

# The Northern Ireland Prison Population - 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
<b>Introduction:-</b>	<p>The publication entitled The Northern Ireland Prison Population 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 2009. The reports are available to download from the <a href="#">DoJ website</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 PDF (536 KB)</a>.</p> <p>This report presents data on average daily prison population levels, receptions and discharge data for Northern Ireland. It includes information by establishment, custody type, gender, age, sentence length, principal offence categories and religion along with some international data for comparative purposes.</p> <p>The statistics are produced using administrative data sourced from the NI Prisoner Record Information System Management (PRISM). PRISM is a live recording system used by NIPS for the day to day control and management of prisoners across Northern Ireland's three establishments. Introduced as a live system in 2006, it covers prisoner status and privileges and is used to regulate discharge dates and record sentence lengths. The data from which receptions and release information are derived are core fields and so their accuracy is essential for the effective handling of day to day prison operations.</p>

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<p><b>Introduction continued:-</b></p>	<p>While the key principle underlying the operation of PRISM is that it relies on NIPS staff within the prison establishments to update, the purpose of the information contained on PRISM is to enable the effective supervision of inmates and consequently it is critical that it is highly accurate.</p> <p>ASG have been granted live read access to the PRISM system and also to relevant sections of the PRISM extractor programme, Business Objects. This enables statisticians to extract and download bespoke frozen file segments on command from the PRISM database.</p> <p>Further details about PRISM can be found in the <a href="#">QAAD report (opens in a new window)</a>.</p>
<p><b>Relevance:-</b> <i>The degree to which the statistical product meets user needs in both coverage and content.</i></p>	<p>This report presents data on average daily prison population levels, receptions and discharges for Northern Ireland. It includes information by establishment, custody type, gender, age, sentence length, principal offence categories and religion along with some international data for comparison purposes.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>User needs are identified through biennial online customer surveys, the most recent undertaken in <a href="#">Autumn 2022 PDF (946 KB)</a>.</p> <p>The report has also been subject to two consultation exercises. The first, during April/May 2018, invited</p>

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<p><b>Relevance continued:-</b></p>	<p>responses to the proposal of using financial year data as the main reporting period for future publications. There were no objections to the proposed changes and as a result, it has focused mainly on data by financial year from 2014/15.</p> <p>A second consultation exercise was conducted in May/June 2022 focusing on the inclusion of additional detail for remand data, committal number, discharge numbers and religious group information. There were also proposed changes to the reporting of reception data. The majority of responses were favourable and as a result the changes have been implemented for the 2021/22 publication, with data tables focusing on data from 2015/16 onwards. Details of both consultations can be found on the <a href="#">DoJ website</a> (opens in a new window).</p>
<p><b>Accuracy and reliability:-</b> <i>The proximity between an estimate and the unknown true value.</i></p>	<p>Data provided via PRISM relies on staff to input information. Like many administrative systems therefore, the resultant statistics are potentially prone to human error or to the system not being able to cater for every scenario encountered. Cross checks for data entry are however incorporated across the system.</p> <p>Given that the information recorded is used to manage day to day business within the NI prison establishments it is essential that it is highly accurate. The nature of the information is factual and the scope for subjectivity is minimal. It is not a sample but a complete data set.</p> <p>There is no means of verifying if information has been entered incorrectly, or not at all. However, as it is the main source of information used to manage day to day business within NICTS and NIPS it needs to be</p>

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<b>Accuracy and reliability continued:-</b>	<p>highly accurate. Risks to data quality and mitigating actions are detailed in the <a href="#">QAAD report (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Numerous validation checks are carried out 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 <a href="#">QAAD report (opens in a new window)</a>.</p> <p>Offence data is unavailable on PRISM in a small number of cases. This occurs because offence and sentence data is imported to PRISM from another system (Causeway) and occasionally individuals are not recorded on the Causeway system, for example when the individual is an immigration detainee and is only being temporarily held before being transferred to GB for processing; or when an individual is sentenced outside NI (in GB or Ireland) and then transferred to NI to serve their sentence. As a result, the criminal case has not been processed through Causeway, and so there is no data to provide to PRISM.</p> <p>For the purposes of the population report, immigration detainees are counted as 'unsentenced', and therefore offence categories and sentences lengths are not applicable.</p> <p>Users should however bear in mind that the statistics originate from administrative data which has different purposes, aims and objectives and are kept for non statistical purposes.</p> <p>Users should note that some figures may not add to the totals due to rounding.</p>

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<p><b>Timeliness and punctuality:-</b>  <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 financial year (1st April to 31st March). 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 it took to allow administrative records to be updated and to allow for resolution of various data quality issues.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="455 605 1020 1096"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="455 605 768 639">Report Year</th> <th data-bbox="768 605 1020 639">Publication Date</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 662 768 696">2021/22</td> <td data-bbox="768 662 1020 696">16/9/22</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 719 768 753">2020/21</td> <td data-bbox="768 719 1020 753">17/9/21</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 776 768 811">2019/20</td> <td data-bbox="768 776 1020 811">25/9/20</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 833 768 868">2018/19</td> <td data-bbox="768 833 1020 868">27/9/19</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 891 768 925">2017/18</td> <td data-bbox="768 891 1020 925">26/9/18</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 948 768 982">2016/17</td> <td data-bbox="768 948 1020 982">27/9/17</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 1005 768 1039">2015/16</td> <td data-bbox="768 1005 1020 1039">30/9/16</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="455 1062 768 1096">2014/15</td> <td data-bbox="768 1062 1020 1096">11/9/15</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Report Year	Publication Date	2021/22	16/9/22	2020/21	17/9/21	2019/20	25/9/20	2018/19	27/9/19	2017/18	26/9/18	2016/17	27/9/17	2015/16	30/9/16	2014/15	11/9/15
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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 PDF (536 KB)</a>.</p> <p>No issues relating to accessibility or clarity were identified during a <a href="#">Customer Survey undertaken in Autumn 2022 PDF (946 KB) (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</a>, 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 <a href="#">DoJ website</a>.</p> <p>Explanatory information including sources, discontinuities and missing data have been included.</p>

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<p><b>Coherence and comparability:-</b></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>A range of international prison comparisons are published on the <a href="#">World Prison Brief website</a> (opens in a new window). This includes the prison population as a rate per 100,000 of the overall population within each jurisdiction. Comparative information is included in the publication for a selection of European countries, with the information based on the latest available at the start of September 2022. The sources for data however varies and may include a snapshot of a single day during the year.</p> <p>The report was subject to a consultation exercise, during April/May 2018, regarding proposed changes to the reporting period. The consultation invited responses to the proposal of using financial year data as the main reporting period for future publications. The responses were favourable, with no objections to the proposed changes. As a result the publication focuses mainly on data by financial year from 2014/15. Prior to that it was prepared on a calendar year basis.</p>
<p><b>Trade-offs between output and quality components:-</b></p>	<p>No trade-offs applied.</p>



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<p><b>Assessment of user needs and perceptions:-</b> <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, Statement details ASGs customer engagement policy, and can be found at <a href="#">Policy 6 in the Code of Practice for Statistics – Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB)</a>.</p> <p>An <a href="#">online customer survey was undertaken in Autumn 2022 PDF (946 KB) (opens in a new window)</a>. 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 reasons for using the publication were policy/performance/resource related, media/public interest related, and to facilitate academic research.</p> <p>All respondents (100%) 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 DoJ.</p>
<p><b>Performance, cost and respondent burden:-</b> <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 20 days.</p>

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<p><b>Confidentiality, transparency and security:-</b> <i>The procedures and policy used to ensure sound confidentiality, security and transparent practices.</i></p>	<p>The ASG Confidentiality and Protection Arrangements statement, <a href="#">Policy 2 in ASGs Policies and Statements PDF (536 KB)</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="#">‘National Statistician’s Guidance: Confidentiality of Official Statistics’</a> 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>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>The <a href="#">pre-release access list</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>