Department for
Communities
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Northern Ireland Welfare Supplementary Payment and Discretionary Support Schemes

Section 75 statistics November 2017 to March 2025



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Welfare Supplementary Payment Schemes

1. As part of "A Fresh Start, the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan", which was published in November 2015, the Northern Ireland Executive set out an agreed approach to implementing welfare reform in Northern Ireland. This included funds from the Executive to 'top up' UK welfare arrangements.

2. The Executive agreed to establish a small Working Group under the leadership of the late Professor Eileen Evason to bring forward mitigation proposals within an agreed financial envelope. The Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group subsequently published its report in January 2016, and the Northern Ireland Executive accepted its recommendations in full. A range of Welfare Supplementary Payment schemes were subsequently developed and implemented by the Department for Communities.

3. The Welfare Reform Mitigations Working Group recommended the following welfare reform changes should be mitigated:

- Benefit Cap
- Time-limiting of Contributory Employment and Support Allowance
- Personal Independence Payment (for claimants moving from Disability Living Allowance)
- Loss of Disability-Related benefits
- Carers
- Social Sector Size Criteria (commonly known as the bedroom tax)

4. The Department for Communities identifies all claimants eligible for a mitigation payment, no application is required, and payments are made regardless of the personal characteristics of the recipients.

5. During the period from November 2017 to March 2025 a total of 90,044 questionnaires were issued to claimants who were awarded mitigation payments. There were 31,950 responses that contained answers to all or some of the nine equality questions. This represents a 35% response rate.

6. Responses have been categorised by type of mitigation payment and outcomes, including combined overall results, are included at **Table 1**. However, these results should be interpreted with caution as respondents are self-selected and are not a statistically representative sample of Welfare Supplementary Payment customers.

7. Each welfare mitigation scheme was subject to a Section 75 screening exercise prior to implementation. As the main aim of the Welfare Supplementary Payment Schemes are to mitigate any adverse impacts of welfare reform on the most vulnerable people in society it was concluded that the schemes did not have to be subjected to a full Equality Impact Assessment (that is, a formal consultation). It should be noted that the screenings were in relation to the policies around the Welfare Supplementary Payment schemes and not the associated welfare reform change.

8. The Department has considered the Section 75 data that is now available and looked again at the screenings for the schemes. The Department is satisfied that the original outcomes remain valid and there is no requirement to screen the policies again.

Discretionary Support

9. Discretionary Support was introduced in November 2016, and it provides financial assistance to people who find themselves in an extreme, exceptional or crisis situation, have a total annual income below a set threshold and who meet specific eligibility criteria. Section 75 data collected on Discretionary Support also includes information on grants paid out under the Universal Credit New Claims Grant that was introduced from 1 November 2017. As this fund is currently delivered through the Discretionary Support Scheme it is not possible to separate this data from the overall Discretionary Support data.

10. Collection of Section 75 data relating to Discretionary Support claims was possible from August 2021 and from this date to March 2025 there were 475,058 claims for Discretionary Support of which 262,893 voluntarily completed (partially or fully) the Equality monitoring questions. This represents a completion rate of 55.34%. Responses have been set out for claims, grants, loans and nil awards by self-reported Equality categories based on monitoring questionnaires at **Table 2.** However, these results should be interpreted with caution as respondents are self-selected and are not a statistically representative sample of Discretionary Support customers.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

11. Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 came into force on 1 January 2000 and placed a statutory obligation on public authorities, in carrying out their various functions relating to Northern Ireland, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between:

- persons of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status or sexual orientation;
- men and women generally;
- persons with a disability and persons without; and
- persons with dependants and persons without.

12. The Department has collected information on the nine equality groups for each of the Welfare Supplementary Payment schemes and for Discretionary Support. These are gender, age, marital status, caring responsibilities, disability, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and political opinion.

Table 1: Welfare Supplementary Payments Proportions (%) of Section 75 Group Category Responses

Section 75 Group	Category	All WSP schemes %	SSSC	Benefit Cap	PIP Dis	PIP Red	PIP Conflict related	Disability Premiums	Carers	ESA Time Limiting
Gender	Male	43	42	14	49	47	45	51	38	40
	Female	57	58	86	51	53	55	49	62	60
Age	16-34	18	13	45	25	15	24	17	13	4
	35-54	44	47	55	38	42	38	47	52	38
	55 and over	39	40	*	37	43	38	37	35	59
Marital Status	Single	39	44	47	44	35	41	50	20	13
	Married	29	13	22	30	38	32	12	57	68
	Divorced	15	22	7	13	13	15	23	6	7
	Other	17	21	24	13	14	12	15	17	13
Dependants	No dependants	56	58	2	67	66	63	64	17	63
	Child/children	30	27	97	21	23	24	23	39	24
	Dependant with a disability	10	11	1	8	7	10	11	39	7
	Older person	3	3	*	3	3	2	2	4	4
	Other	1	1	*	1	1	1	*	1	2
Disability	Consider themselves as having a disability	82	76	21	97	99	97	95	61	91
	Do not consider themselves as having a disability	18	24	79	3	1	3	5	39	9

Racial/ Ethnic Group	White	98	98	90	99	98	100	98	98	99
	Other	2	2	10	1	2	*	2	2	1
Religious Belief	Catholic	47	45	49	49	50	47	51	51	45
	Protestant	45	48	35	44	43	43	42	42	50
	Other	5	4	15	4	5	7	5	5	4
	None	2	3	1	3	2	3	3	2	1
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	97	97	99	97	97	96	96	99	99
	Gay/lesbian/bisexual	3	3	1	3	3	4	4	*	1
Political Opinion	Nationalist	40	42	27	42	41	37	42	44	33
	Unionist	41	45	23	39	39	35	35	36	44
	Neither	19	13	50	19	20	29	22	20	23

Data Notes

Percentages have been rounded to the nearest whole number and therefore may not sum to 100%.

Percentages based on counts of less than 5 (including zero) are represented with an asterisk in the table.

Respondents with multiple caring responsibilities could select more than one category under 'Dependants'.

Some respondents from the overall total (31,950) had received a Welfare Supplementary Payment (WSP) for more than one reason. Their responses were included for each of the WSP schemes that applied to them.

From scrutiny of the data, it would appear that some responses have not been allocated to the correct Welfare Supplementary Payment Scheme. For example, the number of responses where the reason for payment was categorised as a Conflict Related Injury notably exceeded the number of persons recorded on the mitigations database as having received a WSP for this reason. While this should not affect the combined breakdown of responses for all WSP schemes, breakdowns for individual WSPs should be interpreted with caution.

In November 2025, all previous data was reviewed, leading to re-categorisation of some ambiguous answers.

Table 2: Discretionary Support Claims, Grants, Loans and Nil Awards by self-reported Equality categories (Aug 21 - Jan 25) – based on Equality monitoring questionnaires

Section 75 Group	Category	All Claims	All claims awarded a grant	All claims awarded a loan	Nil Awards
Gender	Female	65%	66%	69%	62%
	Male	34%	34%	31%	37%
Age	16-34	46%	44%	45%	49%
	35-54	45%	44%	46%	43%
	55 and over	10%	12%	9%	7%
Marital Status	Single	70%	69%	72%	70%
	Married	16%	16%	14%	16%
	Divorced	9%	9%	9%	8%
	Other	6%	6%	5%	6%
Dependants	No dependants	61%	61%	58%	63%
	Child/children	29%	29%	32%	28%
	Dependant with a disability	8%	8%	8%	8%
	Older person	2%	2%	2%	2%
Disability	Consider themselves as having a physical or mental health condition	55%	55%	58%	51%
	Do not consider themselves as having a physical or mental health condition	45%	45%	42%	49%
Racial/ Ethnic Group	White	94%	95%	96%	94%
	Other	6%	5%	4%	6%

Religious Belief	Catholic	47%	49%	48%	45%
	Protestant	21%	22%	22%	22%
	Other	12%	10%	10%	11%
	None	21%	20%	20%	22%
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual	89%	90%	90%	88%
	Gay/lesbian/bisexual/other	11%	10%	10%	12%
National Identity	British only	30%	30%	30%	31%
	Irish only	32%	35%	33%	31%
	Northern Irish only	24%	25%	25%	24%
	Other	13%	11%	11%	14%

Source: Analytics Division (DfC) Aug 2021 – Mar 2025

Notes: **IMPORTANT** – The figures in the table are based on voluntary responses to Equality monitoring questionnaires issued to all Discretionary Support claimants between August 2021 and March 2025*. Users should exercise significant caution when attempting to draw any inferences from these figures. The key concern with voluntary response surveys is that they can be subject to self-selection bias where participants of the survey may have characteristics which are unrepresentative or different from the broader claimant population, thus leading to potential bias in the results.

*Absence of system functionality means the outcomes of claims is unavailable by Section 75 group for the period January 2024 to October 2024.

Claims are based on the date of the claim, while awarded grants and loans are based on the award decision date

Individuals can be awarded both a grant and a loan and can therefore be attributed to both Grant and Loan categories.

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