



Commissioner for **Older People**
for Northern Ireland

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RE: Good Relations Indicators Readership Survey 2021

Dear Daniel,

I am writing in response to the *Good Relations Indicators Readership Survey 2021* feedback request, offering the perspective of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland (COPNI).

While COPNI is aware of the rationale for the metrics collected within the survey, and their link to the priorities set out in the *Together: Building a United Community* policy document¹, there are several points I would like to raise that may inform future iterations of the survey to support more effective policy design across government in relation to the needs of older people.

For context, we would highlight that Northern Ireland's population is ageing, with current estimates suggesting that by mid-2027 the number of people aged 65 and over is projected to overtake the number of children.² Despite this growth in our older population, our research and engagement has shown that the voices and experiences of older people are often underrepresented. As a result, it can be difficult to identify the issues most important to older people, and to advocate for societal change without robust evidence. In contrast, if quality wellbeing data on older people was available, this could support effective policy development and offer a rationale for specific interventions on older people's issues.

A focus on data points and outcomes specific to children and young people is something that COPNI sees often. COPNI has raised our concerns of similar age-bias

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[Together Building a United Community \(executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk\)](#)

² [2020-based interim population projections - statistical bulletin \(nisra.gov.uk\)](#)

in our consultation with the Executive Office in the design of their outcomes for the Programme for Government. We believe more should be done to prioritise and track the wellbeing of older people in our society.

The *Good Relations Indicators* report, while not focusing on older people, includes several metrics that if adjusted would allow policymakers and other stakeholders to track the experiences of older people in Northern Ireland over time. For example, the metrics below could offer insight into the overall sense of safety, belonging, and influence that older people have in our society:

- **Indicator 3.2a**, Percentage of people who see town centres as safe and welcoming places for people of all walks of life;
- **Indicator 4.1a**, Percentage who feel a sense of belonging to: their neighbourhood or Northern Ireland; and
- **Indicator 4.1b**, Percentage of people who feel they have an influence on decisions made in: their neighbourhood or Northern Ireland.

In order to better capture the opinions of older people in our society, COPNI would recommend that in future publications these and other indicators (where applicable) be broken down to provide a focus on older people. As Northern Ireland's population ages, monitoring the views of older people will become increasingly important. Tracking these views would provide an evidence base from which policymakers could draw valuable insight on our ageing society. We would therefore request that you assess the feasibility of using your current (or an adjusted) sample to record the experience of older people in these areas and include some narrative on how older people are viewed and view themselves in society. I would welcome any further discussion on our response to your survey.

Best regards

Conor Tinnelly
Policy Advice and Research Unit
Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland