



Equality Monitoring Report:

Survey of complainants to the Police

Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, 2019/20



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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, the completed forms are returned to the Statistics and Research Branch within the Office. This information is used for statistical purposes only and are not shared with other members of staff.

The survey findings are used by the Office to monitor who accesses to the service provided and uses this information in its reports to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

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 the complainants for complaints received during 2019/20. Due to the partial closure of the Office from mid-March to Mid-June 2020, following advice from the government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, only persons making complaints between April 2019 and January 2020 were surveyed this year (for more information see the Covid-19 Impact Section below). The results are based on 241 completed questionnaires, a return rate of 23% for public complaints received between April 2019 and January 2020 or 18% of all public complaints received during the whole of 2019/20.

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.

Covid-19 Impact:

Acting on government advice, the Office closed in mid-March 2020 to all but essential work. The impact was that survey forms were not issued for complaints received during February or March 2020. As only 10 months data was collected rather than data for the whole year, as in previous surveys, the data will not be as representative as previous years and the margin of error around the results will be higher. For this reason, care should be taken when comparing the results for 2019/20 with previous years.

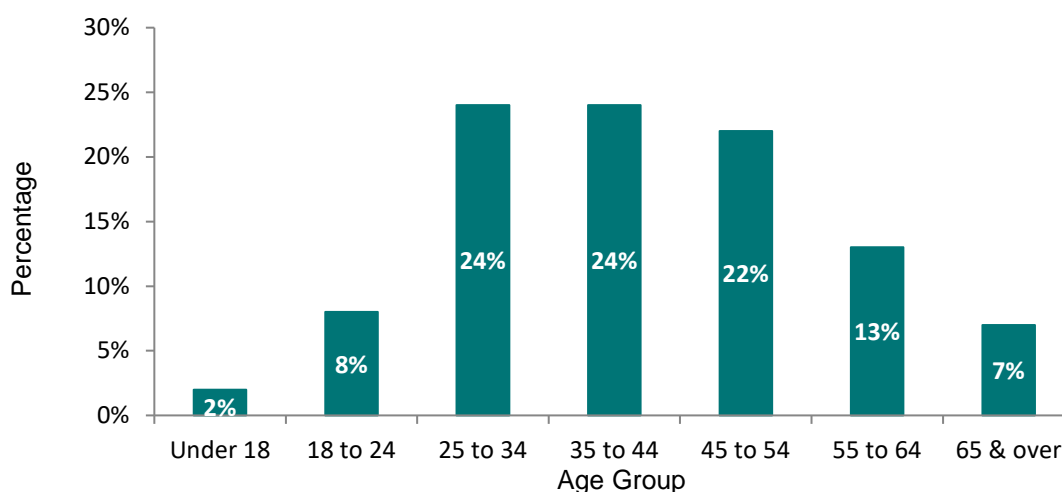
Survey Findings

This section summarises the main findings from the 2019/20 Equality Monitoring Survey. In Appendix 1, the results are displayed in a series of tables.

Age

During 2019/20, just under a quarter of complainants (24%) were aged between 25 and 34 and a similar proportion were aged between 35 and 44. Just over one fifth (22%) were aged 45 to 54. Smaller proportions of complainants were aged under 25 and 55 & over (Figure 1, Table 1).

Figure 1: Complainants by age group, 2019/20



The complainant's age was known for 76% of all public complaints received during 2019/20.

Gender

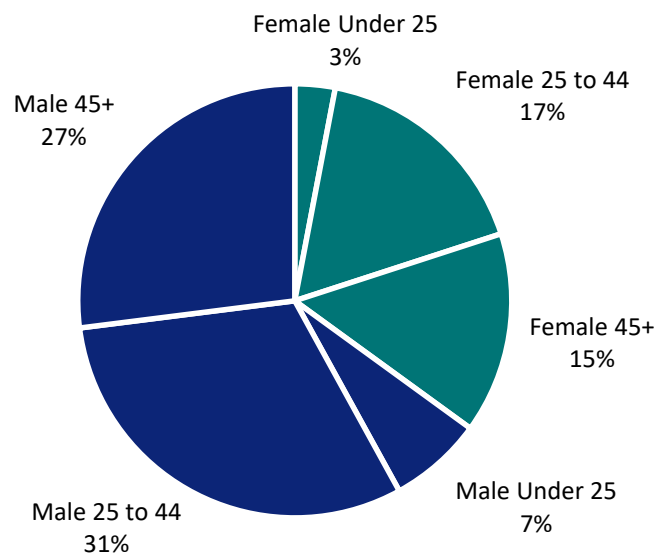
During 2019/20, more than three fifths (63%) of complaints were made by males and just under two fifths (37%) were made by females (Table 2).

The complainant's gender was known for 99.6% of complaints received during 2019/20.

Age and Gender

In terms of gender and age combined, just over three in ten complaints received during 2019/20 were from females aged over 25. Almost twice as many complaints were made by males aged over 25 during this time (Figure 2, Table 3).

Figure 2: Gender and Age Group, 2019/20

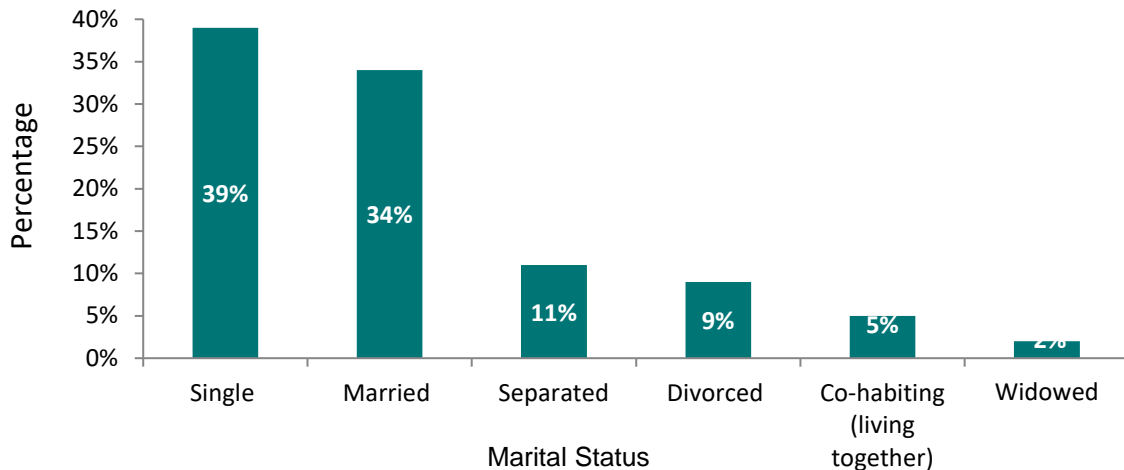


The complainant's age and gender were known for 76% of public complaints made during 2019/20.

Marital Status

In 2019/20 the largest proportion of complaints (39%) were made by single people followed by people who were married or in a civil partnership (34%). Smaller proportions of complaints were made by people who were separated, divorced, co-habiting or widowed (Figure 3, Table 4).

Figure 3: Marital Status, 2019/20



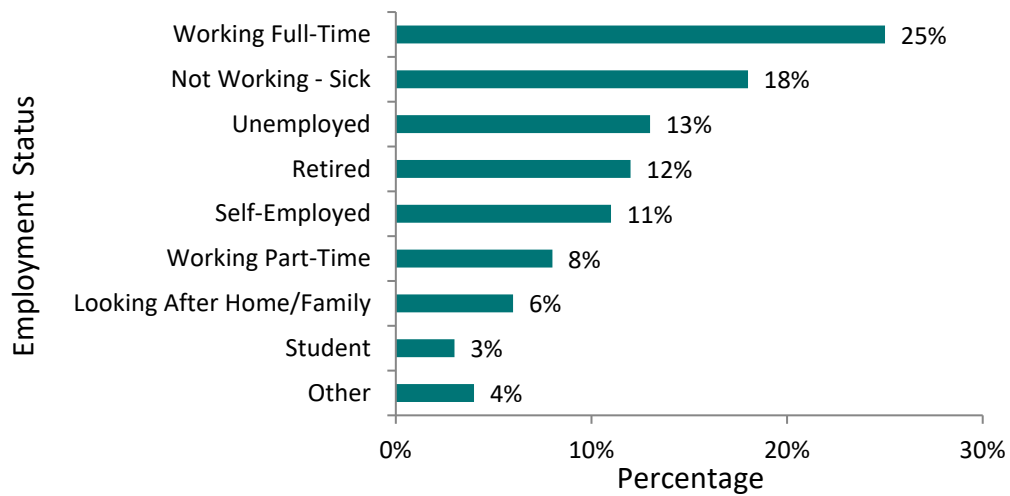
Notes:

- *Married includes civil partnerships*
- *Divorced includes formally in a civil partnership which has been legally dissolved*
- *Widowed includes surviving member of a civil partnership*
- *99% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the marital status question.*

Employment Status

Over two fifths (44%) of complaints received in 2019/20 were made by a person who reported they were working; either full-time, part-time or were self-employed (Figure 4, Table 5). Almost one in five complainants (18%) were not working as they were permanently sick. Smaller proportions of complaints were made by people who were unemployed, retired, looking after their home or family or were studying.

Figure 4: Employment Status, 2019/20

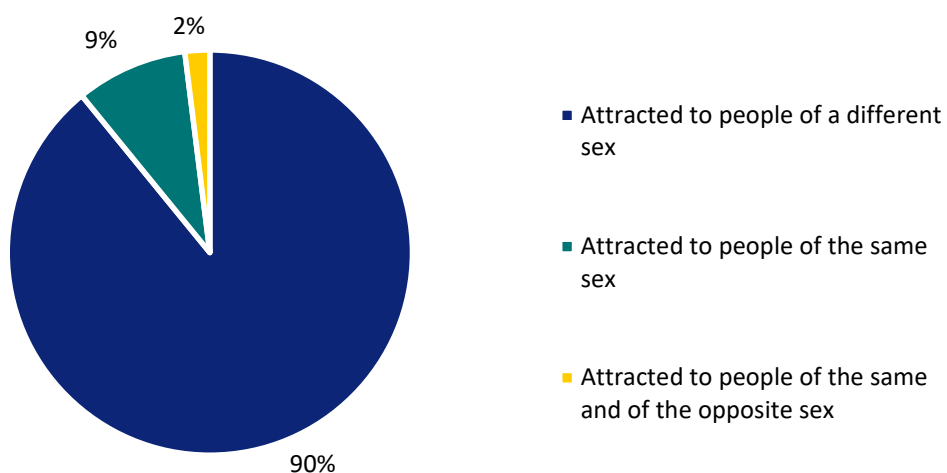


Note: 96% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the employment status question.

Sexual Orientation

During 2019/20, nine in ten complaints (90%) 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 5, Table 6).

Figure 5: Sexual Orientation, 2019/20



Note: 85% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the sexual orientation question.

Community Background

Nearly half (47%) of the complaints received during 2019/20 were made by a complainant reporting that they had a Protestant community background and around one third (32%) reported they had a Catholic community background (Table 7). Whilst, around one fifth (21%) reported that their community background was neither Catholic nor Protestant.

Note: 98% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the community background question.

Racial Group

In 2019/20 the vast majority of complaints (95%) were made by people who reported their race to be White (Table 8). The remaining 5% of complainants reported their race to be either Bangladeshi, Indian, Pakistani, of a mixed ethnic group or other.

Note: 99.5% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the race question.

Country of Birth

During 2019/20, the majority of respondents (80%) stated that they were born in Northern Ireland (Table 9). A further 7% were born in England, 3% born in the Republic of Ireland and 2% in Scotland.

Note: 99.5% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the country of birth question.

Disability

Over three fifths (64%) of respondents in 2019/20 self-reported that they did not have a disability while just over a third (36%) self-reported that they had a disability (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”.

Note: 99% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the disability question.

Dependants

Just over half of respondents (54%) in 2019/20 stated that they did not have dependants and just under half (46%) reported that they did have a dependant (Table 11).

Note: 96% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the question about having dependants.

Political Opinion

In 2019/20, two fifths of respondents (40%) who answered the political opinion question indicated that 'no political party' best represented their current political opinion. Just over a quarter of respondents (26%) indicated that a Unionist party best represented their current political opinion and 11% indicated that it was a Nationalist party (Table 12).

Note: 73% of the returned equality monitoring forms completed the political opinion question.

Appendix 1: Tables

Table 1: Age group, 2019/20

	Percentage
Under 18	2%
18 to 24	8%
25 to 34	24%
35 to 44	24%
45 to 54	22%
55 to 64	13%
65 & over	7%
Base number	1,779

Table 2: Gender, 2019/20

	Percentage
Male	63%
Female	37%
Base number	2,339

Table 3: Age group & gender, 2019/20

	Female	Male
Under 25	3%	7%
25 to 44	17%	31%
45 & over	15%	27%
Base number	626	1,151

Table 4: Marital status, 2019/20

	Percentage
Single (never married)	39%
Married or Civil partnership	34%
Separated	11%
Divorced or legally dissolved civil partnership	9%
Co-habiting (living together)	5%
Widowed or surviving member of civil partnership	2%
Base number	415

Table 5: Employment status, 2019/20

	Percentage
Working Full-Time	25%
Not Working Because You Are Permanently Sick	18%
Unemployed	13%
Retired	12%
Self-Employed	11%
Working Part-Time	8%
Looking After Home and/or Family	6%
Student	3%
Other	4%
Base number	403

Table 6: Sexual Orientation, 2019/20

	Percentage
Attracted to people of a different sex	90%
Attracted to people of the same sex	9%
Attracted to both people of the same and of the	2%
Base number	356

Table 7: Community Background, 2019/20

	Percentage
Member of the Protestant community	47%
Member of the Catholic community	32%
Member of neither the Protestant nor Catholic	20%
Base number	412

Table 8: Race, 2019/20

	Percentage
White	95%
Other	5%
Base number	419

Table 9: Country of Birth, 2019/20

	Percentage
Northern Ireland	80%
England	7%
Republic of Ireland	3%
Scotland & Wales	2%
Other Country	8%
Base number	419

Table 10: Disability (self-reported), 2019/20

	Percentage
No	64%
Yes	36%
Base number	417

Table 11: Dependants, 2019/20

	Percentage
Complainant does not have any dependants	54%
Complainant has dependants	46%
Base number	405

Table 12: Political opinion, 2019/20

	Percentage
No political party	40%
Unionist party	26%
Nationalist party	11%
Alliance party	10%
Other	12%
Base number	309

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 complainant¹, asking for information relevant to the ten categories specified in Section 75 of the Act. 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 research 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 DI Diver, Microsoft Excel and SPSS packages.

The figures in this statistical report are based on the information received between 1 April 2019 and 31 January 2020². Due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the resulting closure of the Office to all but essential work, 10 months of survey data has been collected for this year. During this 10-month time period, the Office issued 1,802 questionnaires in which 421 were returned, representing a return rate of 23% for public complaints received between April 2019 and January 2020 or 18% of public complaints received during the whole of 2019/20. When completing the form not all respondents answered all of the questions (with Sexual Orientation and Political Opinion having the

¹ Apart from a very small number who have asked not to be contacted by the office or for whom we have insufficient contact information.

² Apart from the age and gender information which is based on administration information held on the case handling system for the full year (1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020).

lowest response rates). 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 a majority of complainants' gender from their title or salutation, giving a total sample of almost 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 76% 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's Revision 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's 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.

The number of completed equality monitoring forms received during 2019/20 is lower than in previous years due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the partial closure of the Office following government advice resulted in fewer equality monitoring forms being issued and returned 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. Caution should be exercised when comparing the results from this report to previous years.

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. the Complaints Officer has recorded the complainant as anonymous), because the complainant's address is not recorded or if only an email address is available. 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 Information

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This publication and other information about the work of the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland are available at: www.policeombudsman.org

