



Department for

Communities

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An Roinn

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Department for

Commonities

Section 75 Screening Form

Part 1. Policy scoping

The first stage of the screening process involves scoping the policy under consideration. The purpose of policy scoping is to help prepare the background and context and set out the aims and objectives for the policy, being screened. At this stage, scoping the policy will help identify potential constraints as well as opportunities and will help the policy maker work through the screening process on a step by step basis.

Public authorities should remember that the Section 75 statutory duties apply to internal policies (relating to people who work for the authority), as well as external policies (relating to those who are, or could be, served by the authority).

Information about the policy

Name of the policy

Annual up-rating of social security pensions, benefits and lump sum payments, comprising—

- the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Order (Northern Ireland) 2024 (the Up-rating Order);
- the Social Security Benefits Up-rating Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 (the Up-rating Regulations);
- the Pneumoconiosis, etc., (Workers' Compensation) (Payment of Claims) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 (the Pneumoconiosis Regulations); and
- the Mesothelioma Lump Sum Payments (Conditions and Amounts) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 (the Mesothelioma Regulations).

Is this an existing, revised or a new policy?

Existing

What is it trying to achieve? (intended aims/outcomes)

Social security benefits, pensions and lump sum payments in Northern Ireland (NI) are generally maintained in parity with Great Britain (GB).

The rates of most social security benefits, pensions and lump sum payments are reviewed each year in GB and usually up-rated in April. The Department for Communities is empowered to make corresponding provision for NI. This legislation is to provide for the increase in the rates for 2024-2025. The Department for Communities has no power to set different rates for NI in the Up-rating Order.

The rates are reviewed to determine whether they have retained their value in relation to the general level of prices or earnings. The Consumer Prices Index (CPI) for the 12-month period to the end of September 2023 is used to determine the change in prices. It showed a positive growth rate of 6.7%. Therefore price-linked benefits (which includes contributory, non-contributory and extra-costs disability benefits) will be up-rated by this percentage.

State pensions would usually be uprated by the highest of the increase in earnings, the increase in prices or 2.5 per cent (known as the 'triple lock'). As a consequence, those benefits usually linked to earnings will be uprated by 8.5% (growth in Average Weekly Earnings in the year to May-July 2023) for 2024-2025. The benefits impacted include the basic State Pension, new State Pension (up to the full rate), Pension Credit Standard Minimum Guarantee and survivors' benefits (also known as widow's and widower's pensions) in Industrial Death Benefit.

The Up-rating Regulations make technical provision directly consequential upon the Up-rating Order to ensure correct implementation of the increased rates.

The Mesothelioma Regulations and the Pneumoconiosis Regulations increase the amounts of lump sums payable to individuals with certain respiratory diseases or their dependants. The amounts payable from April 2024 will be increased by 6.7% in line with the up-rating of Industrial Injuries benefits.

Are there any Section 75 categories which might be expected to benefit from the intended policy?

Yes

If Yes, explain how.

The increased lump sum payments, pension and benefit rates will be payable to all relevant benefit and pension recipients.

Who initiated or wrote the policy?

The GB Secretary of State for Work and Pensions is required under sections 150, 150A and 151A of the Social Security Administration Act 1992 to review annually the level of certain benefits and pensions and lay an Order before Parliament specifying any relevant increases.

Sections 132, 132A and 132B of the Social Security Administration (Northern Ireland) Act 1992 provide for the Department for Communities to make a corresponding Order for NI.

There is no legislative requirement to increase the rates of payments under the pneumoconiosis or mesothelioma compensation schemes. However, in order to maintain their value in relation to inflation, they are being increased in line with the increase in CPI.

Who owns and who implements the policy?

The Department for Work and Pensions and the Department for Communities.

Implementation factors

Are there any factors which could contribute to/detract from the intended aim/outcome of the policy/decision?

If yes, are they

☐ financial

☒ legislative

☐ other, please specify _____

Main stakeholders affected

Who are the internal and external stakeholders (actual or potential) that the policy will impact upon?

- ☐ staff
- ☒ service users
- ☐ other public sector organisations
- ☐ voluntary/community/trade unions
- ☐ other, please specify _____

Other policies with a bearing on this policy

What are they and who owns them?

N/A

Available evidence

Evidence to help inform the screening process may take many forms. Public authorities should ensure that their screening decision is informed by relevant data.

What evidence/information (both qualitative and quantitative) have you gathered to inform this policy? Specify details for **each** of the Section 75 categories.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Religious belief	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.
Political opinion	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.
Racial group	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.
Age	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.
Marital status	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.

Section 75 category	Details of evidence/information
Sexual orientation	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.
Men and women generally	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.
Disability	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.
Dependants	None – the Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.

Note to reader - If you are aware of and would like the Department to take into account any further evidence or information relevant to this policy, please send this to:

The Department for Communities
Social Security Policy and Legislation Division
Causeway Exchange
Level 8
1-7 Bedford Street
Belfast
BT2 7EG
E-mail: SSPLD@communities-ni.gov.uk

Needs, experiences and priorities

Taking into account the information referred to above, what are the different needs, experiences and priorities of each of the following categories, in relation to the particular policy/decision?

Specify details for **each** of the Section 75 categories

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Religious belief	The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
Political opinion	The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
Racial group	The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
	security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
Age	The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
Marital status	The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.
Sexual orientation	The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Section 75 category	Details of needs/experiences/priorities
Men and women generally	<p>The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</p>
Disability	<p>The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</p>
Dependants	<p>The Department considers this policy to be of a technical nature and therefore deems there to be no specific needs, experiences or priorities for any of the Section 75 groups in relation to the annual up-rating policy. Making these Statutory Rules will ensure that increased earnings-indexed and price-indexed pension and benefit rates will be payable to relevant benefit and pension recipients in NI. The Statutory Rules are necessary to maintain the single systems of social security and pensions set out in section 87 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.</p>

Part 2. Screening questions

Introduction

In making a decision as to whether or not there is a need to carry out an equality impact assessment, the public authority should consider its answers to the questions 1-4 which are given on pages 66-68 of this Guide.

If the public authority's conclusion is **none** in respect of all of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then the public authority may decide to screen the policy out. If a policy is 'screened out' as having no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations, a public authority should give details of the reasons for the decision taken.

If the public authority's conclusion is **major** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality of opportunity and/or good relations categories, then consideration should be given to subjecting the policy to the equality impact assessment procedure.

If the public authority's conclusion is **minor** in respect of one or more of the Section 75 equality categories and/or good relations categories, then consideration should still be given to proceeding with an equality impact assessment, or to:

- measures to mitigate the adverse impact; or
- the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of a 'major' impact

- a) The policy is significant in terms of its strategic importance;
- b) Potential equality impacts are unknown, because, for example, there is insufficient data upon which to make an assessment or because they are complex, and it would be appropriate to conduct an equality impact assessment in order to better assess them;
- c) Potential equality and/or good relations impacts are likely to be adverse or are likely to be experienced disproportionately by groups of people including those who are marginalised or disadvantaged;
- d) Further assessment offers a valuable way to examine the evidence and develop recommendations in respect of a policy about which there are

concerns amongst affected individuals and representative groups, for example in respect of multiple identities;

- e) The policy is likely to be challenged by way of judicial review;
- f) The policy is significant in terms of expenditure.

In favour of 'minor' impact

- a) The policy is not unlawfully discriminatory and any residual potential impacts on people are judged to be negligible;
- b) The policy, or certain proposals within it, are potentially unlawfully discriminatory, but this possibility can readily and easily be eliminated by making appropriate changes to the policy or by adopting appropriate mitigating measures;
- c) Any asymmetrical equality impacts caused by the policy are intentional because they are specifically designed to promote equality of opportunity for particular groups of disadvantaged people;
- d) By amending the policy there are better opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations.

In favour of none

- a) The policy has no relevance to equality of opportunity or good relations.
- b) The policy is purely technical in nature and will have no bearing in terms of its likely impact on equality of opportunity or good relations for people within the equality and good relations categories.

Taking into account the evidence presented above, consider and comment on the likely impact on equality of opportunity and good relations for those affected by this policy, in any way, for each of the equality and good relations categories, by applying the screening questions given overleaf and indicate the level of impact on the group i.e. minor, major or none.

Screening questions

1. What is the likely impact on equality of opportunity for those affected by this policy, for each of the Section 75 equality categories? minor/major/none

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
Religious belief	The Statutory Rules simply make technical amendments to increase pension and benefit rates from April 2024, and therefore do not have any adverse implications for equality of opportunity.	None
Political opinion	As above	None
Racial group	As above	None
Age	As above	None
Marital status	As above	None
Sexual orientation	As above	None
Men and women generally	As above	None
Disability	As above	None

Section 75 category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact? minor/major/none
Dependants	As above	None

2. Are there opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity for people within the Section 75 equalities categories?

Section 75 category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief		No – The Statutory Rules simply increase pension and benefit rates from April 2024. They do not provide any opportunities to better promote equality of opportunity.
Political opinion		As above
Racial group		As above
Age		As above
Marital status		As above
Sexual orientation		As above

Section 75 category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Men and women generally		As above
Disability		As above
Dependants		As above

3. To what extent is the policy likely to impact on good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group? minor/major/none

Good relations category	Details of policy impact	Level of impact minor/major/none
Religious belief	The Rules will simply increase pension and benefit rates from April 2024, and are therefore not likely to have any impact on good relations.	None
Political opinion	As above	None
Racial group	As above	None

4. Are there opportunities to better promote good relations between people of different religious belief, political opinion or racial group?

Good relations category	If Yes , provide details	If No , provide reasons
Religious belief		No – the Rules will increase price-indexed and earnings-indexed pension and benefit rates, which will be payable from April 2024. The Rules do not provide any opportunity to better promote good relations.
Political opinion		As above
Racial group		As above

Additional considerations

Multiple identity

Generally speaking, people can fall into more than one Section 75 category. Taking this into consideration, are there any potential impacts of the policy/decision on people with multiple identities?

(For example; disabled minority ethnic people; disabled women; young Protestant men; and young lesbians, gay and bisexual people).

Provide details of data on the impact of the policy on people with multiple identities. Specify relevant Section 75 categories concerned.

None

Part 3. Screening decision

In light of your answers to the previous questions, do you feel that the policy should: (please underline one)

- 1. Not be subject to an EQIA**
- 2. Not be subject to an EQIA (with mitigating measures /alternative policies)**
- 3. Be subject to an EQIA**

If 1 or 2 (i.e. not be subject to an EQIA), please provide details of the reasons why:

The Department considers that this policy is technical in nature in that it simply deals with the making of Statutory Rules to increase earnings-indexed or price-indexed pension and benefit rates from April 2024.

If 3. (i.e. to conduct an EQIA), please provide details of the reasons:

Mitigation

When the public authority concludes that the likely impact is 'minor' and an equality impact assessment is not to be conducted, the public authority may consider mitigation to lessen the severity of any equality impact, or the introduction of an alternative policy to better promote equality of opportunity or good relations.

Can the policy/decision be amended or changed or an alternative policy introduced to better promote equality of opportunity and/or good relations?

If so, **give the reasons** to support your decision, together with the proposed changes/amendments or alternative policy.

N/A

Part 4. Monitoring

Effective monitoring will help identify any future adverse impacts arising from the policy which may lead you to conduct an EQIA, as well as help with future planning and policy development.

You should consider the guidance contained in the Commission's Monitoring Guidance for Use by Public Authorities (July 2007).

The Commission recommends that where the policy has been amended or an alternative policy introduced, then you should monitor more broadly than for adverse impact (See Benefits, P.9-10, paras 2.13 – 2.20 of the Monitoring Guidance).

Please detail proposed monitoring arrangements below:

The rates of social security benefits, pensions and lump sums are reviewed annually to determine whether they have maintained their value in relation to the general level of prices and/or earnings.

Part 5 - Approval and authorisation

Screened by:	Position/Job Title	Date
Andrew Hay	EO1	31.01.24
Approved by:		
David Tarr	G5	04.04.24

Note: A copy of the Screening Template, for each policy screened should be 'signed off' and approved by a senior manager responsible for the policy, made easily accessible on the public authority's website as soon as possible following completion and made available on request.