



Department of
Finance
An Roinn
Airgeadais
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DRAFT BUDGET 2025-26

CUMULATIVE EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT



Draft Budget Equality Impact Assessment

Executive Summary

Every budget has the potential to impact equality, whether intentionally or inadvertently and the Executive's Draft Budget 2025-26 is no exception. The allocation of resources, prioritisation of programmes, and implementation of policies within a budget can either reduce or exacerbate existing disparities in society. Thus, it is essential for good budget planning to include an equality assessment, ensuring that decisions are taken with a clear understanding of the potential equality impacts.

When viewed cumulatively, Section 75 groups related to race, age, disability and dependants have the most potential to be adversely impacted by the Draft Budget unless departments take further action to address these areas. In considering their Draft Budget outcome, DfI and DfC have both indicated the potential for significant adverse impact across all nine Section 75 groups.

Introduction

The Executive's Budget sets out the overall allocation of public resources to government departments, providing a strategic framework for public spending. It is a critical tool in shaping how public services and infrastructure are funded, ensuring that resources are distributed in a way that supports economic growth, social well-being, and equality.

This Cumulative Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) considers the high-level equality implications of the Draft Budget proposals for the forthcoming financial year.

Section 75 duties

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (the Act) requires the Department of Finance to comply with two statutory duties:

Section 75(1)

In carrying out its functions relating to Northern Ireland, the Department is required 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.

Section 75(2)

In addition, without prejudice to the obligations above, in carrying out its functions in relation to Northern Ireland, the Department is required to have regard to the desirability of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group.

An Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is therefore used to determine the extent of any potential differential impact of a proposed policy upon the relevant groups and in turn whether that impact is adverse or positive. It is also an opportunity to seek ways to more effectively promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Department of Finance has prepared this draft EQIA document in line with the arrangements set out in DoF's Equality Scheme¹ for the purpose of assisting stakeholders in assessing and considering the potential impacts and opportunities of the Executive's Draft Budget 2025-26.

The Department would like to extend its thanks to the Equality Commission for its advice in the development of this EQIA.

Defining the aims of the policy

The Draft Budget, as agreed by the Executive, provides each department with a proposed spending envelope. Following consultation, a final Budget will be considered and agreed, and it will then be for each Minister to then decide how to allocate funds within their department to meet their priorities.

At this stage, the Draft Budget 2025-26 is necessarily broad in scope, offering a general allocation of funds rather than specifying detailed policies or individual spending decisions. These more granular decisions, which often determine the precise impact on individuals and communities, are made by departments as they design and implement specific policies and programs in light of Budget allocations. As such, this EQIA does not attempt to fully predict or assess the equality implications of future departmental decisions, which will themselves be subject to further detailed analysis and consultation, including their own EQIA processes.

Instead, this assessment takes a cumulative approach, focusing on the overall equality impact of the Budget at the strategic level. It considers how the distribution of resources across departments and sectors aligns with equality of

¹ [Updated Equality Scheme following 2021-22 review.pdf](#)

opportunity and good relations, including obligations under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

By taking this approach, the EQIA aims to identify potential areas of risk or opportunity for promoting equality in the Budget's overall structure. This allows policymakers to consider equality at the earliest stages of financial planning, ensuring that the high-level allocation of resources contributes to a fairer and more inclusive society.

Consideration of available data and research

The Budget, in providing a strategic framework for public spending, acts to support the priorities outlined by the Executive in its draft Programme for Government 'Our Plan: Doing what matters most'². The draft Equality Impact Assessment published for consultation alongside the draft Programme for Government includes high-level data providing a snapshot of where possible inequalities may exist for each of the Section 75 groups. Similarly, an EQIA was published for consultation alongside the draft Investment Strategy for Northern Ireland in 2022 considering inequalities across Section 75 groups in relation to infrastructure investment.

Due to the overarching nature of the Draft Budget and the fact that it underpins the Programme for Government and ISNI, the comprehensive data presented in both these EQIAs is relevant to this equality impact assessment. These EQIAs are available at:

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/PFG-Documents>

<https://isni.gov.uk/strategy/eqia-consultation/>

The Executive published its draft Programme for Government 2024-27 on 9 September. The consultation closed on 4 November. The timing means that the Programme for Government (PfG) may be finalised during the Draft Budget consultation period. Further work will be carried out to align the PfG priorities with the final Budget 2025-26 as described in the Budget Sustainability Plan.

² [Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'- Documents | Northern Ireland Executive](#)

Assessment of impacts

In reaching any decisions on the final Budget it is important to have due regard for equality of opportunity and the promotion of good relations. This section provides a cumulative picture of the potential impacts of the Draft Budget on each Section 75 group.

The requests for funding submitted by departments during the budget process far outweigh the funding available to the Executive. The Budget will therefore require Ministers to make decisions around what can and cannot be progressed within their final allocation. As these decisions lie with individual Ministers this EQIA does not attempt to presume what those decisions might be. Rather, the strategic aim of assessing the cumulative equality impacts at this point, before Ministers take decisions on allocations, is to consider how the broad spending envelopes allocated to each department may potentially impact on equality of opportunity across all Section 75 groups. Each department will, in due course and in line with their Equality Schemes, publish their own screenings and individual Equality Impact Assessments where appropriate.

Tables 1 and 2 shows the potential equality impact of the Draft Budget allocations across all departments³ for each of the Section 75 groups.⁴ The tables below are coded with Red Amber Green and Blue Status where red represents major adverse impacts, amber represents minor adverse impacts, green represents no impact and blue represents positive impacts.

³ The Equality Commission NI has previously confirmed FSA are not a designated body for the purposes of Section 75. FSA has therefore been excluded from this analysis.

⁴ Religious Belief, Political Opinion, Racial Group, Age, Marital Status, Sexual Orientations, Men & Women, Disability, Dependants and Good Relations.

Table 1. Draft Budget equality impact assessment (Resource Budget)

Department	Religious Belief	Political Opinion	Racial Group	Age	Marital Status	Sexual Orientation	Men & Women	Disability	Dependants	Good Relations
DAERA										
DfC										
DfE										
DE										
DoF										
DoH										
DfI										
DoJ										
TEO										
Non-Ministerial Departments										

Table 2. Draft Budget equality impact assessment (Capital Budget)

Department	Religious Belief	Political Opinion	Racial Group	Age	Marital Status	Sexual Orientation	Men & Women	Disability	Dependants	Good Relations
DAERA										
DfC										
DfE										
DE										
DoF										
DoH										
DfI										
DoJ										
TEO										
Non-Ministerial Departments										

Department synopsis

Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

For DAERA, potential equality impacts are complex given the relationships and patterns with religious belief, sectorial employment and geographic location across Northern Ireland. The impacts will also be dependent on the policies and actions chosen, developed and implemented by other relevant departments going forward in the future to meet the requirements of the Climate Change Act and Green Growth Strategy. The proposed Budget outcome for the Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs therefore has the potential to create minor adverse impacts all Section 75 groups but this will require more in-depth consideration as policy proposals in these areas are being developed.

Communities

Although the Draft Budget outcome is an increase on the 2024-25 position, it presents a difficult funding scenario for the Department for Communities with the potential for difficult measures to be taken to remain within the spending envelope. The Department has noted that the majority of these measures may have adverse impacts on all Section 75 groups, particularly those who fall within several categories. DfC has produced reports which provide more detail on inequalities and Section 75 impacts.⁵

Economy

Whilst the Draft Budget outcome for the Department for the Economy represents an increase on the 2024-25 position it is not sufficient to achieve the Department's vision for 2025-26 and may require the Department and partner organisations to take measures that have the potential to adversely impact upon a range of Section 75 groups, particularly age, marital status, men and women generally, people with a disability and people with dependants.

Education

Given the breadth of Education's impact across our society, the Draft Budget outcome should be expected to have an impact on all Section 75 categories, either directly or indirectly, with the most significant impact upon children with disabilities or in ethnic minority groups. The Department also notes that there are potentially minor adverse impact on good relations and the Section 75 groups of people of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group, if funding to specific sectoral bodies is impacted.

⁵ For example [Northern Ireland Welfare Supplementary Payment and Discretionary Support Schemes](#)

Finance

The Department of Finance has identified no direct adverse impacts on Section 75 groups. However, the majority of DoF's services are provided to other NICS departments so there may be indirect impacts which the Department would not be able to quantify.

Health

The proposed Budget outcome will enable the Department of Health to meet recurrent commitments including those in relation to 2024-25 pay. However, it will have serious consequences for Health and meeting 2025-26 commitments such as inflationary pressures on goods and services and increasing demands for example in family led services. Whilst the overall budget is increasing, it may still require the implementation of a range of measures to reduce spending in certain areas. The Budget outcome for Health will therefore potentially impact more upon older and younger people, persons with a disability, persons with dependants as these groups are generally disproportionately high users of health services compared to other groups. It is extremely difficult to fully mitigate the potential adverse impacts on Section 75 groups or provide alternatives given the scale of the funding gap. Further work will be required to determine the allocation of funding to priority areas and the resulting impact on equality.

Infrastructure

The proposed Budget outcome for the Department for Infrastructure, based on high-level initial assessments, does go some way towards meeting the Department's highest priority measures, but still results in a shortfall of funding, similar to other departments. Further work is underway to fully assess the equality impact of the budget outcome, however based on the initial high-level assessments there could be potential adverse impacts on all Section 75 groups.

Justice

Although funding availability may impact on the pace of delivery of policies and reforms and there are indicators that some Departmental policies may impact on particular sections of the population more than others, no major detrimental impacts have been identified as a result of the 2025-26 proposed Budget allocations.

Executive Office

The majority of The Executive Office's outward-facing programmes and arms length bodies are involved in work to address Section 75 inequalities or promote

good relations. Whilst the Draft Budget has earmarked funding for specific purposes, such as HIA, Victims Payments and Truth Recovery, there remains a risk of potential adverse impact on Section 75 categories, whether in terms of salaries, programme expenditure, or other high-priority capital expenditure.

Non-ministerial departments

Due to the nature of the services provided by the non-ministerial departments there are no expected adverse impacts across the Section 75 groups associated with the Draft Budget outcome.

Impact on Section 75 groups

Assessing the cumulative equality impact of the Executive's Budget is crucial because it provides a holistic understanding of how funding decisions affect different groups in society. While individual departmental assessments can identify localised impacts, they often fail to capture the broader, interconnected effects of budgetary policies on Section 75 groups. For example, cuts in healthcare may disproportionately affect low-income families, while reductions in education funding could simultaneously limit opportunities for the same group, compounding disadvantage in areas such as age, and dependants. A cumulative approach ensures that these overlapping impacts are identified, promoting the opportunity for a more equitable distribution of resources and mitigating systemic inequalities.

Moreover, a cumulative equality assessment aligns with the principles of fairness and inclusivity, which are central to our equality framework. By evaluating the Budget as a whole, policymakers can better ensure compliance with Section 75 equality legislation which mandates the promotion of equality of opportunity. This approach also fosters public confidence, as it demonstrates a commitment to transparent, evidence-based decision-making.

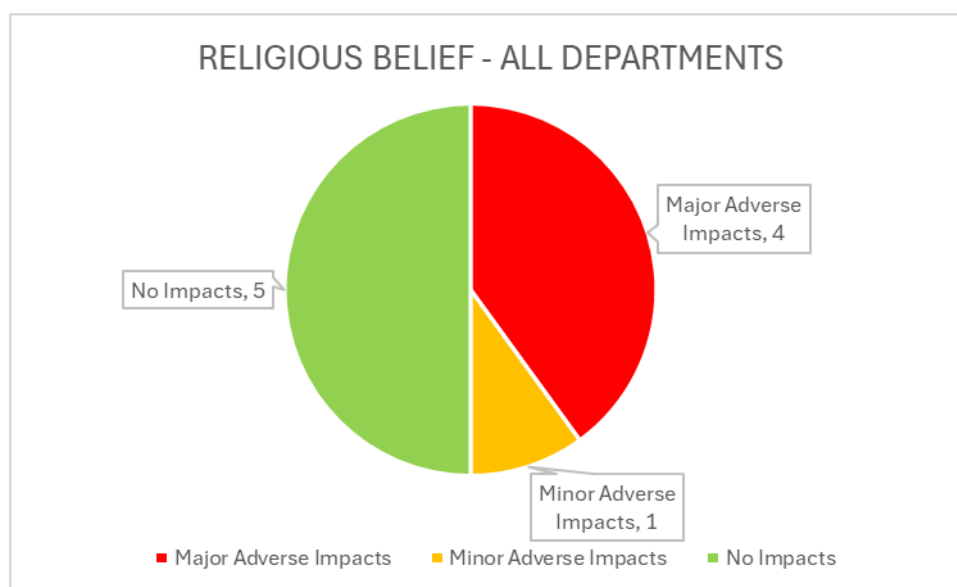
The following section examines the potential for the Draft Budget to have cumulative impacts on each Section 75 group. For the purposes of this section, the non-ministerial departments have been amalgamated.

The Charts below are set out with Red Amber Green and Blue Status where red represents major adverse impacts, amber represents minor adverse impacts, green represents no impact and blue represents positive impacts.

Religious Belief

Census 2021 data shows that 42% people here have Catholic religious belief, 37% Protestant, 1% other, and 19% no religion / religion not stated. Chart 1 shows the potential impacts of the Draft Budget on this group.

Chart 1. Potential impact on persons with different religious beliefs (RDEL)⁶



DE has noted potential adverse impacts upon the good relations categories of people of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial groups, if funding to specific sectoral bodies or shared education is affected. DfC has indicated that as people identifying as Roman Catholic are over-represented in deprived areas and also account for almost half of the applicants for Discretionary Support grants. Furthermore, the DfI Audit of Inequalities cites anecdotal evidence that religious belief may have some relevance in the provision of public transport services, particularly in respect of safety. As such there is potential for this group to be adversely affected by any budget decisions that may impact on delivery of grants and benefits or public transport.

DAERA notes a potential for minor adverse impact as within agriculture, forestry and fishing sectors, 65% of employees were Protestant and 35% Catholic.⁷ Changes to these sectors therefore may have the potential to disproportionately impact on this group.

⁶ For the purposes of these charts, all non-ministerial departments are combined into one segment.

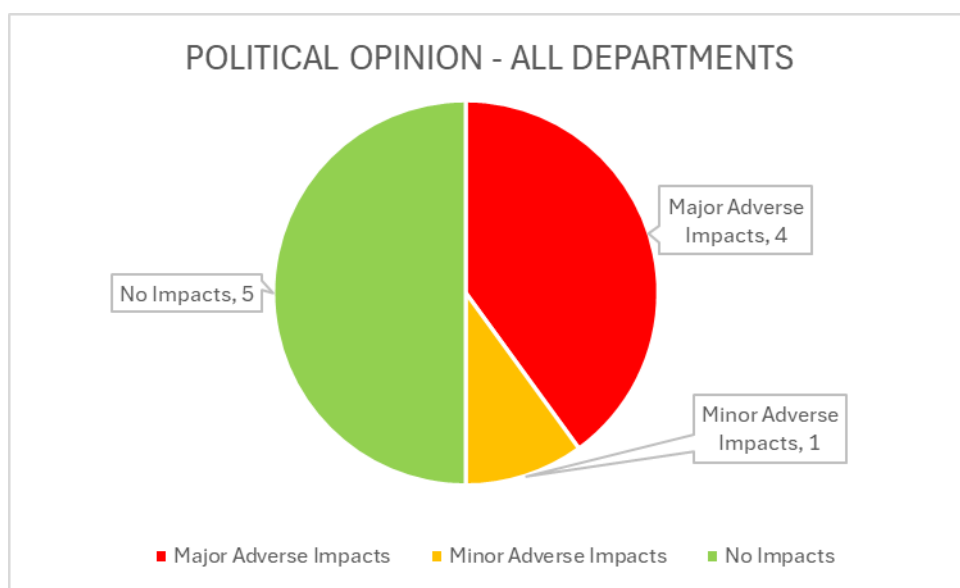
⁷ [Labour Force Survey Religion Reports | The Executive Office](#)

Political Opinion

There is an absence of data on political opinion, however it is often noted that political opinion will often correlate closely with religious belief. It is therefore considered that potential impact on groups of different religious belief may also impact upon those of differing political opinion for the same reasons as noted above.

In Census 2021, 814,600 people (42.8%) living here identified solely or along with other national identities as 'British'. This is down from 876,600 people (48.4%) in 2011. The Census also found, 634,600 people (33.3%) living here identified solely or along with other national identities as 'Irish'. This is up from 513,400 people (28.4%) in 2011. Finally, the Census 2021, identified 598,800 people (31.5%) living here as solely or along with other national identities 'Northern Irish'. This is up from 533,100 people (29.4%) in 2011.

Chart 2. Potential impact on persons of different political opinion (RDEL)

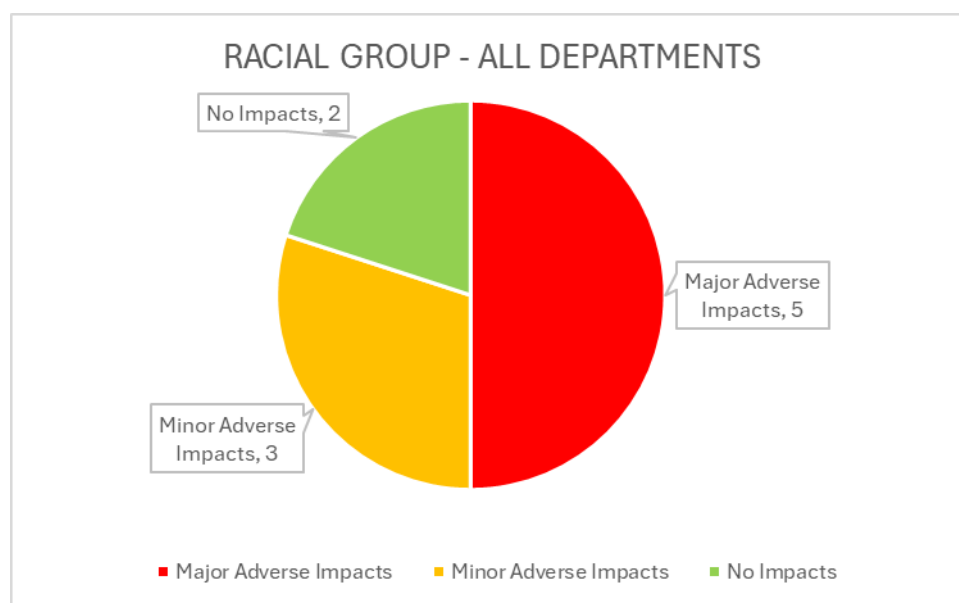


DE has noted potential adverse impacts upon the good relations categories of people of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial groups, if funding to specific sectoral bodies or shared education is affected. DfI has noted that financial challenges for Translink may impact on the delivery of public transport services and the ongoing historic regional imbalance of public transport provision can also impact on political opinion, particularly in the Northwest.

Racial Group

Census 2021 data shows that 92% of the population are white (British/Irish/Northern Irish only and Christian/no religion/religion not stated), 5% are white (other) and 3% are of non-white ethnicity.

Chart 3. Potential impact on persons of different racial groups (RDEL)



DfC notes that the intersectionality of gendered poverty compounds its impact on women with other marginalised identities. Black women, for instance, face higher odds of being single parents and working low-wage jobs. Additionally, households belonging to Black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities are more likely to have dependant children and larger families, making them more susceptible to changes in the delivery of Universal Credit.⁸ Compounding this is the DfI Audit of Inequalities which highlighted evidence that asylum seekers and migrant workers may be more heavily reliant on public transport, citing evidence that a high proportion of this cohort is reliant on benefits or employed in low-paid jobs. The potential combined effect of budget decisions on benefit delivery and public transport may compound the potential for adverse impacts on this group. Furthermore, children and young people experiencing educational disadvantage, including those in minority ethnic groups, have the potential to be adversely impacted by decisions affecting DfE's Further Education allocations and DE's Resource and Capital Budget outcomes.

There is also recognition that those within the BAME community face particular challenges with mental health and accessing mental health services. The risk of

⁸ <https://policyinpractice.co.uk/we-can-do-better-women-welfare-and-the-gender-benefits-gap/>

certain illnesses, for example stroke, is also significantly worse for some racial groups. Funding of DoH services may therefore have an impact for those in different racial groups.

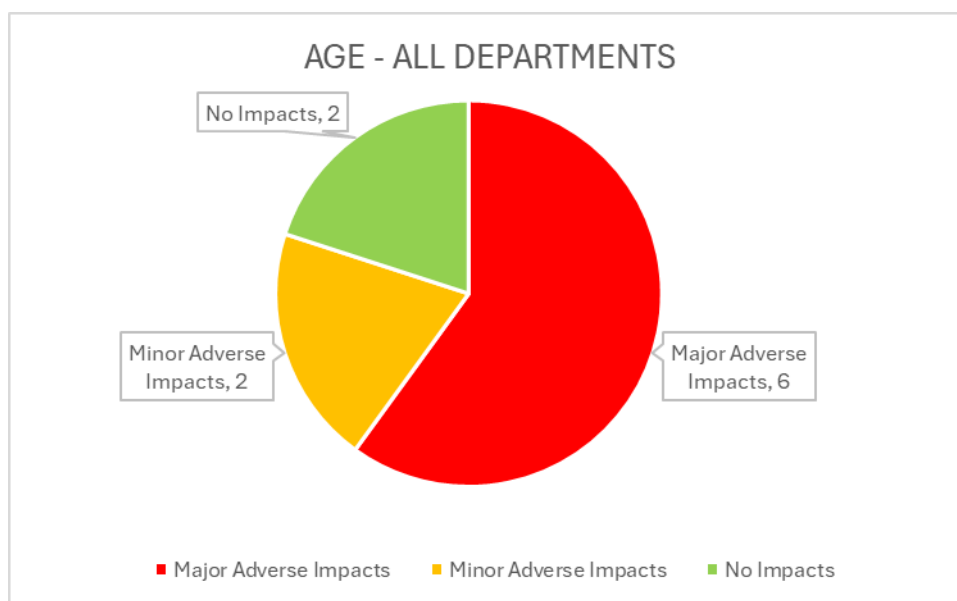
As hate crimes are often targeted at ethnic minorities there is scope for racial groups to be impacted by any resource constraints for the Department of Justice. For example, during recent riots where ethnic minorities were under threat, PSNI requested additional police officers from elsewhere in the UK under mutual aid arrangements. The Executive Office also note that there is potential for adverse impact on this group as a result of funding constraints.

DAERA notes the potential for minor adverse impact on all Section 75 groups across potential future actions and policies, however through inclusive collaboration and collation of racial group evidence any potential impact can be identified and managed as the strategy develops, by making appropriate changes to the strategy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures.

Age

Census 2021 data shows that 20% of the population were aged 0-15, 30% are aged 16-39, 32% are aged 40-64 and 17% are aged 65 and over.

Chart 4. Potential impact on persons of different age (RDEL)



Age is the one of the most significantly impacted Section 75 group across all departments, with younger and older people potentially being disproportionately impacted upon. As these groups are disproportionately high users of health services, the Draft Budget outcome for Health shows potential major impacts for these groups across a range of measures including a reduction in waiting list activity, restrictions on the use of new drugs and therapies, and Mental Health reform.

The Draft Budget outcome for Education represents an increase on the 2024-25 position however it is unlikely to meet all pressures, adversely impacting on children and, in particular, children with disabilities or in ethnic minority groups. Likewise, with three-quarters of DfE's budget dedicated to the delivery of Education and Skills, not appropriately funding DfE has the potential to significantly impact on the lives of young people. There are no easy options that will not be a setback for the economy and the lives of our citizens resulting in a scarring impact into their economic futures. Workforce skills are essential for a healthy and growing economy. In addition, any DfI budget decisions around the provision of public transport may compound any adverse impacts on children and young people who make the majority of their trips by bus, to get to school or college, leisure facilities and work.

The Draft Budget for Communities has the potential to adversely impact on a range of age groups include people of working age due to the Department's role in Universal Credit delivery, young people who avail of Employment Support interventions and Discretionary Support grants, and older people and young people who rely on services provided by the local charitable sector funded by the department. The Department's Audit of Inequalities⁹ provides more detail and these impacts will need further consideration as policy decisions are made following the Budget allocation.

Also, within DoJ for example, the Youth Justice Agency deals specifically with young people and the largest proportion of the prison population is men aged 30-39. Following the overall Budget allocations, any decisions that impact upon funding for these areas may have differing impacts across the age groupings. These will need further consideration following the final Budget allocations.

DAERA's 'Equality Indicators for Northern Ireland Farmers' report¹⁰ states that in 2018 the average age of farmers in Northern Ireland was 59 years. Furthermore, actions as a result of the Green Growth Strategy for example may be experienced differently depending on age. As a result, there may be potential for minor impact on this group as future policies are developed however as policy proposals are subject to public consultation any impact will be considered at that stage.

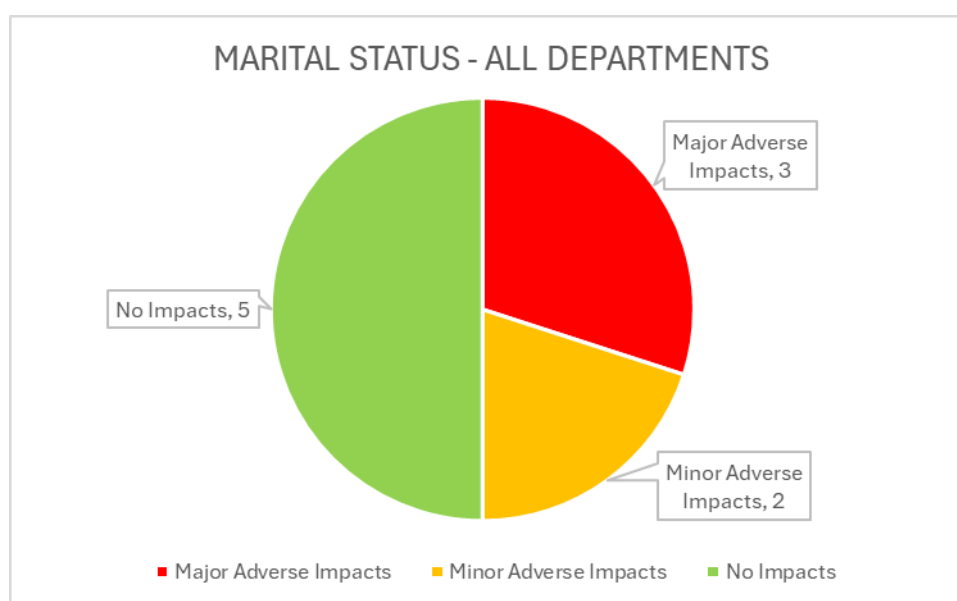
⁹ [DfC Audit of Inequalities 2021-2022 | Department for Communities](#)

¹⁰ [Update of Equality \(Section 75\) Indicators for Farmers | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

Marital Status

Census 2021 data shows that 36% of the population are single (never married or never registered a civil partnership), 48% are married or in a civil partnership, 4% are separated (but still legally married or still legally in a civil partnership), 6% are divorced or formally in a civil partnership which is now legally dissolved and 6% are widowed or surviving partners from a civil partnership.

Chart 5. Potential impact on persons of different marital status (RDEL)



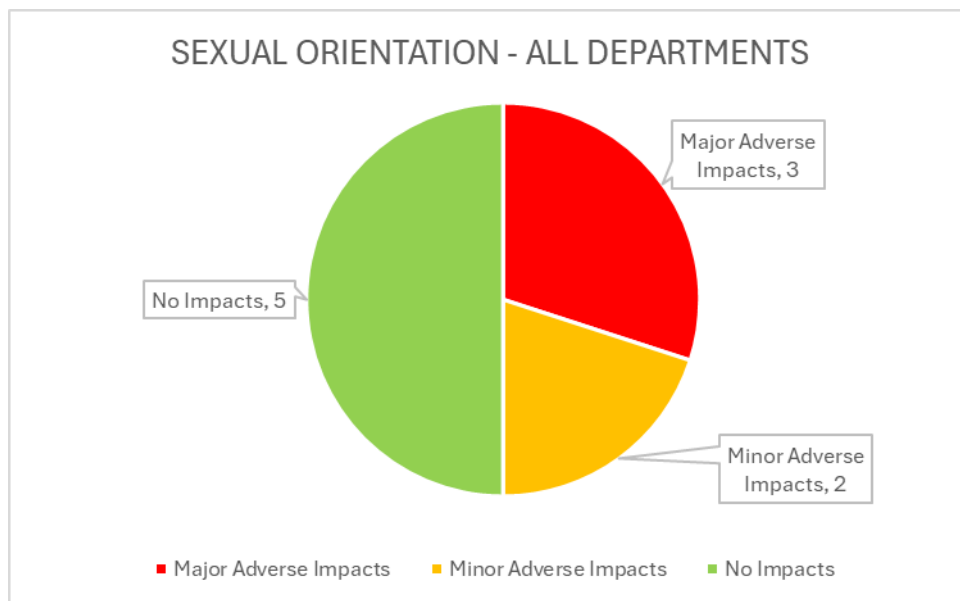
Major impact on persons of differing marital status may occur across 3 departments, the most significant impact being DfC with responsibility for the delivery of benefits and discretionary grant support. In the DfC report detailing Section 75 statistics for Discretionary Support claims¹¹ from August 2021 to March 2023, 71% of the applicants identified as single. Women particularly unmarried/single mothers, rely more heavily on benefits as part of their income, rendering them vulnerable to decisions concerning benefit provision. Nearly half of children in lone-parent families live in poverty, compared with 1 in 4 of those in couple families. Of the working-age adults, lone parents are by far the most likely of any family type to be struggling with poverty. Furthermore, as single parents are more likely to be on benefits and make a higher percentage of journeys by walking, cycling or more public transport, DfI's Budget position and subsequent decisions may compound this impact.

¹¹ [Northern Ireland Welfare Supplementary Payment and Discretionary Support Schemes](#)

Sexual Orientation

Census 2021 data showed that 90% of the population identified as straight/heterosexual, 2% identified gay, lesbian, bisexual, or other sexual orientation and 7% preferred not to say/not stated.

Chart 6. Potential impact on persons of different sexual orientation (RDEL)



The absence of appropriate data makes it difficult to determine impacts of strategic level Budget allocations on this group, however DfC notes that some available research would suggest that bisexual women are more likely to claim disability-related benefits than their heterosexual counterparts, and gay and bisexual men are more likely to claim work-related benefits than their heterosexual counterparts.¹² DoH also note limited data in respect of sexual orientation and health outcomes, though people from LGBTQI+ groups can suffer more harm in respect of issues like substance use. This group may be adversely impacted by decisions affecting the delivery of benefits and health strategies.

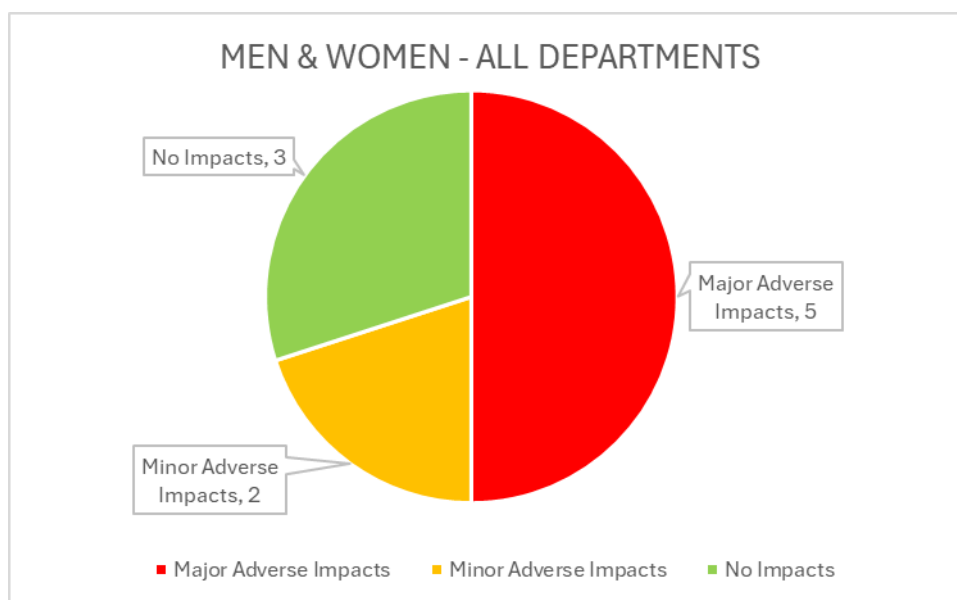
DfI indicates that that LGBTQI+ people living in a rural area were three times as likely not to access services they are aware of because it is too far to travel compared to those living in an urban area. Seven in every eight LGBTQI+ people living in a rural area feel that it is important to have access to an LGBTQI+ support service in their local area. Any decisions therefore regarding the delivery of public transport may have disproportionate impacts on this group.

¹² <https://lgbtqwelfare.stir.ac.uk/2022/12/08/lgb-access-to-welfare-benefits/>

Men and Women Generally

Census 2021 data indicates 51% of the population are female and 49% are male.

Chart 7. Potential impact on men and women generally (RDEL)



Within the Health and Social Care sector, 80% of employees were female. Should a pay freeze or pay rise lower than that implemented in England be required under the DoH proposed Budget outcome, this would have a differential impact on women.

Women also make up the majority of benefit claimants and experience higher rates of poverty than men for a variety of reasons. DfC therefore raises the potential for women to experience adverse impacts as a result of a constrained Resource allocation. Similarly, DfE notes that as of April 2022 the largest proportion (85%) of individuals enrolled in Apprenticeships are in the age group 16 to 24 years and the majority (64%) of these individuals enrolled are male. The implication is that any budget decisions that affect apprenticeship funding would impact mostly on males aged between 16 and 24 years old.

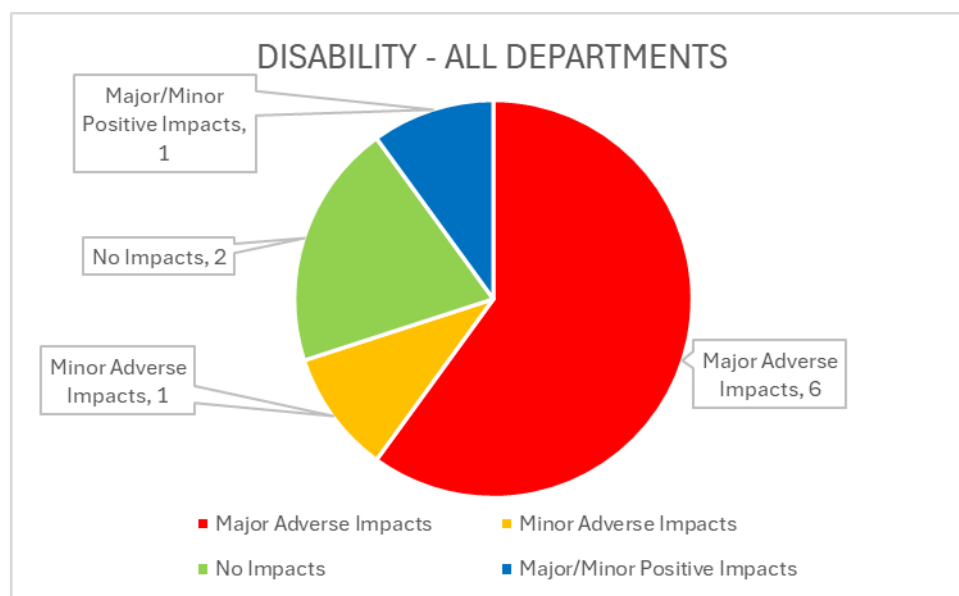
The NI Rural Women's Network note that women are much less likely to have access to their own private transport than men. This means that women depend much more on public transport, creating the potential for adverse impact on this group.

Within the Department of Justice, different policy decisions will have differing impacts on men and women generally, for example the majority of the prison population, Youth Justice Agency referrals and Probation Board service users are male, whereas women are victims in the majority of domestic abuse offences. Impacts on these groups will need further consideration when policies are further developed.

Disability

Census 2021 data shows that 24% of the population live with a disability and 76% without.

Chart 8. Potential impact on persons with or without a disability (RDEL)



DoH has raised a number of concerns in this area including potential for a reduction in funding for enhanced GP services, reduced vaccination programmes and reduced community support services. As people with disabilities are high service users across a range of health services it is likely that any measures taken may result in adverse impact.

Similarly, DE also raised issues that may create inequalities of opportunity for people with disabilities. For example any decisions that may be required around the provision of school transport, with 44% of transport currently required for children with special educational needs may have adverse impact, as would a continued pause of the youth capital programme which ranks projects the ensure that young people with disabilities and those experiencing socio-economic deprivation are prioritised.

Disabled people face a higher risk of poverty with the difference being particularly stark for working-age adults, with those who have a disability more than twice as likely to live in poverty than those who are not. DfC has noted that any decisions that affect the ability to process and pay disability benefit or discretionary support grants will disproportionately impact on individuals with a disability. In addition, any risk to the financial viability of the DfC's Employment Support services will similarly adversely impact on this group, a concern as NI has the highest levels

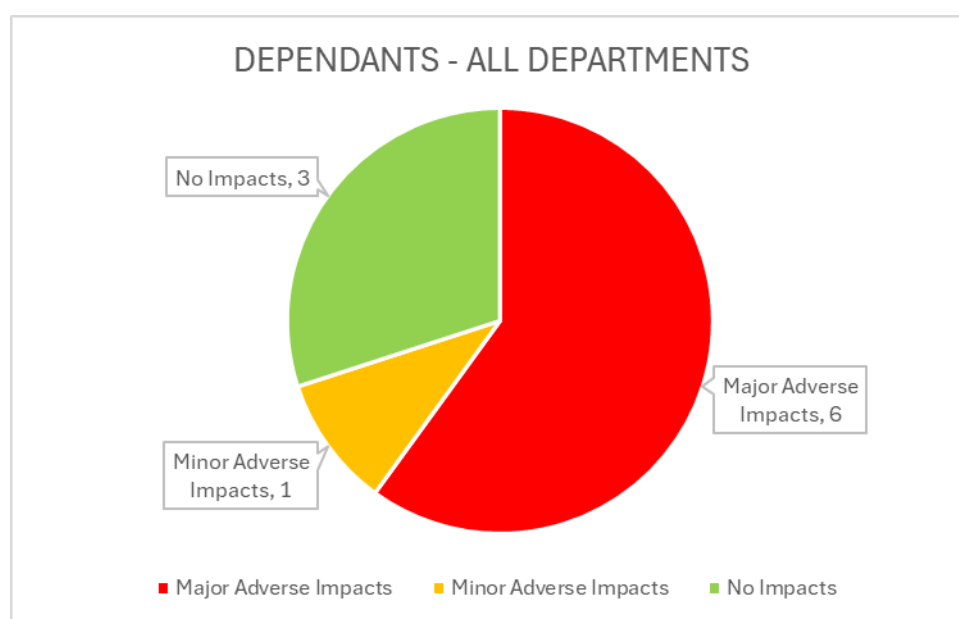
of economic inactivity and the largest disability employment gap in the UK. As young people with disabilities are five times more likely to be Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) than their non-disabled peers, DfE notes that divesting in appropriate further and higher education, skills and training for young people with disabilities or special educational needs would have adverse impacts on this group including in accessing employment.

Across other departments, DoJ notes a potential positive impact on people with disabilities through continued registered intermediary provision. This will help assess how service users with disabilities can be better supported in the civil and family courts and will help inform future policy development in this area. DfI's funding for roads, including active travel and roads maintenance is at risk of being funded at 2024-25 levels which may have adverse impacts on people with a disability. DAERA also note that people with a disability experience climate change impacts differently and more severely than others. Their ability to adapt to future changes in our lifestyles, employment, transportation and new technology, which will be required to achieve net zero, may vary significantly. Equality impacts will be assessed further and mitigation measures employed where appropriate as the Green Growth strategy develops.

Dependency Status

Census 2021 data shows that 69% of the population live in households with dependant children and 31% have a household with one or more dependant children.

Chart 9. Potential impact on persons with or without dependants (RDEL)



DfC has raised a number of issues in this area, as high levels of poverty are more likely to be experienced by people with dependants. Any inability of the Department to process benefits to people with dependants, including for example child maintenance payments, would have adverse impacts on this group.

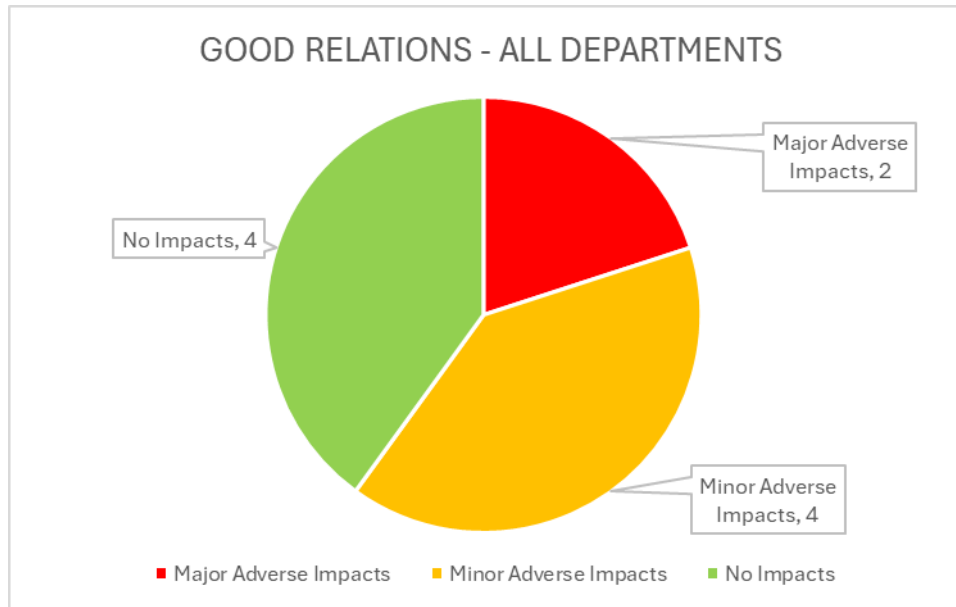
Also, as discussed earlier, DoH has noted a number of concerns of adverse impact on children and older people and these issues equally affect people with dependants. Similarly DfI raises concerns around roads-related funding and potential impacts on people with dependants.

DE's Early Learning and Childcare Strategy is a high priority for the Executive and is included within the Programme for Government. Although the Draft Budget 2025-26 does provide an uplift on the 2024-25 position, there remains potential that if this spending area is not fully funded at the level required in 2025-26 there may be adverse impacts on those with dependants.

The DfE Skill Strategy aims to address the skills imbalances in the NI economy, and any budgetary decision that adversely affects this funding will likely have an adverse impact on those farthest from employment, including those on low income and with dependants.

Good Relations

Chart 10. Potential impact on good relations (RDEL)



DfC and TEO have indicated potential major adverse impact on good relations, due to the potential impact of the Draft Budget outcome on all good relations categories, i.e. people of different religious beliefs, political opinion or racial group, and noted in the previous sections.

A number of other departments have also noted potential for minor adverse impacts. DE notes that if funding to specific sectoral bodies was impacted or if funding to promote integrated and shared education was reduced, there is potential for adverse impact but these will be considered in more detail as the budget process progresses and policies are developed further in line with final allocations. Similarly, DoH notes that the potential minor adverse impact on good relations relates more to differing racial groups having greater need for certain health services, rather than impact between racial groups. Infrastructure has a role to play in removing barriers and creating opportunities for interaction and engagement between communities, DfI therefore raises a concern that any budget decision that may affect service delivery may have adverse impact on good relations. DfE has highlighted that not investing in Regional Growth would impact good relations. Our whole economy faces a number of challenges, and these disparities are even more pronounced at a sub-regional level. By not providing appropriate funding it could impact DfE's ability to collaborate and work to tackle this disparity and improve relations across the region.

In terms of capital budgets, two departments have noted the potential for positive impact on good relations categories. DAERA notes that there are opportunities to promote good relations through inclusive stakeholder engagement and collaborative partnerships at local, national and international levels. DfI similarly note the role of infrastructure in removing barriers and creating opportunities for interaction and engagement between communities, should adequate capital funding be provided.

Mitigating measures

At this stage it is difficult to identify overarching mitigating measures as part of the Draft Budget, as individual Ministers will make further decisions on the allocation of spending envelopes within each department. As such, mitigating measures are more acutely considered when the specific policies and more granular detail is made available.

At an overarching level, the Executive has provided earmarked funding for specific programmes as part of the budget process. In doing so, these programmes and policies received an allocation before other general allocations were made. Earmarked funding has been designated to additional welfare reform mitigations, housing benefit rates rebate, debt advice, childcare, benefit delivery and ending violence against women and girls. This earmarked funding is anticipated to positively impact Section 75 groups.

Consultation

The Draft Budget 2025-26 is open for public consultation until 13 March 2025. You can respond to the consultation via [2025-26 Draft Budget consultation](#).

This EQIA is designed to inform on the potential equality impacts of the Draft Budget. As policy development is taken forward by individual Ministers, departments will provide more detailed screenings and EQIAs to consider the impacts of those policy decisions. These will be published by individual departments and in line with their Equality Schemes.

Decision making and publication

A final Budget for 2025-26 will be considered and agreed by the Executive, taking account of the responses to the consultation.

Monitoring

The 2025-26 Budget will be reviewed by departments throughout the 2025-26 financial year and will be subject to In-Year Monitoring Rounds where Ministers will be able to raise specific concerns and bid for additional funding to further address issues within their departments.

List of data sources

Draft Programme for Government

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/newnigov/draft-programme-for-government-our-plan-doing-what-matters-most.pdf>

Draft Programme for Government EQIA

<https://www.northernireland.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/newnigov/impact-assessment-draft-equality-impact-assessment-eqia.pdf>

Investment Strategy EQIA

<https://isni.gov.uk/app/uploads/2022/01/Draft-Equality-Impact-Assessment.pdf>

DfC - Section 75 statistics November 2017 to March 2023

[Northern Ireland Welfare Supplementary Payment and Discretionary Support Schemes](#)

Equality Commission Guidance

<https://www.equalityni.org/Employers-Service-Providers/Public-Authorities/Section75/Section-75/Implementing-S75>

DOF Equality Scheme

[Updated Equality Scheme following 2021-22 review.pdf](#)

TEO – Labour Force Survey Religion Reports

[Labour Force Survey Religion Reports | The Executive Office](#)

NI Rural Women's Network Manifesto

<https://www.nirwn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NIRWN-Rural-Womens-Manifesto.pdf>

DfC - Audit of Inequalities 2021-2022

[DfC Audit of Inequalities 2021-2022 | Department for Communities](#)

DAERA - Equality (Section 75) Indicators

[Update of Equality \(Section 75\) Indicators for Farmers | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#)

Policy in Practice Gender Benefits Gap

<https://policyinpractice.co.uk/we-can-do-better-women-welfare-and-the-gender-benefits-gap/>

LBG Access to Welfare Benefits – University of Stirling

<https://lgbtqwelfare.stir.ac.uk/2022/12/08/lgb-access-to-welfare-benefits/>



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