

National Report Template ILAG Cologne 2025

It would be much appreciated if you could fill in what you can for your jurisdiction. We know it's a lot of information to ask, so do not worry if you can only provide some of the information. Please highlight any recent significant changes in your legal aid programme if time and energy permits.

1. Country details:

Name, Population, GDP, Poverty line / % of population deemed to be living in poverty, number of practising lawyers in the jurisdiction.

- Northern Ireland has a population of 1,920,400 (2023 Mid-year Estimate, NISRA).
- In 2022, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for Northern Ireland was £56.7 billion; compared to £46.8 billion in 2018 (ONS UK).
- In 2022/23, 18% of individuals (approx. 349,000 people) were estimated to be living in relative poverty; compared to 16% in 2021/22. The percentage of individuals in absolute poverty in 2022/23 stood at 14% (approx. 271,000 people); compared to 13% in 2021/22 (NISRA, DfC).
- There are approximately 2,300 plus solicitors currently practicing law in Northern Ireland (Law Society of Northern Ireland).

2. Legal Aid Organisation / Authority:

Name and Status of LAO (Independent, within Government, part of the Bar Association / Law Society, Public Defenders Office etc). Number of board and staff members?

Delivery method (salaried, private profession, paralegals, through NGOs etc) Number of lawyers, advocates and paralegals (separately) participating in the legal aid programme? If mixed please give the division of labour and balance of the mix.

- 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 155, or 146.8 full-time equivalent (FTE), in addition to two non-executive members (NEMs) which sit on its Board.
- During 2023/24, there were 457 Solicitor Firms (comprising multiple Solicitors) and 603 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. Paying providers of legal advice and services

What payment methods are used to recompense private lawyers or other providers in your system (e.g. contract, fixed fee, hourly rate, part pro bono, etc)?. If your jurisdiction uses salaried lawyers or advice providers does the contract of employment have any requirements as to quantity of work / cases required per month or year, or other targets to be met?

- Practitioners, both Solicitors and Counsel, are remunerated through a mix of standard fees and time-in-line assessments depending on the nature of the legal aid services provided, as directed by legislation.

4. Budget and Spend:

Please give the budget for Publicly Funded Legal Services / Legal Aid in your jurisdiction for the last two years. If possible show the actual expenditure broken down by civil, criminal, administrative, children, asylum? Expenditure on initial advice services. Please indicate the proportion of the legal aid budget that is funded by (a) central / Federal Government (b) Local or state government. Contribution paid by the client. Is your legal aid budget demand led (uncapped) or capped or a mixture? (Please elaborate).

- 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 LSA publishes annual [Official Statistics](#) via its website¹. Within the latest release, [Annual Statistics to March 2024](#), Table A4 provides a breakdown of all authorised legal aid expenditure (criminal and civil) for the four-year period 2020/21 to 2023/24. Table A6 further disaggregates civil expenditure by the Primary Nature of each case.

5. Scope, Caseload and Eligibility:

What restrictions on scope are there for civil and criminal administrative, children, asylum? legal aid and for initial advice in your jurisdiction? Total number of applications and grants for the last two years. Please break down by civil, criminal administrative, children, asylum? and initial advice as well as by year. Proportion of the population eligible for civil legal aid and/ or initial Advice. Eligibility limits for criminal legal aid. Are means tested contributions part of your (a) civil (b) criminal (c) initial advice eligibility requirements? In your jurisdiction, are legal aided litigants who lose their case liable to pay the other side's legal expenses/ costs?

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

¹ <https://www.justice-ni.gov.uk/articles/annual-statistics-legal-aid>

- While LSA adjudicate on applications for civil legal aid, the granting of criminal legal aid is a Judiciary function. Once awarded, information is shared from NI Courts & Tribunal System to LSA for the purposes of issuing criminal legal aid certificates and the subsequent administration of criminal legal aid, including payment of bills.
- LSA's latest Official Statistics release, [Annual Statistics to March 2024](#), also provides a granular breakdown of legal aid grants (criminal and civil) for the four-year period 2020/21 to 2023/24 (Table A1). Table A3 further disaggregates civil grants by the Primary Nature of each case.
- As the annual number of applications received each year is not included with LSA's Official Statistics, a high-level summary is set out at Table 1, below:

Table 1: Applications submitted and granted, 2022/23 and 2023/24^{1,2,3}

	Applications Submitted		Applications Granted	
	2022/23	2023/24	2022/23	2023/24
Criminal Courts	24,925	25,235	24,925	25,235
Criminal Advice & Assistance (PACE)	18,865	19,026	18,865	19,025
All Criminal	43,790	44,261	43,790	44,260
Advice & Assistance (Civil)	8,937	7,438	5,885	5,055
Representation Lower	8,359	8,752	7,119	7,455
Representation Higher	10,299	10,354	7,151	7,083
Exceptional Funding	52	50	31	28
All Civil	27,647	26,594	20,186	19,621
Grand Total	71,437	70,855	63,976	63,881

Sources: LAMS (MI) and Official Statistics

Notes:

1. Applications Submitted constitute Management Information and may be subject to change.
2. As criminal legal aid is granted by the judiciary, an application is considered already granted once the application is received by LSA. In turn, the figures match in Table1.
3. As an application can be submitted and granted in different years, the two sets of figures presented in Table 1 should be considered independent.

- 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.

6. Quality Assurance:

System used – Complaints to LAO, Complaints to the Bar Association/ Law Society, Client Satisfaction questionnaires / interviews, Continuing Legal Education, Mentoring, Peer Review, Supervisor audit, Observation or video/audio tape etc? What requirements are there (if any) for lawyers and others who wish to provide legal aid, other than membership of the Bar / professional association e.g. registration, experience, special exams, interviews, upper or lower limits on number of cases undertaken annually etc?

- 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.

7. Public Legal Education:

Initiatives in last two years to increase public awareness of the availability of Publicly Funded Legal Services/ legal aid in your jurisdiction and how to access it. (Include any particular approach for those in remote areas or those with special legal needs e.g. the elderly or victims of domestic violence). Has there been a country wide Needs Assessment study in your jurisdiction in recent years, looking at the distribution of justiciable problems and how the public respond to them? Date of last needs assessment? Executed by?

8. Alternative Sources of Legal Aid services:

What are the other principal sources of legal help for disadvantaged citizens in your jurisdiction, and how many clients do they assist annually (e.g. legal expenses insurance, trade unions, consumers organisation claims companies, community law clinics, university law clinics, local charities, NGOs etc). Is the use of Internet tools e.g. Rechtswizer, Rocket lawyer, legal databases etc increasing in your jurisdiction?

- 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.

9. Holistic legal services:

Is your jurisdiction exploring link ups between legal services providers and non lawyer professionals e.g. health / justice partnerships, social work / justice collaboration, or other forms of "one stop shop"?

- A pilot exercise is underway in an attempt to map, for the first time, the level of legal representation and subsequent legal aid costs in criminal cases from both the prosecution (PPS) as well as the defence (LSA) perspectives.

10. UN SDG Standard 16.3

Please identify any steps being taken to articulate and elaborate Sustainable Development Goal 16.3 in your jurisdiction.

11. Other

- The Department has been consulting on an Enabling Access to Justice Programme Delivery Plan – [Consultation on Enabling Access to Justice Programme Delivery Plan | Department of Justice](#)