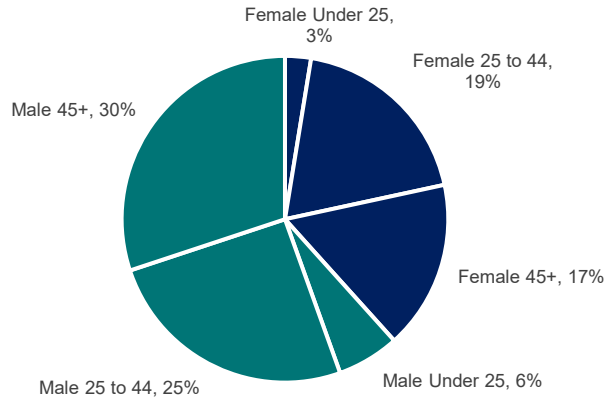
Figure 2: Gender of complainants, 2025/26



Age and Gender

In terms of gender and age combined, over a third of complaints received during 2025/26 were from females aged over 25 while over half were made by males aged over 25 during this time (Figure 3, Table 3).

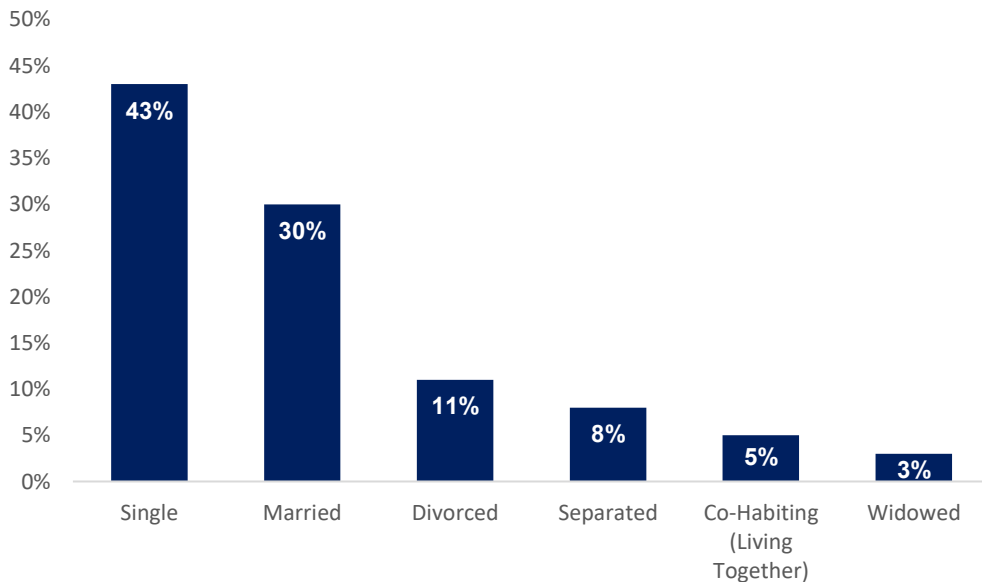
Figure 3: Gender and Age Group, 2025/26



Marital Status

In 2025/26 the largest proportion of complaints were made by single people followed by people who were married or divorced. Smaller proportions of complaints were made by people who were separated, co-habiting or widowed (Figure 4, Table 4).

Figure 4: Marital Status, 2025/26



Note: Married includes those in a civil partnership.

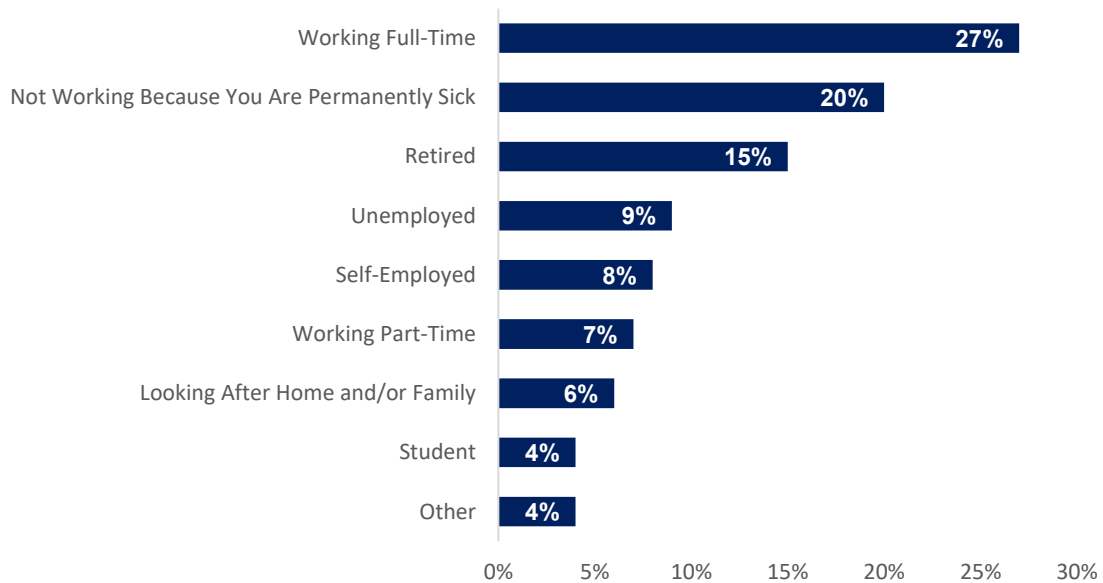
Divorced includes those formally in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved.

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

Employment Status

In 2025/26, just over two fifths of complaints were made by individuals who reported that they were working; either full-time, part-time or were self-employed. Less than three out of ten complainants were unemployed or were not working as they were permanently sick. Smaller proportions of complaints were made by people who were retired, looking after their home or family or were studying (Figure 5, Table 5).

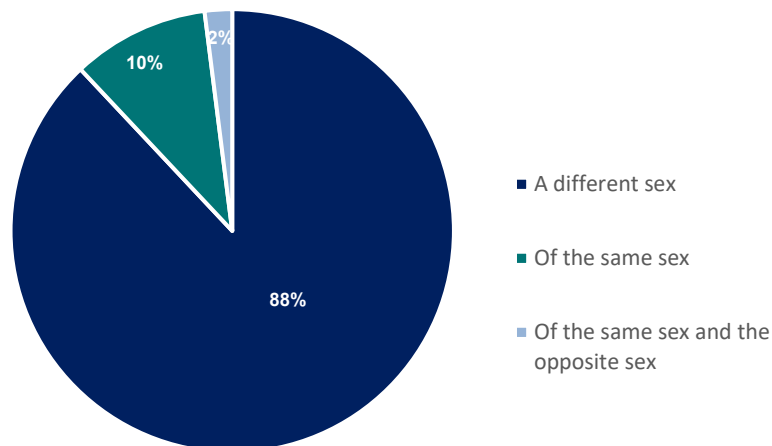
Figure 5: Employment Status, 2025/26



Sexual Orientation

During 2025/26, almost 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, 2025/26



Community Background

In 2025/26, similar proportions of respondents reported to be from either a Protestant community background (41%) or a Catholic community background (40%). Just under a fifth (19%) reported that their community background was neither Catholic nor Protestant (Table 7).

Racial Group

In 2025/26, most respondents (95%) reported their race to be White. The remaining 5% reported their race to be either Black African, Mixed Ethnic Group, Irish Travelling Community, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black Caribbean, Indian, or Other (Table 8).

Country of Birth

During 2025/26, most respondents (81%) stated that they were born in Northern Ireland. A further 5% were born in England, 3% in the Republic of Ireland, 2% in Poland, 2% in either Scotland or Wales and 6% were born in an “Other” country (Table 9).

Disability

Just over half (51%) of the respondents in 2025/26 self-reported that they did not have a disability while just under half (49%) self-reported that they had (Table 10).

Disability is a complex concept and there are several 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 half of the respondents (51%) in 2025/26 stated that they did have dependants while just under half (49%) reported that they did not (Table 11).

Political Opinion

In 2025/26, just under half of respondents (48%) who answered the political opinion question indicated that ‘no political party’ best represented their current political opinion. Just over a fifth of respondents (23%) indicated that a Unionist party best represented their current political opinion and a fifth (20%) indicated that a Nationalist party did. Smaller proportions indicated that either the Alliance party (6%) or an “Other” political party (4%) best represented their current political opinion (Table 12).

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Age group, 2025/26

Age Group	Percentage
Under 18	2%
18 to 24	7%
25 to 34	18%
35 to 44	27%
45 to 54	23%
55 to 64	16%
65 & over	7%
Base Number	2,803

Table 2: Gender, 2025/26

Gender	Percentage
Male	61%
Female	39%
Base Number	2,996

Table 3: Age group & gender, 2025/26

Age Group	Female	Male
Under 25	3%	6%
25 to 44	19%	25%
45+	17%	30%
Base Number	1,073	1,726

Table 4: Marital status, 2025/26

Marital Status	Percentage
Single (never married)	43%
Married/in civil partnership	30%
Divorced/formally in civil partnership which is now legally dissolved	11%
Separated	8%
Co-habiting (living together)	5%
Widowed/surviving member of civil partnership	3%
Base Number	430

Table 5: Employment status, 2025/26

Employment Status	Percentage
Working full-time	27%
Not Working because you are permanently sick	20%
Retired	15%
Unemployed	9%
Self-employed	8%
Working part-time	7%
Looking after home and/or family	6%
Student	4%
Other	4%
Base Number	415

Table 6: Sexual Orientation, 2025/26

Sexual Orientation	Percentage
Attracted to people of a different sex	88%
Attracted to people of the same sex	10%
Attracted to people of the same and of the opposite sex	2%
Base Number	371

Table 7: Community Background, 2025/26

Community Background	Percentage
Member of the Protestant community	41%
Member of the Catholic community	40%
Member of neither the Protestant nor Catholic community	19%
Base Number	422

Table 8: Race, 2025/26

Race	Percentage
White	95%
Other	5%
Base Number	429

Table 9: Country of Birth, 2025/26

Country of Birth	Percentage
Northern Ireland	81%
England	5%
Republic of Ireland	3%
Scotland & Wales	2%
Poland	2%
Other Country	6%
Base Number	432

Table 10: Disability (self-reported), 2025/26

Disabled	Percentage
No	51%
Yes	49%
Base Number	429

Table 11: Dependents, 2025/26

Dependents	Percentage
Complainant does not have dependants	49%
Complainant does have dependants	51%
Base Number	369

Table 12: Political opinion, 2025/26

Political Opinion	Percentage
No political party	48%
Unionist party	23%
Nationalist party	20%
Alliance party	6%
Other	4%
Base Number	302

Appendix 2: Background and Methodology

The Office of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland was set up by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 1998 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. We also provide a QR Code on the survey letters to allow individuals the opportunity to complete a digital copy of the form (replies from the QR Code are stored on Citizen Space). For those complainants who only provide an email address or request that all correspondence is via email, we send them a link to the digital survey. During the year we posted a total of 2,539 forms and sent 92 emails. We received a total of 416 paper forms and 106 replies via Citizen Space (because of scanning the QR Code or following the link in the email).

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, the information supplied is 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 survey forms 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 2025 and 31 March 2026. 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 58% to 83%,

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.

when based on the number of forms returned. Information on the achieved sample for each question is presented in the tables in Appendix 1.

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 most of the complainants' gender from their title or salutation, giving a total sample of 100% 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 93% 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 <https://www.policeombudsman.org/statistics-and-research/profile-of-complainants>

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 the margin of error around the results may be higher.

Data limitations

Equality monitoring forms are issued to the 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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