

Older People in Northern Ireland: Report 5: Older People in the Republic of Ireland

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This is the fifth of a series of reports and fact sheets to be published in 2004/5 on the needs and circumstances of older people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The research has been funded by Atlantic Philanthropies. Previous reports are:

- Report 1: Setting the scene (November 2004)
- Report 2: Financial circumstances (December 2004)
- Report 3: Health and wellbeing (March 2005)
- Report 4: The Angry Generation (May 2005)

Copies of these reports are available online at
<http://www.governance.qub.ac.uk/olderpeople.html>

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Introduction

This is our fifth and final report in a series of publications relating to the needs and circumstances of older people. The first four reports focussed on Northern Ireland. We commenced with a broad overview of the position of older people in this part of the United Kingdom. The second report dealt with income and poverty amongst persons of pensionable age. This was followed by a review of data relating to the health of older people and their caring responsibilities. In the fourth report we looked at the special pressures and sources of strain facing those aged between 50 years and pensionable age. To round off the project, in this report we look at data relating to older people in the Republic of Ireland to enable some comparison to be made of the positions north and south.

How many older people are there in the Republic of Ireland?

In Northern Ireland 15.89% of the population is of pensionable age. Table 1 indicates that the position in the Republic is slightly different with 13.14% being in this category. As would be expected there is a sharp variation by gender and the majority of pensioners (63.1%) are women.

Table 1: Estimated population of pensionable age, Republic of Ireland, 2003

	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	N	%
60-64 years			79,800	3.99	79,800	2.01
65-69 years	66,100	3.34	69,200	3.46	135,300	3.40
70-74 years	53,100	2.69	60,500	3.02	113,600	2.86
75-79 years	37,400	1.89	52,300	2.61	89,700	2.25
80-84 years	23,300	1.18	38,300	1.91	61,600	1.55
85+ years	13,000	0.66	29,800	1.49	42,800	1.08
All pensioners	192,900	9.76	329,900	16.48	522,800	13.14
Total population	1,977,200		2,001,700		3,978,900	

Source: Population Estimates, 2003, Central Statistics Office

How long can people in the Republic expect to live?

Table 2 indicates the gains made - which parallel closely those that have occurred in Northern Ireland - over the past fifty years with regard to life expectancy. It can be noted that life expectancy amongst women at birth has increased by eleven years over the past half century. The gains made by males have been rather more modest, however. What perhaps stands out from the table is the length of time over which change has occurred. In our first report we discussed the alarmist tone which surrounds much of the pensions debate which is suggestive of sudden change and crisis. In practice, as the table indicates, change occurs more gradually giving time for thought and preparation.

Table 2: Life expectancy by gender and selected years

	Life expectancy at ...			
	Birth		Age 65 years	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
1950-52	64.5	67.1	12.1	13.3
1970-72	68.8	73.5	12.4	15.0
1990-92	72.3	77.9	13.4	17.1
1995-7	73.0	78.5	13.8	17.4

Source: Central Statistics Office, 2003

How many older people will there be in the future?

Table 3 indicates that it is projected that the number of older people will rise as a proportion of the population from 13.1% in 2001 to 23.4% in 2036. Whilst there is a tendency in some circles to view such projections with deep anxiety and to predict grave consequences for, for example, health care systems, there is a need for caution in thinking about the implications of these figures. Older people today are fitter and healthier than they were 20 or 30 years ago. Older people in 30 years time may well be healthier than older people today. It cannot be assumed that the need for health care will rise directly in line with a growing number of older people. Clearly extra demand will come from the increase in the number of persons aged 85 years or over who are those most likely to need substantial care, but they will account for only 2.8% of the total population in 2036.

Table 3: Projected population (000s)

	2001	2021	2036
60/65-74 years	318.4	571.3	775.7
75-84 years	146.8	231.1	391.9
85+ years	40.4	74.7	158.5
Total older population	505.6	877.1	1326.1
Total population	3847.2	5069.9	5668.7
Older persons as a % of total population	13.14	17.30	23.39

Note: based on current demographic trends (M1F2); Source: Central Statistics Office, 2004

Table 4 indicates that the excess of births over deaths in the Republic is the highest in the British Isles.

Table 4: Components of population change

	000s		
	Births	Deaths	Natural change
England	560.5	497.0	63.5
Republic of Ireland (2003)	61.5	28.8	32.7
Northern Ireland	21.5	14.2	7.2
Wales	30.1	32.8	-2.7
Scotland	51.2	57.3	-6.1

Source: ONS, Regional Trends, 2004; Central Statistics Office, Database Direct

How many older people have partners to help and support them?

Table 5 indicates the consequences for women of their greater longevity: they are less likely to have a partner in their later years and will therefore be more at risk of living alone. Data for 2002 indicate that 21.4% of males aged 65 years or more in private households lived alone compared with 33.9% of females aged 65 years or more in private households. For those aged 75 years or over, the figures rise to 26.1% for males and 42.7% for females.

Table 5: Marital status by gender and age

	%					
	Males			Females		
	65-74	75+	All pensioners	60-74	75+	All pensioners
Married/remarried	68.5	53.4	62.8	57.4	19.5	43.5
Widowed	8.8	23.5	14.4	26.8	62.1	39.7
Single	19.4	21.8	20.3	12.1	17.7	14.2
Divorced/separated	3.2	1.3	2.5	3.7	0.7	2.6

Source: Census of Population, 2002

Where do older people live?

Table 6 indicates that older people in the Republic are more likely than those in younger age groups to live in rural areas. This clearly has implications for the delivery of health and social care services which will obviously cost more when the population served is more scattered. It can be noted that only one third of persons aged 60 years or over in Northern Ireland live in rural areas.

Table 6: Age by dwelling location

	%	
	Urban	Rural
20-24 years	69.8	30.2
25-39 years	64.2	35.8
40-59 years	56.1	43.9
60-74 years	56.3	43.7
75+ years	53.2	46.8
All ages	59.6	40.4

Source: Census of Population, 2002

How healthy are older people?

Table 7 underlines our observations above with regard to life expectancy. It can be seen that older people in the Republic are the most likely in the British Isles to report their health as being “good”. It can be noted that there is a very sharp variation here between Northern Ireland and the other nations. (The age range of respondents varied among the different national surveys, and so comparison can only be made for 18-74 year olds).

Table 7: Self reported ‘good’ health

Country	%					
	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74
Northern Ireland	72	64.1	63.9	50.4	39.4	32.1
England	84.2	84	81.6	74.1	67.4	60.2
Scotland	88.3	84.6	82.9	75.9	62.8	59.1
Wales	93.3	90.9	86.3	78.1	66.6	60.1
Republic of Ireland	94.3	94.4	91	86	76.1	62.3

RoI source: SLAN (Survey of Lifestyle, Attitudes and Nutrition) 1998

From: Miller et al, 2003

Table 8 provides more detail on reported health status in the Republic. It can be seen that nearly one third of persons aged 65 years or over (29.8%) rate their health as excellent or very good and only 6% describe their health as poor. Table 9 indicates that a significant minority of older people report some disability but overall the position is more positive than might have been expected from popular debates.

Table 8. Self-reported health, respondents aged 65 years or over

	%
Excellent	8.0
Very good	21.8
Good	39.3
Fair	24.6
Poor	6.0
Other	0.3

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, 2001

Table 9: Disability by age and gender

	%		
	Males	Females	All
15-24 years	3.4	2.7	3.1
25-44 years	4.9	5.0	4.9
45-64 years	11.8	10.5	11.1
65+ years	27.4	34.0	31.1
All ages (15+)	9.3	10.6	9.9

Source: 2002 Census of Population, CSO

How many older people have caring responsibilities?

It is important to remember in the debate on ageing that older people are care givers as well as receivers of care. In the Republic, 3.6% of males aged 65 years or over in private households are providing assistance to someone else. For women the figure is 4.0% (based on data from the 2002 Census of Population). Table 10 demonstrates the substantial volume of help provided by older people. For half of all carers (49.9%), caring is the equivalent of a full time job - if not more.

Table 10: Hours of caring given by people aged 65 years or over

Hours per week	%
1-14	36.9
15-28	7.7
20-42	5.4
43+	49.9
N	16571

Source: 2002 Census of Population, CSO

Are older people in the Republic working on past retirement age?

In the United Kingdom a central element of current policy is to encourage older people to work up to and beyond retirement age. In Northern Ireland data for 2002 indicated that only 8.4% of pensioners (women aged 60 years or over and men aged 65 years or over) were still in employment. The data in Table 11 relates to persons aged over 65 years or over, but it is evident that, north and south, the great majority of older people have left the labour force.

Table 11: Current economic activity (65+ years)

	%		
	Male	Female	All pensioners
Employed	11.3	2.5	6.3
Retired	81.5	48.2	62.7
Long-term sick	5.6	6.8	6.2
*Other	1.6	42.5	24.8

*includes looking after home/family

Source: 2002 Census of Population, CSO

How many older people live in poverty?

In our second report we demonstrated that many pensioners in Northern Ireland are hard pressed financially. For methodological reasons we cannot make exact comparisons, but it is clear that pensioner poverty is a significant problem in the Republic also. Table 12 indicates that poverty affects over one third of pensioners in the Republic and, as elsewhere, women are more likely to be poor than men.

Table 12: At risk poverty rate (after social transfers, 60% threshold)

	%		
	Male	Female	All
0-14 years	25.7	22.2	23.9
15-64 years	19.6	20.6	20.1
65+ years	30.6	40.7	36.4

Source: 2003 EU Survey on Income and Living Conditions

http://www.cso.ie/eusilc/at_risk_of_poverty.htm

Attitudes towards older people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Recent research (Evason and Dowds, 2004) has examined attitudes towards older people in Northern Ireland and the Republic. Whilst the data produced suggest that there are many areas of common concern, attitudes in the Republic are significantly more positive. Table 13 indicates that people in Northern Ireland are much more likely to consider that older people are treated worse because of their age. People in the Republic are nearly twice as likely to say older people are treated better because of their age.

Table 13: Do you think that older people are, on the whole, treated better or worse than people in the general population in this country because of their age?

Northern Ireland								
	18-24	25-44	45-49	50-59	60-64	65-74	75+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Better	18	11	8	6	11	9	21	11
Worse	35	51	48	57	52	45	36	48
The same	40	34	42	36	36	43	41	38
Don't know	7	3	2	1	2	3	2	3
Republic of Ireland								
Better	13	14	17	22	26	30	44	19
Worse	33	42	32	37	35	29	17	36
The same	50	39	45	40	37	39	36	41
Don't know	4	5	6	1	2	3	3	4

Source: Evason and Dowds, 2004

Table 14 indicates that people in Northern Ireland are more likely to report that they find they are treated with less respect as they get older and there is a particularly strong view on this in the 50-64 years age group. The majority of people in the Republic report that they feel they are treated with the same or more respect.

Table 14: As you get older, do you find that people treat you with more respect or less respect?

Northern Ireland								
	18-24	25-44	45-49	50-59	60-64	65-74	75+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
More respect	36	22	29	15	16	21	34	24
Less respect	25	36	35	44	42	39	33	36
Same	31	40	36	39	42	38	32	38
Don't know	9	2	1	2	0	2	1	3
Republic of Ireland								
More respect	65	31	28	26	23	31	49	36
Less respect	8	22	20	25	27	23	20	20
Same	20	43	52	48	50	45	30	41
Don't know	7	4	1	1		2	1	3

Source: Evason and Dowds, 2004

Finally, Table 15 suggests that the majority of people in Northern Ireland and the Republic think that the authorities could do more for older people. Here, again, however, attitudes seem more positive in the Republic.

Table 15: Do you think that the authorities in Northern Ireland/ the Republic of Ireland do all they should for older people, do too much, or do not do enough?

Northern Ireland								
	18-24	25-44	45-49	50-59	60-64	65-74	75+	All
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Do all they should	15	17	21	20	23	25	41	20
Do too much	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
Do not do enough	63	74	72	77	74	71	53	71
Don't know	20	9	8	3	3	4	5	8
Republic of Ireland								
Do all they should	20	19	23	29	30	46	51	26
Do too much	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	1
Do not do enough	70	77	72	68	65	52	48	69
Don't know	10	4	5	3	4	2	2	5

Source: Evason and Dowds, 2004

Conclusion

This is our fifth and final report on older people in which we have focussed on persons of pensionable age in the Republic of Ireland. In the United Kingdom the debate on ageing has been characterised by negativity and, indeed, alarmism but, at many points in our presentation of data for Northern Ireland, we found there was a more positive story to tell than popular discussion would suggest. The same is true for the Republic. For example, old age is often seen as synonymous with living alone and in isolation. In fact, the majority of older people in the Republic do not live alone, though obviously the risk increases with age. For example, growing older is associated with severe ill health and frailty. In the Republic of Ireland the majority of those aged 65-74 years report their health as good and they are more likely to do so than those in the same age group in the rest of the British Isles.

Clearly, older people in the Republic face difficulties. As in Northern Ireland, a significant proportion of older people can be described as hard pressed financially and it can be noted that in both Northern Ireland and in the Republic the majority of the populations generally consider that more help should be given to older people. At the same time, attitudes towards older people do seem to be more positive in the Republic than in Northern Ireland. For example, older people in the Republic are much less likely to feel that older people are treated worse because of their age than those in the same age group in Northern Ireland. They are also more likely to feel that they receive the same or more respect.

This report, together with the previous four reports in the series, highlights the value of analysing data from primary and secondary sources of information and presenting it in an accessible way. Firstly, it enables us to understand the situation of older people in our society. Secondly, it helps dispel stereotypes and myths about the economic cost of an ageing population and address the challenges ahead in a more measured way. Thirdly, it provides empirical evidence to help inform policy in a range of sectors.

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