

Northern Ireland National Report ILAG Harvard 2023

1. Country details:

Northern Ireland has a population of 1,903,100 (NISRA, Census)

In 2018, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Northern Ireland was £48.3 billion; compared to £46.8 billion in 2017 (NISRA, ELMS)

In 2021/22, 16% of individuals (approx. 300,000 people) were estimated to be living in relative poverty; compared to 17% in 2020/21. The percentage of individuals in absolute poverty in 2021/22 stood at 13% (approx. 249,000 people); compared to 12% in 2020/21 (NISRA, DfC)

There are approximately 2,267 solicitors currently in private practice in Northern Ireland (Law Society of Northern Ireland).

2. Legal Aid Body:

The Legal Services Agency (LSA) is the body responsible for the administration of legal aid in Northern Ireland. The LSA is an Executive Agency within Northern Ireland's Department of Justice (DoJ) but has operational independence when determining applications for legal aid.

The LSA's operational staff headcount is 138, or 127 full-time equivalent (FTE), in addition to two non-executive members (NEMs) which sit on its Board.

Currently, there are some 940 Solicitors and 590 Barristers registered with LSA to deliver and provide legal services in Northern Ireland.

Legal practitioners are remunerated on a case-by-case basis following assessment of individual bills as specified by legislation.

3. Budget and Spend:

The LSA's budget is funded by central government, via the Department of Justice. While legal aid entitlement means it is a demand led service, the legal aid budget is capped each year by the Department, though is regularly supplemented during in-year monitoring rounds to ease pressure on the fund.

The profile of spend is set out below:

	2021/22	2022/23
	£000	£000
Advice & Assistance	3,988	3,438
Representation Lower	5,250	6,903
Representation Higher	38,395	42,359
Criminal	46,066	48,973
Exceptional Funding	1,017	(228)
Total	94,716	101,444

4. Scope, Caseload and Eligibility:

The scope of the legal aid scheme in Northern Ireland provides extensive coverage with limited restrictions, primarily around defamation proceedings and certain tribunals.

While LSA adjudicates and grants civil legal aid in Northern Ireland, criminal legal aid is granted by the judiciary. Details of the volume of applications and grants are set out below.

With limited exceptions civil cases are subject to a means test and this can involve payment of contributions. There are no contributions payable for criminal legal aid.

	Applications Received		Applications Granted	
	2021/22	2022/23	2021/22	2022/23
	32,16	27,79	29,48	24,75
Advice & Assistance	2	3	2	0
Representation Lower	9,139	8,356	7,588	7,119
	10,29	10,29		
Representation Higher	6	4	7,213	7,151
	24,64	24,92	24,64	24,92
Criminal	9	5	9	5
Exceptional Funding				

	48	52	30	31
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	76,29	71,42	68,96	63,97
Total	4	0	2	6
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5. Quality Assurance:

In Northern Ireland work continues to deliver a quality assurance scheme. At present complaints about the quality of service provided are matters for the Law Society and Bar Council.

To provide legal services funding by the LSA an individual must have a valid practising certificate issued by the Law Society and Bar Council and must be a registered user of the LSA's digital case management system.

6. Alternative Sources of Legal Aid services:

In addition to legal aid, a range of voluntary organisations provide advice and assistance and some representation, primarily in certain tribunals. There are also a range of insurance-based products available to assist with legal issues. A few statutory bodies will also bring test case litigation, primarily in human rights and employment law.