

# Do You Mean Me?

Discrimination: attitudes and experience  
in Northern Ireland

## Equality Awareness Survey 2011

Equality Commission

FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



# Executive Summary

The 2011 Equality Awareness Survey measures attitudes towards specific equality groups; perceptions and experiences of unfair treatment; and awareness of a range of equality related matters amongst the general public in Northern Ireland.

The survey involved over 1000 face to face interviews with members of the public across Northern Ireland conducted during September 2011. The sample was stratified by age, gender, religion, social class and geography.

The survey followed a similar structure and content to that of the Commission's previous Equality Awareness Surveys (2008 and 2005). Additional questions were included in 2011 to measure and provide baseline information, including the equality impact of the current economic climate.

## SOCIAL ATTITUDES

Respondents were asked a series of questions which focused on social attitudes and perceptions of equality. With regards attitudes to specific groups questions examined: general attitudes; attitudes towards specific groups in different situations (social distance) and; those groups considered to be treated unfairly. Questions also examined attitudes to equality and diversity – the importance of equality over time; how comfortable respondents would be with particular groups in the highest political office; as well as views on positive action, under-represented groups; and, affirmative action.

### General attitudes towards specific groups

Respondents were asked to indicate generally how positive or negative they felt towards each group – an indicator of open or publicly held views.

- For the most part, **attitudes towards the different groups were generally positive.**
- However **negative attitudes existed towards: Travellers (30%), transgender persons (22%), and Eastern European migrant workers (21%).** Only 7% perceived those from a different religion in an unfavourable light. Negative attitudes towards the different groups are broadly similar to those in 2008.
- **The only group to see a decline in negative attitudes towards them was lesbian, gay or bisexual persons,** from 21% in 2008 to 15% in 2011. There was not a corresponding increase in positive views though – rather the proportion of those holding 'neutral' views increased.

### Social distance – understanding latent views towards specific groups

Social distance – that is the extent to which respondents feel comfortable with varying degrees of closeness to a member of a ‘different’ group – was explored in the context of situations of work, community and family life.

These responses can provide an indication of latent or underlying feelings towards these groups.

- In terms of social distance scenarios, attitudes varied towards the different groups when contextualised in the situations of work, community and family life. Overall, attitudes towards different groups in different social distance situations have firmed or hardened over time, in particular in the ‘marry/relationship’ situation.
- As in 2008, the **most negative attitudes were towards Travellers** in each of the three situations. In 2011, 35% of respondents would mind (a little or a lot) having a Traveller as a work colleague, 54% would mind having a Traveller as a neighbour while 55% would mind having a Traveller as an in-law. This compares with 38%, 51% and 51% respectively in 2008.
- Negative attitudes were also displayed towards **transgender people** in each of the three social situations: 35% of respondents would mind (a little or a lot) having a transgender person as a work colleague, while 40% would mind having a transgender person as a neighbour and 53% would mind having a transgender person as an in-law (53%).
- In terms of the three types of disability considered (physical, learning or mental ill-health), as in 2008, **mental ill-health** evoked the greatest number of negative responses, with 26% saying they would mind (a little or a lot) having a person with mental ill-health as a work colleague, while 24% and 37% respectively would mind having this person as a neighbour or as an in-law.
- Notably, **negative attitudes towards those experiencing mental ill-health increased more over time than attitudes towards any other group**: with a ‘work colleague’ seeing an increase of 9 percentage points from 17% in 2008; a ‘neighbour’ an increase of 8 percentage points from 16% in 2008; and an ‘in-law’ by 12 percentage points from 25% in 2008.
- Respondents were **least likely to mind** having someone of a **different religion or with a learning disability** as a work colleague (8-11%); someone with a learning or **physical disability** or of a different religion as a neighbour (8-10%); and someone of a different religion or with a learning or physical disability as an in-law (17-18%).

### Perceptions of unfair treatment in Northern Ireland

Respondents were asked to identify the groups they thought were **treated unfairly** and the group they thought was **treated most unfairly** in Northern Ireland.

- When asked which **groups were treated unfairly**, the most common answers were **people over 70; lesbian, gay or bisexual people and disabled people (all 24%)**.
- When asked which specific **group was treated most unfairly**, **people aged over 70** were considered to be treated most unfairly in Northern Ireland (15% of respondents), followed by **lesbian, gay or bisexual people, disabled people and Roman Catholics (all 13% each)**. 8% felt Protestants were treated most unfairly and only a small proportion felt that men or women were treated unfairly (1% each).
- **In 2008, 24% had felt that racial or ethnic groups were treated the most unfairly, followed by Travellers (16%) and older people (15%** - the same as in 2011). Other comparator figures from 2008 include – disabled people 10%; Roman Catholics 5%; Protestants 4%.
- With regards to the **types of unfair treatment**, in 2011 respondents were of the view that:
  - people over 70 were most likely to be treated unfairly when using public services;
  - lesbian, gay or bisexual people were most likely to be subject to harassment; and that
  - disabled people and Roman Catholics were most likely to be treated unfairly at work.

A majority of respondents (54%) disagreed with the statement that **‘sometimes there is good reason to be prejudiced against certain groups’**, however, **close to one-third (30%) agreed** with the statement (a proportion similar to that noted in the 2010 Scottish Attitudes Survey, from which this question was developed).

### **Attitudes to equality and diversity**

The survey examined **attitudes to equality and diversity**. Respondents were asked questions regarding the importance of equality, efforts made to combat discrimination and questions regarding how ‘comfortable’ or not respondents would be with having someone from a range of different groups in the highest elected political position in Northern Ireland. It also sought views on the need to have more people from under-represented groups in employment or public life.

#### *Importance of equality over time:*

- For most people in Northern Ireland, the prevailing perception was one of **no change in the importance of equality issues over the last three years (50%)**. However, almost one in three said that **equality issues have become more important (29%)**.
- More than two-fifths (42%) said that **religion is the most important equality issue, followed by age (39%) and gender (27%)**.

- 45% of respondents were satisfied that **enough was being done to fight all forms of discrimination** in Northern Ireland (down from 55% in 2008), while **35% were not satisfied**.

### *Attitudes to diversity:*

- Respondents were most 'comfortable' with a man (mean score=9.25) or a woman (mean score=9.13) in the **highest elected position**. Respondents were most '**uncomfortable**' towards having a **Traveller** (mean score=5.34) in the highest elected political position in Northern Ireland. This was followed by a **transgender person** (mean score=5.75) and a **person experiencing mental ill-health** (mean score=6.14).
- More than two-thirds (69%) said they would like to see **more women in management positions** in the workplace. Increasing the representation of **disabled people in the workplace** (65%) and having **more female MLAs** (63%) were also popular choices attracting a lot of support. Respondents identified **least the need for people aged over 70 in companies** (42%).
- Over three-quarters (**77%**) either agreed or strongly agreed that '**public bodies in Northern Ireland should be more representative of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities**'. This is an increase of 7 percentage points since 2008 (70%).
- **Two-thirds (66%)** either agreed or strongly agreed that '**a police service whose religious composition is more representative of both the Protestant and Roman Catholic communities will offer a better service**' (findings broadly similar to the 2008 survey).

### **Positive and affirmative action in Northern Ireland**

The survey sought to assess the influence of positive action measures in attracting an under-represented community into employment.

- **52%** reported that they would be more **likely to apply for a job if a company** had advertisements that said they **particularly welcomed applicants from members of their communities**.
- Furthermore, **55%** indicated that they **would apply for a job if the company took practical steps to develop contacts within their communities**.
- **Support** for these affirmative measures **has increased** by a respective 6 and 7 percentage points since 2008.

### **Support for equality laws**

Support for equality laws in Northern Ireland has remained consistently high over time.

- 91% of respondents in 2011 agreed on the **need for equality laws**, a similar finding to 2008 and 2005 (both 92%).
- More than three-quarters of respondents (77%) agreed that **equality laws should be strengthened** to match those in Great Britain, while only 3% disagreed.

## DISCRIMINATION AND COMPLAINTS

This section explores personal experience of discrimination or harassment, and the extent to which respondents were prepared to seek redress in such a situation, including the likelihood of them contacting the Equality Commission.

### Experience of unfair treatment:

- **One in three (33%)** respondents said that they had been **subject to some form of harassment or unfair treatment** during the past three years because they belonged to a particular group, an increase of 16 percentage points since 2008 (17%) and 17 percentage points since 2005 (16%).
- In 2011 those **groups most likely to consider they had been subject to some form of unfair treatment** were minority ethnic groups (61%); lesbian, gay or bisexuals (53%); those from Belfast (44%); those with a Limiting Long Term Illness - LLTI (40%); those from a lower class (37%). In 2008 the comparable groups were lesbian, gay or bisexuals (34%); those of a higher class (18%); those from Belfast (26%) and those from a Roman Catholic community background (19%).
- In 2011, 14% of respondents felt they had **experienced harassment because** they belonged to a particular group while 14% felt they had not been able to express their own culture; 10% reported being treated unfairly at work. 10% considered they had been treated unfairly in relation to buying or renting a house, premises or land. In 2008 the most common reasons cited were being treated unfairly at work (8%) and belonging to a particular group (7%).

### Complaints:

- Of those who believed they had been treated unfairly (n=357), **just over one fifth (21%)** said they had made **some form of complaint**, a similar finding to 2008 (20%).

### Equality Commission advice and support:

- Respondents were informed that the Commission offers advice and assistance to people who believe they may have been discriminated against.
- A majority (**58%**) **said they would contact the Commission** if they had a problem, a rise of 16 percentage points since 2008 (42%). 18% said they would not.



- Of those respondents who would not contact the Commission (n=194), 23% said the main reason given was **lack of awareness** of the Commission, while 16% said they would **go to a solicitor or somewhere else** instead.

### Knowledge of rights:

- Almost **a quarter (24%)** of people surveyed felt that they **would know their rights** if they were the victim of discrimination or harassment, a decrease of 12 percentage points since 2008 (36%). There were no comparable questions in 2005.

## AWARENESS OF ANTI-DISCRIMINATION LAW

This section examines public awareness and perceptions towards anti-discrimination laws in Northern Ireland. In 2011 new additional questions were developed to establish the level of awareness of *grounds* (such as gender, age or disability) and *areas* (such as employment, education or transport) that are protected by anti-discrimination laws and to provide baseline data on awareness of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

### Awareness of areas and grounds

The survey found that a majority of the general public have good awareness of the areas and grounds protected by anti-discrimination laws in Northern Ireland. In general, those from a higher social class and with a third level education were most likely to indicate awareness across the different areas and grounds:

- More than half (52%) of respondents were aware that anti-discrimination laws protect them on the **grounds** of religion, while more than two-fifths were aware that age (46%) and disability (42%) were protected grounds. Political opinion (12%) was the least well-known ground protected under the laws. It was notable that, despite being long established, only one in three (34%) were aware that gender was a protected ground.
- More than two-thirds (69%) of respondents were aware that anti-discrimination laws protect them in the **area** of employment. 45% were aware that the laws protect them in the area of education, yet conversely training (17%) was the least well-known area protected under the law.

### Public Authority duties to promote equality and good relations

These questions sought to measure public awareness of the responsibilities of public authorities under equality legislation and to assess the extent to which the public had been consulted.

- Nearly **two-thirds (63%)** of respondents were **aware that public authorities have a responsibility** under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act **‘to promote equality of opportunity and good relations** in the ways that they work’.



- A minority of respondents (**15%**) were aware of instances where they had been asked to respond to a consultation about equality of opportunity and good relations by a public authority.

### United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCRPD)

The Equality Commission, along with the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, has been designated as ‘independent mechanism’ under the UNCRPD to promote, protect and monitor implementation of the UNCRPD in Northern Ireland. The question sought to provide a baseline measure regarding awareness of the Convention. Just over **one-fifth (21%) of respondents had heard of the UNCRPD.**

## THE EQUALITY COMMISSION

Respondents were asked a series of questions with regards to the Equality Commission, in particular: awareness of the Commission, its role and responsibilities; and public confidence in the Commission.

### Awareness of the Commission and its role

In summary, awareness of the Commission was similar to 2008 levels.

- In 2011, **28% correctly identified the Equality Commission** as the organisation with overall responsibility for promoting equality and dealing with anti-discrimination laws in Northern Ireland (unprompted). This was similar to 2008 (30%) however this has increased by 17 percentage points since 2005 (11%). The next most common response was the former Equal Opportunities Commission (11%).
- When advised of the function of the Equality Commission, over half (**52%**) indicated that they **had heard of the Equality Commission**, which is similar to the response in 2008 (55%), however a decrease in prompted awareness of 6 percentage points since 2005 (58%).

*Of those who were aware of the Equality Commission (n=577)*

### Knowledge of the role and responsibilities of the Commission

Knowledge of the functions of the Commission has fluctuated, though remained high over time. The Commission’s role in assisting complainants and providing advice was most commonly cited by respondents.

- Almost three quarters (**72%**) indicated they ‘**knew something**’ about the roles and responsibilities of the Commission, compared with 82% in 2008 and 65% in 2005. This is a decrease of 10 percentage points since 2008, however this is an increase of 7 percentage points since 2005.

- When asked to suggest the **main services provided by the Commission** (n=577), the most common response was **supporting people to take cases to tribunal (41%)**. Awareness of this area has doubled since 2008 (20%). The next most common response was providing information and publications (39%), this has tripled from 12% since 2008. Knowledge of the Commission's work to assist employers with workforce monitoring has fallen from 26% in 2008 to 15% in 2011.

### Confidence in the Commission

Overall, **the survey indicates an increase in confidence in the Commission**. This increase was strongest in relation to the Commission as “a valued source of expert advice” (7 percentage points increase), and that the Commission is “respected equally by all sections of the community” (11 percentage points increase).

There was no difference by community background in the confidence levels expressed.

- Two thirds (**65%**) (n=577) had either some or a lot of confidence in the Commission's **ability to promote equality of opportunity for all**, 12% indicated little or no confidence, while 23% did not know. This is similar to the response in 2008 (63%, n=589).
- There was strong agreement that the Commission **provides a valued source of expert advice on equality issues (73%)**, an increase of 7 percentage points since 2008 (66%). 4% disagreed, while 23% were undecided.
- **68%** were either fairly satisfied or very satisfied that the Commission **treats members of the public equally irrespective of their background**, similar to 2008 (64%). 6% were either fairly dissatisfied or very dissatisfied, while 27% were undecided.
- **64%** either agreed or strongly agreed that the Commission **is respected equally by all sections of the community in Northern Ireland**. Support has shown an increase of 11 percentage points since 2008 (53%). 11% either disagreed or strongly disagreed, while 26% were undecided.

### Impacts of economic downturn

A new suite of questions in 2011 sought to explore employment effects of the economic downturn across equality grounds. Respondents were asked about: employment effects as a result of the current economic climate; confidence in the ability to keep their job; and, confidence in the likelihood of finding a job in the event of losing their job.

- **7% (1 in 14)** said that they **had lost their job in the last 12 months as a result of the economic climate**, while over half (54%) indicated they had not. Almost three-tenths (29%) said they had not been working and were not looking for work, while one-tenth (10%) said they had not been working but were looking for work.

- Those more likely to say they had lost their jobs due to the economic downturn were those with a **Limiting Long Term Illness - LLTI** (23%), with a **lower household income** of <£15K (19%), with **post primary or no qualifications** (15% and 12%, respectively) or from a **lower social class** (22%).
- Of those in employment (n=585), almost **one-quarter (24%) had been affected by reduced hours** as a result of the economic climate, while 76% had not been affected.
  - Those more likely to be affected by reduced hours were those with a **LLTI** (47%), from a **lower class** (35%), and those **living in the East** of Northern Ireland (29%).
- **Almost one-third** of those in employment, (32%, n=586) had been **affected by a pay cut or pay freeze** as a result of the economic climate, compared with 68% who had not.
  - Those more likely to be affected by a pay cut or pay freeze as a result of the economic climate were **males** (36%), those with **dependants under 18** (36%), **Roman Catholics** (37%), **Nationalists** (43%), those **married, cohabiting or in a civil partnership** (35%) and those living in **Belfast** (42%).
- **66%** were fairly confident or very **confident in the ability to keep their job in the next 12 months**, while almost **one-quarter (24%) were not** confident.
  - Further analysis suggested that there were no differences between sub-groups regarding confidence in their ability to keep their job.
  - Public **confidence in Northern Ireland is lower than the UK and EU average**, with a respective 77% each saying they were fairly confident or very confident in the ability to keep their job in the next 12 months.
- Opinion was equally divided when asked to indicate the **likelihood of finding a job in the next six months in the event that they lost their job**. Around **1 in 3** (36%) said they were fairly likely or very **likely to find a job** in the next six months in the event that they lost their job, while a **similar proportion** (35%) said they were **not likely to find a job** in the next six months.
  - **Those likely to be confident** in finding a job in the next six months in the event of being laid off work were **lesbian, gay or bisexual** people (82%) and those living in the **East** of Northern Ireland (58%).
  - **Confidence in Northern Ireland regarding finding a job is lower than that of the UK and EU average**, with a respective 51% and 44% saying that they were fairly confident or very confident in finding a job in the event of being laid off work.

Equality Commission

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June 2012