

Judicial Statistics Background Quality Report



Department of
Justice

An Roinn Dlí agus Cirt
Máinnstríe O tha Laa

**Updated
January 2023**

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:-	<p>The publication entitled Judicial Statistics is produced annually by the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS) team within 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); it has been published since 2008. 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).</p> <p>The report presents statistical information in relation to the criminal, civil and family business conducted by the NICTS and the work of some associated offices.</p> <p>The statistics are produced using administrative data primarily sourced from the Integrated Court Operations System (ICOS), a live operating system used in each court tier to process every part of the court business from receipt of payments through to the production of final orders made.</p> <p>To complete the data set, data relating to the Enforcement of Judgements Office is sourced from the Judgement Enforcement Management System (JEMS); data relating to the Office of Care and Protection and Official Solicitors Office are sourced from the OCP operating system, and manual Excel spreadsheets relating to the Coroners Service for Northern Ireland and the Social Security and Child Support Commissioners are also included.</p>

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<p>Introduction continued:-</p>	<p>Information is based on data extracted at June each year, for example data covering 1st January to 31st December 2021 were extracted at 3rd June 2022.</p> <p>More detail can be found in the associated Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) report (opens in a new window).</p>
<p>Relevance:- <i>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</i></p>	<p>The information in the publication is used by NICTS policy officials in their role assisting and advising the Minister for Justice to discharge their duties. It is also used to answer NI Assembly and Justice committee questions and to inform requests and queries from other Government organisations, the media and the general public, including students conducting research into Justice issues.</p> <p>Statistics are included for the Court of Appeal, High Court, Crown Court, County Court, Magistrate’s Court, Children Order and for the Enforcement of Judgments Office, Social Security Commissioners and Pension Appeals Tribunals and Coroners Service for Northern Ireland.</p> <p>User needs were identified through an online customer survey undertaken in Autumn 2022 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window).</p> <p>Further information on the quality assurance information checks that are undertaken can be found in the QAAD report (opens in a new window).</p>

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<p>Accuracy and reliability:- <i>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</i></p>	<p>These statistics are sourced from administrative systems used in each court tier to process every part of the court business from receipt of payments through to the production of final orders made.</p> <p>The information is not a sample but a complete data set of all relevant cases recorded within the time period reported on.</p> <p>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, the data are extracted around 20 weeks after the end of the reporting period; this allows for the updating and completion of records across the systems concerned.</p> <p>There is no absolute means of verifying if information has been entered incorrectly, or not at all. However, as ICOS is the main source of information used to manage day to day business within NICTS it needs to be highly accurate. Consequently each court division has a case progression officer who is responsible for monitoring accuracy levels on ICOS and for promoting awareness of the impact that errors could have.</p> <p>Numerous validation checks are carried out during the course of each year, by a number of parties, including NISRA statisticians, to ensure the data are fit for purpose. In relation to potential sources of bias and error, further details can also be found in the QAAD report (opens in a new window).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>Users should note that some published figures may not add to the totals due to rounding.</p>

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<p>Timeliness and punctuality:-</p> <p><i>Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</i></p>	<p>The annual datasets cover the calendar year. The statisticians producing the report continually look for ways that the processes can be 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 time allowed for the updating of administrative records and the time it took to resolve various data quality issues.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="459 482 1006 1039"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="459 482 768 525">Report Year</th> <th data-bbox="768 482 1006 525">Publication Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 525 768 596">2021</td> <td data-bbox="768 525 1006 596">16/06/22</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 596 768 668">2020</td> <td data-bbox="768 596 1006 668">25/06/21</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 668 768 739">2019</td> <td data-bbox="768 668 1006 739">09/10/20</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 739 768 811">2018</td> <td data-bbox="768 739 1006 811">28/06/19</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 811 768 882">2017</td> <td data-bbox="768 811 1006 882">29/06/18</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 882 768 953">2016</td> <td data-bbox="768 882 1006 953">23/06/17</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="459 953 768 1039">2015</td> <td data-bbox="768 953 1006 1039">24/06/16</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The report for 2019 was delayed beyond June because of the impact of Covid-19 on resources.</p>	Report Year	Publication Date	2021	16/06/22	2020	25/06/21	2019	09/10/20	2018	28/06/19	2017	29/06/18	2016	23/06/17	2015	24/06/16
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<p>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.</p>	<p>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).</p> <p>No issues relating to accessibility or clarity were identified during a Customer Survey undertaken in Autumn 2022 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window).</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The data presented in the report are also available in Open Document Spreadsheet (ODS) format on the DoJ website (opens in a new window).</p> <p>Explanatory information including sources, discontinuities and missing data have been included.</p>

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<p>Coherence and comparability:-</p> <p><i>Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar.</i></p> <p><i>Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain.</i></p>	<p>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.</p> <p>Direct comparisons can be made for data across all court tiers over an eleven year period, as the ICOS roll out was complete by 2007, except for Table 1 within the report and the Children Order worksheet in the excel tables, rows 48 to 50. The recording of orders made within the Children Order courts have been reported at the participant level since 2007, and the introduction of ICOS. Children Order data in relation to orders made, is recorded on ICOS at the application level. The data is then extracted based on the participants selected on ICOS which indicate all relevant parties to whom the order applies.</p> <p>Following an operational review of recording practices surrounding the selection of participants to whom orders apply in November 2013, a training program was implemented by operational colleagues. This training was delivered in early 2014 to ensure all relevant participants were being consistently applied on ICOS. This has had a knock-on effect on the numbers of own motion, interim and final orders being reported within the Children Order courts, with figures showing large increases since 2014.</p> <p>Following a consultation, a change in the reporting of the orders being made within the Children Order courts from the participant level to the application level from 2016 onwards has been introduced, (and final year figures for 2015 and 2016 were prepared using this new methodology) to overcome issues</p>

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Coherence and comparability continued:-	<p>surrounding the inconsistent recording of participants to whom the orders apply and provide more user friendly data in terms of relating the orders made to the applications being received and disposed.</p> <p>Application level data counts distinct orders made during the court process. This new methodology has been introduced to cover own motion, interim and final orders and will affect the numbers reported in Tables F.4, F.5 and F.6 in publications up to 2020 and in the excel Children Order worksheet in rows 48 to 50 and in the PDF report within Table 1, from 2021 onwards. The numbers of orders made will not be comparable with those published in Judicial Statistics in previous years. To assist with comparisons over time, a back series of orders data from April 2007 to the end of 2015 are available on the Court and Tribunals website (opens in a new window).</p> <p>Before September 2009 all the courthouses opened from 9am to 5pm from Monday to Friday each week (excluding public holidays). In September 2009 five of the 23 courthouses became “Hearing Centres” because they were not fully utilised when the courts weren’t sitting and NICTS needed to make better use of their courthouses and staff. These courthouses were Bangor, Larne, Limavady, Magherafelt and Strabane. They were only open on the day that court hearings take place, and the rest of the time they remain closed. When the Hearing Centres were opened they offered all of the usual services. However, when the Hearing Centres closed people had to access these services at other courthouses, on the telephone or over the internet.</p>

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<p>Coherence and comparability</p> <p>continued:-</p>	<p>The NICTS financial situation is different from what it was in 2009. They are now being asked to operate within tighter financial limits but are still required to provide the same range and standard of services. In March 2013 two of these hearing centres were closed permanently – Larne and Bangor and the court business for these two venues was moved to Ballymena and Newtownards respectively. Caution should therefore be taken when comparing figures with preceding years for Larne and Bangor court houses. Further information on the consultation exercise under taken on proposals to close Hearing Centres can be found on the DoJ website (opens in a new window).</p> <p>ASG undertook a consultation with users (opens in new window) about changing the format of the bulletin to make it more streamlined, targeted and user friendly. This resulted in a change in the format of the publication resulting in a reduction from 140 to 22 pages from 2021 onwards.</p>
<p>Assessment of user needs and perceptions:- <i>The process for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</i></p>	<p>The ASG Customer Service and Engagement Policy details ASGs commitment to and engagement with users 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).</p> <p>An online customer survey was undertaken in Autumn 2022 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window). The vast majority of respondents (88%) worked for The Northern Ireland Civil Service or other Agency; the remainder were from academia and other non-NICS public sector employees. The most frequently stated reason for using the publication was policy/performance/resource related, media/public interest related,</p>

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<p>Assessment of user needs and perceptions continued:-</p>	<p>and to facilitate academic research.</p> <p>All (100%) respondents said that they were satisfied or very satisfied with the publication overall and that the statistics fully or mostly met their needs.</p> <p>Regular meetings also take place with key users within the NICTS.</p>
<p>Trade-offs between output and quality components:-</p>	<p>No trade-offs applied.</p>
<p>Performance, cost and respondent burden:- <i>The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.</i></p>	<p>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.</p> <p>The annual operational cost (staff time) of producing the report is approximately 30 days.</p>

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<p>Confidentiality, transparency and security:- <i>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</i></p>	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>When appropriate, 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.</p> <p>The pre-release access list for the report is reviewed on an annual basis. The named individuals are checked to ensure that they are the correct contact and that they are available on the day before the release of the report (if they are not then they can nominate a deputy). A guidance document is also sent to those on the revised list explaining to them their obligations about data disclosure prior to the publication of the report.</p>