



Submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland

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An Roinn Tithíochta, Pleanála,
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1. Introduction

Age Action is the leading advocacy organisation on ageing and older people in Ireland. Our mission is to achieve fundamental change in the lives of all older people by eliminating age discrimination, promoting positive ageing and securing their right to comprehensive and high-quality services.

We want to make Ireland the best country in the world in which to grow old and we work with older people to build a society free of ageism where their rights are secured. A central feature of our work is raising awareness about the lived experience of growing old in Ireland.

We are grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland.

According to the most recent Census figures, the number of people aged over 65 saw the largest increase of population since 2011. This age group has increased since 2011 by 19.1 per cent (to 637,567) and represents 13 per cent of the total population. The number of people aged over 85 increased by 15.6 per cent (to 67,555) with the vast majority living in private households (91 per cent).¹

Just under 40 per cent of persons living alone in Census 2016 were aged 65 and over.² Over half of all people with disabilities living alone were aged 65 and over.³

In supporting policing that meets the needs of older people it is important to acknowledge that people aged over the age of 65 are the least likely to be the victims of crime, but they are also the most likely to be worried or fearful about becoming a victim.⁴

Callers to the Age Action Information Service often express worry over personal and home safety with some telling us that they do not feel safe without multiple locks on their doors for security.

The apparent paradox is a result of a number of factors, including the fact that an older person is often more vulnerable to a physical assault and would take longer – emotionally, socially and physically – to recover; the numbers of older people who live alone, particularly in rural or isolated communities; and the perception that older people are particularly vulnerable to being targeted by criminals for house break-ins and burglaries.

We also believe that the decision to close almost 140 Garda stations since 2011 undermined the sense of security that they provided for many older people, while also making it more difficult to access the other services provided by stations.

¹ <http://cso.ie/en/media/csoie/newsevents/documents/pressreleases/2017/prCensussummarypart1.pdf>

² <http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/presstatementcensus2016resultsprofile4-householdsandfamilies>

³ <http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2017pressreleases/presstatementcensus2016resultsprofile9-healthdisabilityandcarers>

⁴ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-cv/qnhscimeandvictimisationq32015>

Of all age groups, older people express the highest support for Gardai in their local area but lowest levels of confidence in the overall criminal justice system.⁵

2. Recommendations

We would like to make a number of recommendations for consideration to the Commission on the Future of Policing in Ireland, particularly in the context of policing within an ageing society:

i. Integrating the needs of older people in policing planning

The ageing of our population represents one of the most significant demographic and social developments that Ireland faces in the years ahead.⁶ The number of older people in Ireland will continue to increase rapidly in the years to come, changing the shape of the society the Garda Síochána is responsible for policing.

At present, just over 13 per cent of the total population is over 65 years of age.⁷ The number of people aged over 65 is projected to increase very significantly to close to 1.4 million by 2041.⁸

The number of people over 80 is set to rise even more dramatically, increasing by over 250 per cent to between 470,000 and 484,000 in 2046.⁹ Regional projections for 2016-2031 show the number of older persons (over 65) will almost double in every region over that time period.¹⁰

The *National Positive Ageing Strategy* outlined a key goal to “enable people to age with confidence, security and dignity in their own homes and communities for as long as possible”. This includes empowering people to live free in their own homes, to feel safe and confident in their communities and to support an environment where this ‘sense of security’ is enhanced.¹¹

Key indicators include access to local services for older people, support against elder abuse and personal safety at night in a resident’s local area.¹²

We welcome specific initiatives to include the voice of older people in planning and to canvass their attitudes towards crime and security, such as the Garda Older Persons Association (GOPA) committee in Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown.

Garda procedures on follow-up with victims should be reviewed to see if they are meeting the needs of older people.

⁵ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-cv/qnhscimeandvictimisationq32015>

⁶ http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

⁷ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/q-cv/qnhscimeandvictimisationq32015>

⁸ http://rebuildingireland.ie/Rebuilding%20Ireland_Action%20Plan.pdf

⁹ Based on 2011 base figures.

<http://www.cso.ie/en/csolatestnews/pressreleases/2013pressreleases/pressreleasepopulationandlabourforceprojections2016-2046>

¹⁰ <http://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/rpp/regionalpopulationprojections2016-2031>

¹¹ http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/National_Positive_Ageing_Strategy_English.pdf

¹² <http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Positive-Ageing-Report-Nov-2016.pdf>

As referenced above, the reduction in the number of Gardaí and the decision to close almost 140 Garda stations since 2011 has greatly affected older people's sense of security.

We welcome efforts to work with older people out in the community, such as the Garda Mobile Support Blackrock initiative. Older people contacting Age Action's Information Service have said that they are 'living in fear' in their own home and community. They ask to have a closer relationship with local Gardaí and to see more Gardaí on the streets on patrol. Over 15 per cent of all registrations to the Senior Alert Scheme were prompted by fear of crime, experience as a past victim of crime or a wish to protect their home.¹³

Identification of genuine members of the Garda Síochána can be a worry for older people and this is especially true for those with a visual or hearing impairment. We welcome continued effort by the Garda Síochána to work with disability organisations to resolve accessibility issues.

We warmly welcomed the 2010 Garda Síochána strategy for older people. This publication followed extensive consultation with representative bodies, including Age Action, internal consultations with members of the Garda Síochána working closely with older people and discussions with officials in other State bodies.

The Garda Síochána is to be commended for producing such a strategy that included a four-point action plan with specific initiatives identified for each point, responsibilities allocated to specific officers and anticipated outcomes.

While undoubtedly many of the initiatives were delivered, others were not, and it would be a worthwhile exercise for the Garda Síochána to evaluate the implementation of the strategy and to publish their findings.

This could serve as the first step towards producing a new, updated, strategy that considers the growing numbers of older people, an increased awareness of elder abuse, concerns among older people about online fraud and other developments since 2010.

We would like to see specific liaison officers for older people in both urban and rural areas.

ii. More support for initiatives that assist older people

As was noted above, the fear of crime among older people is greater than the likelihood of becoming a victim but, as the Garda Síochána Older People Strategy notes, fear of crime:

“can significantly limit or restrict the movement and activities of individuals, which can further impact physical, social and emotional well-being”.¹⁴

¹³ <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SAS%20Analysis%20Report%202016.pdf>

¹⁴ <http://www.garda.ie/Documents/User/older%20people%20strategy%20english.pdf>

Age Action spokespersons, when invited to comment on attacks on older people, frequently make the point that the best deterrent against criminals is good neighbours.

We appreciate, the work of the Garda Síochána in supporting community alert and neighbourhood watch schemes. As well as deterring crime, many of these provide a welcome sense of security for older people and they are particularly important in communities that are isolated.

We would like to see more support for these schemes and suggest, as a first step, a national mapping exercise be carried out to identify those communities where neither of these schemes are operating. They could then be prioritised for a targeted piece of work by the local Gardaí, with support where required, to put such a scheme in place.

It may also be useful to examine those schemes that are already running to see how many are actually active in communities and, where inactive schemes or groups are identified, to target them for greater support to restore their functionality.

These schemes could be especially valuable in tackling anti-social behaviour, which is a recurring issue for many older people – particularly in urban communities – and contributes to a sense of fear.

Older people can be reluctant to report information on crime for fear of reprisal or because they do not wish to be a ‘nuisance’ or to bother Gardaí. We would like to see older people supported to participate in crime prevention initiatives and welcome the recent Crime Prevention Ambassador programme, which we would like to see expanded.

A role exists for Community Gardaí to actively promote the Senior Alert Scheme.

By late 2017, over 60,000 personalised alarm pendants have been distributed over the previous seven years.¹⁵ The 2017 Pobal report on the operation of the scheme showed that only one per cent of the population of over-65s had availed of the scheme, rising to a still low figure of 17 per cent among over-85s.¹⁶

A significant underspend in the amount of funding set aside for the scheme was reported last year.¹⁷ The announcement from Minister for Rural and Community Development Michael Ring TD that he is extending the remit of the scheme is welcome.

Callers to Age Action’s Information Service concerned about security issues are frequently surprised to know the scheme exists and, of those aware of it, many are uncertain how to apply.

¹⁵ <https://www.pobal.ie/news/pages/E282AC2320million20new20seniors20alert20scheme20will20give20peace%20of%20mind%20and%20security%20to%20older%20rural%20people.aspx>

¹⁶ <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SAS%20Analysis%20Report%202016.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.rte.ie/news/2017/0727/893330-senior-alerts-scheme>

This is an area where we believe the Garda Síochána could play a valuable and active role and it is surprising to see that only 2 per cent of individuals in possession of a Senior Alert Scheme were informed of the facility by Gardaí.¹⁸

This is a figure we believe could be substantially higher. Each Garda station should have a list of local organisations that distribute the Personal Pendant Alarms.

We would like to see older people to be encouraged to use their alarms if they are afraid and for the companies monitoring personal alarms to be able to provide details of community Gardaí.

4. Conclusion

We would like to thank the commission for the opportunity to participate in this consultation process. The force is held in very high regard by the older people who trust and rely on it to ensure their safety and security in their homes and in their communities.

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¹⁸ <https://www.pobal.ie/Publications/Documents/SAS%20Analysis%20Report%202016.pdf>