

# The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 – Prosecutions at Courts and Case Processing Time for Domestic Abuse Related Cases

## Background Quality Report



# Background Quality Assessment

This report provides information about the quality of the data used to produce ‘The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 – Prosecutions at Courts and Case Processing Time for Domestic Abuse Related Cases’ publication, and any statistics derived from these data.

| Dimension      | Assessment by the author  |
|----------------|---|
| Introduction:- | <p>The publication entitled The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 – Prosecutions at Courts and Case Processing Time for Domestic Abuse Related Cases 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 first published in 2025. The reports are available to download from the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a> and are published in line with the ASG Customer Service and Engagement Statement, <a href="#">Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>This report presents data on the number of prosecutions and convictions for domestic abuse (DA) related cases dealt with at courts in Northern Ireland for the financial year, along with comparative information for the previous year. It also provides data on the number of relevant out of court disposals and case processing time for such cases.</p> <p>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 in Northern Ireland. Information is based on data extracted at April each year, for example data covering 2023/24 i.e. 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 was extracted at April 2024.</p> |

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| <b>Introduction continued:-</b> | <p>This publication is one of a series of five produced by the team. The others are –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Courts Prosecutions, Convictions and Out of Court Disposals;</li><li>• First Time Entrants to the Criminal Justice System in Northern Ireland;</li><li>• Case Processing Time for Criminal Cases Dealt With At Court in Northern Ireland; and</li><li>• Youth Engagement Statistics for Northern Ireland.</li></ul> <p>The data underpinning the Prosecutions, Convictions and Disposals report are also used in the production of the annual ‘First Time Entrants to the Justice System’ publication, which takes data on convictions and out of court diversionary disposals each year and merges it with an historical disposals file.</p> <p>The First Time Entrants report is published annually on a financial year basis, approximately 15 months after the reporting period. This is because the Prosecutions and Convictions bulletin is produced on a calendar year basis so publication of First Time Entrants data is delayed until publication of Prosecutions and Convictions data for the entire period to be reported on has been completed. For example, Prosecutions and Convictions data for the calendar year 2022 were published in June 2023 and, as these contained figures for the last three months of 2021/22, first time offender data for 2021/22 could not be reported upon until the 2022 Prosecutions and Convictions data had been completed.</p> <p>The Case Processing Time report is produced on a narrower dataset, as convictions resulting from breach of court orders, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND) and most other diversionary disposals are not included.</p> |

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| <b>Introduction continued:-</b>   | <p>The Youth Engagement report presents data on cases relating to young people (aged 10 to 17 years at time of offence) coming into formal contact with the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland and who were assessed by the Public Prosecution Service (PPS) as being suitable for resolution through the Youth Engagement process, an out of court diversionary disposal. It is published annually on a financial year basis, approximately 9 months after the reporting period, to allow for update of administrative records and data validation.</p>  |
| <b>Relevance:-</b> The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content. | <p>The data included in the publication are based on cases relating to the domestic abuse offence or any offence aggravated by reason of involving DA as laid out in <a href="#">The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (The Act) (opens in a new window)</a>, for which court proceedings were completed, or that had an out of court disposal recorded in Northern Ireland during the financial year. The information 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.</p> <p>User needs were discussed with the relevant policy customers.</p> <p>Analysis is provided by gender, age, court type and disposal type i.e. if the offence was dealt with by imprisonment, suspended sentence, community service, monetary penalty, discharge or diversion. For those offences aggravated by DA, a breakdown by offence category is also provided. Data for the youth court, a special magistrates' court which deals with proceedings against juveniles between the ages of 10 and 17, are included in the report with data for magistrates' courts.</p> |

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| <p><b>Relevance continued:-</b> The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</p> | <p>Further information is provided on the statutory aggravators that can be attached to the offences under The Act, whether or not sentences have been enhanced based on a proven aggravator and if special measures were put in place at court for witnesses.</p> <p>The average (median) time, from offence reported date to completion date, for cases where there has been a prosecution at court for an offence under the Act, has been included and some comparison with average time taken for all criminal cases has been provided.</p> <p>Some comparisons with figures for the previous year is also included.</p> <p>Statistical coverage includes DA related criminal prosecutions brought to court by the PPS on behalf of the PSNI and other law enforcement bodies. Prosecutions brought by government departments, other public bodies and private individuals are not included.</p> <p>Breaches of community sentences brought by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland are included in the prosecutions and convictions statistics and related figures, but not for the case processing time figures as they are linked to a previous offence and have not proceeded through the various stages in the criminal justice process in the same way that cases relating to other offences may have.</p> <p>Within the report out of court disposals include –</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) those which result in a criminal record (diversionary disposals i.e. offender is subject to a caution, informed warning, a youth conference plan or community based restorative justice scheme); and</li> <li>2) those which do not (Penalty Notices for Disorder (PND)),</li> </ol> <p>where these relate to the new domestic abuse offence created by the 2021 legislation.</p> |

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| <b>Relevance continued:-</b> The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content. | <p>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 <a href="#">NI Direct website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Note that cases dealt with through an out of court disposal are not included in the case processing time figures as they do not go through the standard stages of the court system and, as such, are not directly comparable with cases that have gone through the judicial system.</p> <p>Where an offender has had an out of court disposal imposed or been prosecuted for, or convicted of, several offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence, is counted. The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules issued by the Home Office and The Department of Justice has developed a methodology applicable to Northern Ireland based on these. In summary, where there is a disposal, the offence which receives the most severe penalty is counted. Other factors which may be considered in selection of the principal offence are the potential sentence that may be imposed in relation to an offence and the perceived seriousness of an offence. Principal offence methodology may be viewed on the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> |

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| <b>Relevance continued:-</b> The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content. | For cases brought before a court, the offence counted and used in the compilation of figures in this report is the one on which the court took its final decision. For diversionary disposals, the domestic abuse offence counted is the one recorded at the time the diversionary disposal was issued and, where applicable, subsequently recorded as completed with the PPS. In relation to convictions, the principal offence counted is normally the one that draws the most severe disposal at conviction. Offences for which a defendant is convicted are not necessarily the same as those for which the defendant was initially proceeded against, as charges may be amended during the course of a case. The decision recorded is that reached by the court and takes no account of any subsequent appeal to a higher court.   |
| <b>Accuracy and reliability:-</b> The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.                         | <p>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 domestic abuse cases recorded with the time period reported on. Each Criminal Justice Organisation 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.</p> <p>However, where records have been updated on the systems retrospectively, these updates may be missed if the data were downloaded before this happened. To minimise the impact of this, these particular data are extracted around 4 weeks after the end of the period to be reported; this allows for the updating and completion of records across the systems concerned.</p> |

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| <p><b>Accuracy and reliability continued:-</b> The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</p>   | <p>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 criminal records viewer (CRV).</p> <p>As detailed in the <a href="#">QAAD report (opens in a new window)</a> 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.</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 e.g. reviewing and vetting individuals’ criminal records.</p> <p>Users should note that some published figures may not add to the totals due to rounding.</p> |
| <p><b>Timeliness and punctuality:-</b> Timeliness refers to the time gap between publication and the reference period. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.</p> | <p>The annual dataset covers the financial year. The processes used in producing this report will be continually streamlined while at the same time maintaining or improving the accuracy of the data.</p> <p>The report published in January 2025 is the first in a new series in relation to DA cases dealt with under The Act, which will be updated annually.</p> <p>This new report and subsequent reports will be available to download from the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p>   |

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| <p><b>Accessibility and clarity:-</b> 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, , <a href="#">Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>The report contains contact details for further information and is available to download from the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a> and from the <a href="#">gov.uk website (opens in a new window)</a>, along with reports from earlier years i.e. when they become available, as the 2025 report is the first in a new time series.</p> <p>The data presented in the report are also available in Open Document Spreadsheet (ODS) format on the <a href="#">DoJ website (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Explanatory information including sources, discontinuities and missing data are included where necessary.</p> |

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| <p><b>Coherence and comparability:-</b> 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.</p> | <p>The court structure of Northern Ireland does not equate to that in England, Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland, nor does the process for, or the range of out of court disposals available. Direct comparisons between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland therefore cannot be made.</p> <p>The report published in January 2025 is the first in a new time series, to be updated annually. The focus is on cases with offences covered by the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the Act) and does not include cases with offences prior to the introduction of the Act on 21 February 2022 which may have been assessed by the PPS as having a DA motivation. Due to the time taken for a case to go through the criminal justice process there will be an initial overlap on cases dealt with before and after The Act. This may have an impact on the comparability of figures in the earlier years of the time series. However, this will reduce as, with the passing of time, DA related cases dealt with at courts will relate only to offences that fall under the Act.</p> <p>It is not anticipated that there will be any substantive changes to the measurement of these statistics.</p> |
| <p><b>Assessment of user needs and perceptions:-</b> The process for finding out about users and uses, and their views on the statistical products.</p>   | <p>The ASG Customer Service and Engagement details ASGs customer engagement policy and can be found at <a href="#">Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>As this is a new publication, views were sought from relevant policy colleagues on an outline report to ensure the content would meet the need of its users.</p> <p>ASG carry out a biennial customer survey, users perceptions will be sought on this new publication at the next available opportunity. Regular meetings also take place with key users within the DoJ.</p>  |

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| <b>Trade-offs between output and quality components:-</b>  | No trade-offs applied.  |
| <b>Performance, cost and respondent burden:-</b><br>The effectiveness, efficiency and economy of the statistical output.                                   | <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>   |
| <b>Confidentiality, transparency and security:-</b><br>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices. | <p>The ASG Confidentiality and Protection Arrangements statement, <a href="#">Policy 2 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements (opens in a new window)</a>, 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 <a href="#">'Government Analysis Function's Data and Analysis Method Review'</a> in the collection and dissemination of this report. Data are held on a network that is only accessible to the few statisticians who need access.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>The <a href="#">pre-release access list (opens in a new window)</a> 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> |