First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland -

Background Quality Report

NISRA
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
Gníomhaireacht Thuaisceart Éireann um Staitisticí agus Taighde

Department of Justice
An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Männystrie O tha Laa

Updated March 2021

Background Quality Assessment

This section provides information about the quality of the data used to produce this publication, and any statistics derived from these data.

Dimension	Assessment by the author
Introduction:-	The publication entitled First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland is produced annually by the Analytical Services Group (ASG), a branch of statisticians from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) located within the Department of Justice (DoJ), and has been done so since 2011/12. The reports are available to download from the DoJ website (opens in a new window) and are published in line with the ASG Customer Service and Engagement Statement, Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window).
	This report presents data on first time entrants to the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland for the period 1st April to 31st March. It provides an overview of the structure of the known offending population and information on the breakdown of offences committed by new offenders and the disposals received. Comparative information to the previous year is also provided.
	The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the Causeway Data Sharing Mechanism (DSM1). They were extracted primarily based on records contained on the Criminal Records Viewer (CRV), held on Causeway. CRV utilises data which originated in the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), Public Prosecution Service (PPS) and from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS). Causeway is an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations (CJO) in Northern Ireland. Information is based on data extracted at March each year to complete prosecutions and convictions datasets for the previous calendar year, for example data covering 2018/19 i.e. 1st April 2018 to 31st March 2019 will be extracted at March 2020.

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Relevance:- *The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.*	The information in the publication is used to inform policy decisions within DoJ, as well as to inform requests from other Government organisations and to answer NI Assembly questions and queries from the general public. User needs were identified through an online customer survey undertaken in June 2020 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window). Analysis is provided by age, gender, offence classification and disposal type i.e. if the offence was dealt with by imprisonment, suspended sentence, community service, monetary penalty, discharge or diversion. Some comparisons with figures for the previous year are also included. Statistical coverage is restricted to those criminal prosecutions which were brought by the PPS on behalf of the PSNI, PBNI, the NCA, the Airport Constabulary or Harbour Police, whether they were dealt with at court or by out of court diversion. Prosecutions brought by government departments, public bodies and private individuals are not included, as their prosecution is beyond the remit of the DoJ. The data included in the report are based on individuals who have no previous criminal record in Northern Ireland and who commit a 'first offence' which results in them receiving their first diversion, warning, caution or conviction during the 1st April to 31st March for the year of interest. The term 'first time entrants' equates directly to that of 'first offence'. In order to calculate the proportion of first time entrants, information is also provided for 'further offences' (i.e. offences resulting in further diversions, warnings, cautions or convictions since the offender already has a recorded criminal history). Under the counting rules for the publication, 'further offences' do not relate directly to the number of offenders who have committed further offences, as an offender may have had more than one further conviction or diversionary disposal within the time period covered by the report.

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Relevance continued:-	Where an offender has had a diversion imposed, been warned, cautioned or convicted of several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted whether this is in relation to a first offence or, for the purposes of the report, to a further offence. The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules issued by the Home Office which stipulate that only offences with an admission or finding of guilty are included and, the principal offence is usually taken as the one for which the greatest penalty was imposed. The offence counted and used in the compilation of figures in this report is the one on which the court took its final decision, or for which a diversionary disposal was issued and recorded as completed with the PPS. In relation to convictions, this is not necessarily the same offence as that for which the defendant was initially proceeded against. The decision recorded is that reached by the court and takes no account of any subsequent appeal to a higher court. Out of court disposals not taken into account in this bulletin are Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs). PNDs are a fixed penalty designed to tackle low-level, anti-social and nuisance offending for offenders aged 18 and over and are issued for a range of minor offences. They were introduced in Northern Ireland on the 6th June 2012 as a result of the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. PNDs provide police with a swift financial punishment to deal with misbehaviour and a practical deterrent to future re-offending. However, they do not require an admission of guilt and do not form part of an individual's criminal record. Further information on PNDs can be accessed on the NI Direct website (opens in a new window).
Accuracy and reliability:- *The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.*	These statistics are sourced from administrative systems that encompass data originating from PSNI, PPS and NICTS. The information is not a sample, but a complete data set of all relevant cases recorded within the time period reported on. Each CJO involved records information relevant to them in relation to each case on their own information systems, to allow the processing of that case through that stage of the criminal justice process. Where records have been updated on the systems retrospectively, these updates may be missed if the data were downloaded too early. To minimise the impact of this, these particular data are

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Accuracy and reliability continued:-	extracted around eight weeks after the end of the reporting period; this allows for the updating and completion of records across the systems concerned. There is no absolute means of verifying if CJOs have entered information incorrectly, or not at all. However, as Causeway is the main source of information used to manage day to day business within PSNI, PPS and NICTS and also to communicate important information between these organisations, it needs to be highly accurate. In addition, identified discrepancies are checked against information held in the Integrated Court Operation System (ICOS) and in the CRV. Numerous validation checks are carried out during the course of each year by a number of parties, including NISRA statisticians, to ensure the data is fit for purpose. In relation to potential sources of bias and error, further details can also be found in the QAAD report. Users should however bear in mind that the statistics originate from various administrative data sources which have different purposes, aims and objectives and are kept for non statistical purposes e.g. reviewing and vetting individuals' criminal records. Figures are based on those who have had a conviction at any time since 1960 and those who had either a conviction or a diversionary disposal since the implementation of the Causeway System DSM1, in December 2009. This means that the reported rate of first offences may be slightly higher than the actuality, as, in some cases, first offences would have been dealt with by means of diversionary disposal, information which is not available prior to the introduction of DSM1. Any likely impact however should lessen with the passing of time. Reoffending statistics also suggest that, in most crime categories, persons who commit a proven re-offence do so within one year. As a result, the first year when it might be considered that the effect of diversions data being unavailable for the period prior to 2010 might be reduced is 2011/12 and data are available, as part of this series, from that point forward. Users should note that some figures may not add to the totals due to rounding.

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Timeliness and punctuality:- *Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.*	The annual datasets cover the financial year from 1st April to 31st March. The processes used in producing this report are continually being streamlined while at the same time maintaining or improving the accuracy of the data. The gap between the reference date and the publication date is due to the fact that these statistics are based on information derived from prosecutions and convictions datasets, which are reported on a calendar year basis. Additionally, some time is required to resolve various data quality issues. While, data for first time offenders are published on a financial year basis, they are based on an update of cases dealt with at court in the most recent calendar year published in the annual prosecutions and convictions bulletin. This means there is a delay in the reporting of first time offender data each year. For example, prosecutions and convictions data for the calendar year 2019 were published in June 2020 and, as these contained figures for the last three months of 2018/19, first time offender data for 2018/19 could not be reported upon until the 2019 prosecutions and convictions data had been completed.

Report Year	Publication Date
2018/19	10/07/20
2017/18	26/06/19
2016/17	05/07/18
2015/16	31/08/17
2014/15	21/09/16
2013/14	30/09/15
2012/13	19/12/14
2011/12	27/06/14

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Accessibility and clarity:- *Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of metadata, illustrations and accompanying advice.*	Accessibility to the statistics for this publication are in line with those detailed in the ASG Customer Service and Engagement Statement, Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window). Issues relating to accessibility (specifically ease of finding on the DoJ website) identified during a Customer Survey undertaken in June 2020 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window) have been subsequently addressed. No issues relating to clarity were identified. The report contains contact details for further information and is available to download from the DoJ website (opens in a new window) , along with reports from previous years. The data presented in the report are also available in Open Document Spreadsheet (ODS) format on the DoJ website (opens in a new window) . Explanatory information including sources, discontinuities and missing data have been included.
Coherence and comparability:- *Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.*	The court structure of Northern Ireland does not equate to that in England, Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland. Direct comparisons between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland therefore cannot be made. Further, none of the other nations in the United Kingdom, nor the Republic of Ireland, produce statistics on a similar basis. There have been no changes to the measurement systems since the statistics were developed.

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Assessment of user needs and perceptions:- *The process for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.*	The ASG Customer Service and Engagement Policy details ASGs customer engagement policy and can be found at Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window). An online customer survey was undertaken in June 2020 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window). Almost all the respondents (93%) worked for The Northern Ireland Civil Service or other Agency; the remainder were other non-NICS public sector employees or from academia. The most frequently stated reason for using the publication was policy making/policy monitoring followed by performance monitoring, media related/public interest and to facilitate academic research and aid decisions on resource allocation. The majority (75%) of respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the publication overall; the remaining respondents were neutral. All respondents (100%) said that the statistics fully or mostly met their needs. Regular meetings also take place with key users within the DoJ.
Trade-offs between output and quality components:-	No trade-offs applied.
Performance, cost and respondent burden:- *The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.*	There is no respondent burden, since the data are held on an administrative system, and data on new cases are automatically collected as part of the Criminal Justice process. The annual operational cost (staff time) of producing the report is approximately 15 days.

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Confidentiality, transparency and security:- *The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.*	The ASG Confidentiality and Protection Arrangements statement, Policy 2 in ASGs Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB) (opens in a new window), sets out ASG's arrangement for maintaining the confidentiality of the statistical data used in this publication. All staff involved are trained on the protocols for protecting and maintaining the confidentiality of the data. NISRA follows the 'National Statistician's Guidance: Confidentiality of Official Statistics' in the collection and dissemination of this report. The guidance can be found on the GSS website (opens in a new window). Data are held on a network that is only accessible to the few statisticians who need access. Printouts containing individual records or small cell sizes are locked away and shredded as soon as possible. Standard disclosure control methodology is applied to the data. This ensures that information attributable to an individual is not identifiable in any published outputs and that the outputs are only seen by authorised staff prior to their publication. When necessary, suppression is applied where the number of individuals in a cell is less than three. Suppression is also applied, where necessary, to the next lowest valued cell in order that identification by subtraction is not possible.