

# THE DOMESTIC ABUSE AND CIVIL PROCEEDINGS ACT (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2021 - PROSECUTIONS AT COURTS AND CASE PROCESSING TIME FOR DOMESTIC ABUSE RELATED CASES DEALT WITH IN 2024-25

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# 1

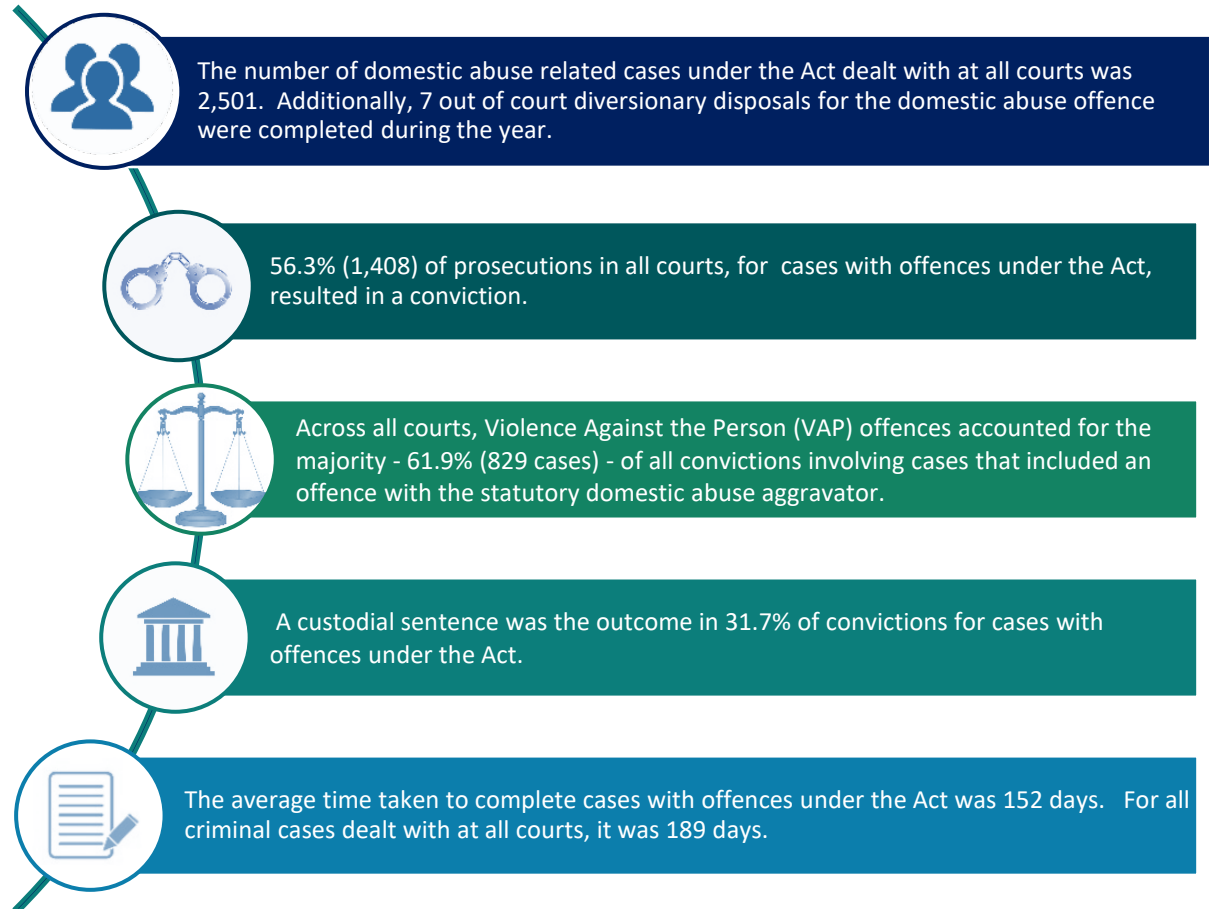
## Key Findings

### 1.1 About this bulletin

This bulletin provides information on domestic abuse (DA) related criminal cases in Northern Ireland completed during the financial year 2024-25. It includes details on:

- Prosecutions and convictions for cases with offences under the [Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2021 \(opens in a new window\)](#) (the Act).
- Out-of-court disposals completed during the same period, for the DA offence created by the Act .
- The time taken to process these cases through the justice system.

### Main Points in 2024-25



# 1 | Key Findings

- In 2024-25, there were 2,501 cases dealt with at courts where there was an offence prosecuted under the Act. This was down 8.3% from 2,728 cases dealt with in 2023-24.
- In 2024-25, 56.3% of cases with an offence prosecuted under the Act resulted in a conviction (1,408 out of 2,501). This conviction rate was slightly higher than the 55.5% observed for cases dealt with in 2023-24 (1,515 out of 2,728). Additionally, in 2024-25, 7 DA offences under the Act were resolved through out-of-court disposals.
- Of the 438 cases with the new DA offence dealt with at court in 2024-25, 211 resulted in convictions. Of the 2,404 cases with offences with the statutory aggravator (Section 15), 1,366 resulted in a conviction.
- In 2024-25, there were 21 convictions in cases with an offence having a child related aggravator attached (under Section 8 or Section 9 of the Act), with the aggravator successfully proven in 6 of those cases. In comparison, 2023-24 saw 17 such convictions, with the aggravator proven in 8 cases.
- In 2024-25, 95.4% of cases (2,386) were handled in magistrates' courts, a slight decrease from 96.6% (2,635) in 2023-24.

- In 2024-25, the vast majority of those convicted in cases with an offence under the Act were male - 90.8% (1,278 out of 1,408).
- People aged 30 to 39 made up the largest proportion of those convicted in cases with an offence under the Act - 36.8% (518 individuals). This was the same in 2023-24 when 37.9% (574) convictions were for people in that age group.
- In 2024-25, where the case included an offence with the statutory DA aggravator (Section 15), VAP was the main offence category in the majority of cases - accounting for 61.9% (829 cases) and cases where the main offence was Criminal Damage & Arson made up 17.8% (239 cases).
- Across all courts, custodial sentences were the main outcome in 31.7% of convictions (446 cases) in 2024-25, compared to 30.6% (463 cases) in 2023-24. At the Crown Court level, custodial outcomes were even more common - 71.0% (66 cases out of 93) in 2024-25, and 72.0% (59) for cases dealt with in 2023-24.
- In 2024-25, sentences were enhanced in 455 cases following convictions for cases with offences under the Act. In 2023-24, this figure was 170.
- Special measures were implemented in 229 DA related cases under the Act in 2024-25, compared to 206 cases in 2023-24.

## 2 | Introduction

### 2.1 Domestic Abuse related crimes

The Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the Act) introduced a new domestic abuse (DA) offence that criminalises a course of abusive behaviour. This offence is not limited to physical or sexual violence or threats; it also includes controlling or coercive behaviour, as well as psychological, emotional, financial, and economic abuse. Recording of this offence began on 21 February 2022.

The Act also introduced two child aggravators that can be applied to the new DA offence, allowing courts to enhance sentencing if proven:

- Section 8: Applies when the victim is under 18<sup>a</sup>.
- Section 9: Applies when a relevant child (under 18) is involved—such as witnessing the abuse, being used or threatened during the abuse, or being adversely affected by it.

Additionally, the Act created a statutory aggravator (Section 15) that can be applied to any offence other than the new DA offence. An offence is considered aggravated if the offender intended to cause, or was reckless about causing, physical or psychological harm to someone they are personally connected to. In this bulletin, these are referred to as offences with the statutory DA aggravator.

<sup>a</sup> If an abuser has parental responsibility for a child under 16, the domestic abuse offence nor the aggravator will apply. Such cases are dealt with under child protection measures.

### 2.2 About this bulletin

Under the Act, the Department of Justice is required to prepare a report for the Northern Ireland Assembly. This report will include information on prosecutions, convictions, and case processing times for DA offences and offences with the statutory DA aggravator. It was laid before the Assembly in July 2025.

This bulletin is separate from that statutory report. It focuses specifically on cases dealt with at court and through out-of-court disposals under the Act. It is the second in a new series examining how such cases are handled.

Produced in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, the bulletin presents data on:

- The number of prosecutions and convictions for cases with at least one offence under the Act in magistrates' courts and the Crown Court in Northern Ireland.
- The period covered spans the 2024-25 year, ie, from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025, though some comparison with data from the introduction of the Act is included.
- Data from the youth court (a special magistrates' court for individuals aged 10 to 17) are included within the magistrates' court figures.
- Information is also provided on out-of-court disposals. However, it's important to note that the Section 15 statutory aggravator is not applied to offences dealt with in this way. Therefore, out-of-court disposal figures relate only to cases involving the new DA offence.

## 2 | Introduction

This bulletin also includes:

- The age and gender breakdown of the known offending population.
- Details of the disposals received and the main offence category for cases where there was a prosecution for at least one offence under the Act
- Details of cases with relevant aggravators under the Act and whether those were proven and any subsequent sentence enhanced.

Where an offender has received an out-of-court disposal or has been prosecuted or convicted for multiple offences on the same occasion, only one offence, the principal offence is counted. Further information on the principal offence methodology, data coverage, and quality is provided in Appendix 1.

All data presented in the bulletin's tables and charts, along with supplementary datasets, are available in the accompanying spreadsheet on the Department of Justice website.

The bulletin also includes the average (median) time from the date an offence was reported/ detected to its completion for cases prosecuted under the Act. A comparison with the average time taken for all criminal cases is also provided.

The next update is scheduled for publication in Autumn 2026. A full [publication schedule \(opens in a new window\)](#) is available on the Department of Justice website.

### 2.3 Other data sources

This bulletin presents statistics on relevant court proceedings and out-of-court disposals concluded in Northern Ireland during the 2024–25 financial year. It also includes some data for cases dealt with in previous years for comparative purposes.

To provide a more complete picture of DA - from incident to conviction - it may be helpful to consider additional sources, such as the Police Service of Northern Ireland's (PSNI) publication [Domestic Abuse Incidents and Crimes Recorded by the Police in Northern Ireland \(opens in a new window\)](#). These figures track the levels and trends of police-recorded DA incidents and crimes. However, as not all victims report abuse to the police, these figures may only reflect part of the true extent of DA.

The Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPS) also plans to publish data on the number of DA related cases submitted by the PSNI, along with the prosecutorial decisions made - whether to proceed to prosecution, divert from court, or take no further action. This data is expected to be published in late 2025.

It's important to note that data from different sources are not directly comparable, as they are collected on different bases (e.g. crimes, suspects, defendants) and may not cover the same cohort due to differences in how long cases take to progress through the criminal justice system.

## 3 | All cases

### 3.1 Included cases

Figures reported in this bulletin only relate to those cases with offences covered under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021 (the Act). The Act does not have retrospective powers. Therefore, cases with offences committed prior to the introduction of the Act on 21 February 2022 that may have had a DA motivation are not included. While such earlier cases may have been dealt with at court or as an out of court disposal during the reporting period, they do not form part of the relevant dataset for this bulletin. Over time, the number of these legacy cases is expected to decline, with most DA related cases falling under the legislation.

Due to the small number involved, the 16 cases involving offences under the Act that were dealt with between 21 February and 31 March 2022 have been included in the 2022/23 figures.

### 3.2 Case numbers overall

In total, there were 2,508 separate DA related cases, with offences under the Act, disposed in 2024-25, whether at court or through out of court disposal (Figure 1). This is 228 fewer cases than the number disposed in the previous year (2023-24, 2,736) (Figure 1). These figures relate solely to cases with at least one offence prosecuted under the Act.

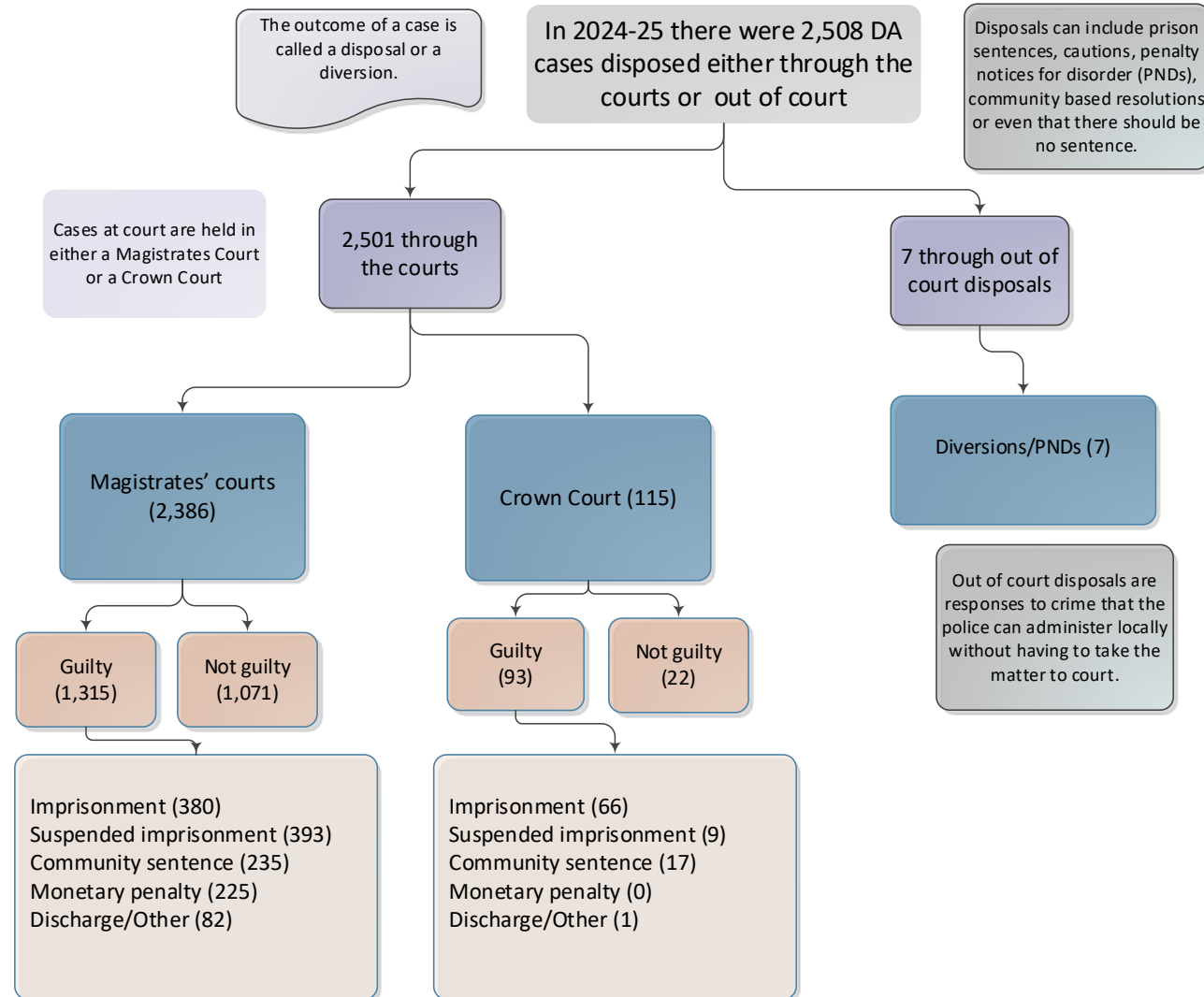
Of all cases under the Act that were disposed in 2024-25, 99.7% (2,501) were dealt with at court and 0.3% (7) by out of court disposal (the Section 15 aggravator cannot be applied to offences dealt with by way of court disposal). These proportions are similar to those for cases completed in 2023-24. (Table 1 in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))



# 4

## Prosecutions and Convictions

Figure 1: Outcomes of domestic abuse related cases dealt with at court and by out of court disposal 2024-25.





# 4 | Prosecutions and Convictions

## 4.1 Prosecutions and convictions overall

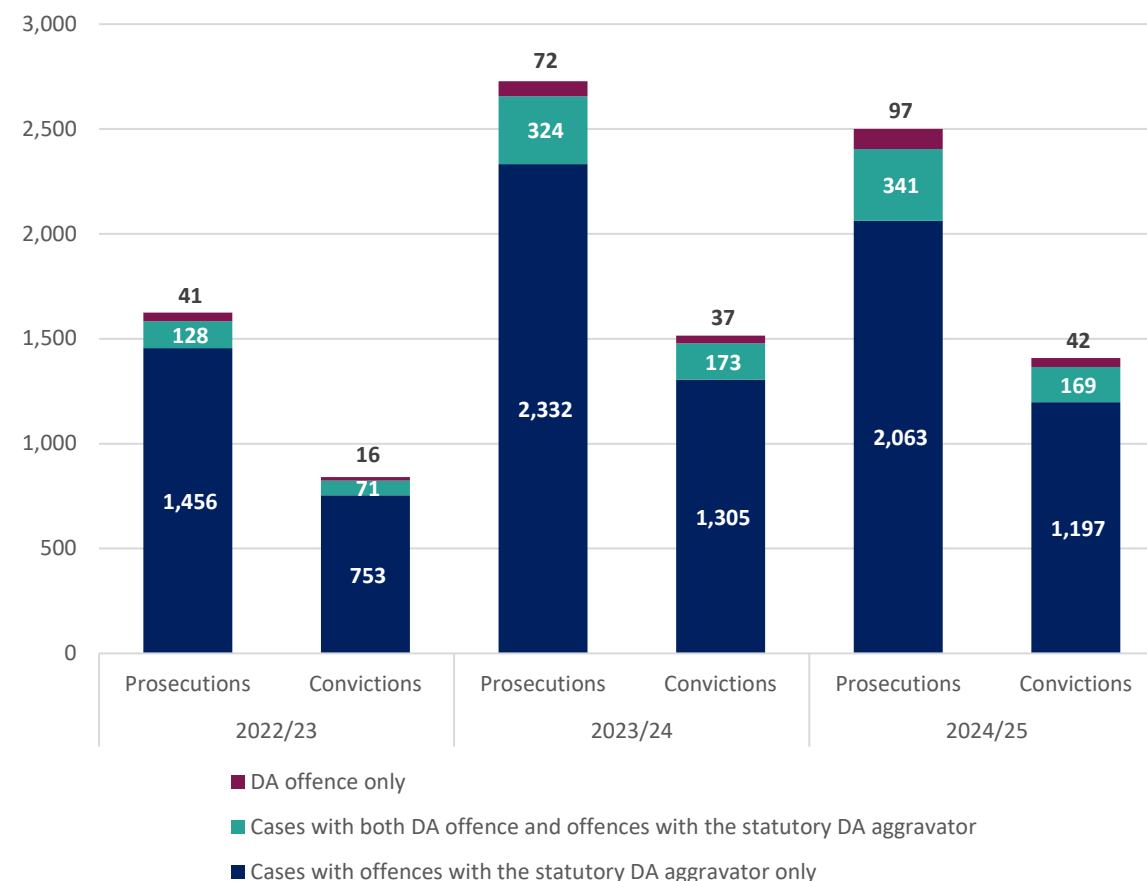
In 2024-25, there were 2,501 prosecutions at court for cases involving at least one offence under the Act, representing an 8.3% decrease from the 2,728 prosecutions for cases dealt with in 2023-24. In 2024-25, 56.3% (1,408) of cases resulted in conviction, compared to 55.5% (1,515) in 2023-24.

Of prosecutions completed during 2024-25, 97 were for cases where the new DA offence was the only offence under the Act, with convictions in 43.3% (42) of these cases. The equivalent figure for cases dealt with in 2023-24 was 51.4% (37 cases).

For cases with other offences with the statutory DA aggravator, there were 2,063 prosecutions completed in 2024-25, resulting in 1,197 (58.0%) convictions. In 2023-24 there were 2,332 similar cases completed at courts, resulting in 1,305 (56.0%) convictions.

There were a further 341 prosecutions in 2024-25 for cases which included both the new DA offence and offences with the statutory DA aggravator (324 in 2023-24). This resulted in 169 (49.6%) convictions in 2024-25, compared with 173 (53.4%) in 2023-24 (Figure 2 and Table 2a in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#)).

**Figure 2: Prosecutions and convictions for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 dealt with at court, 2023-24 and 2024-25.**



# 4 | Prosecutions and Convictions

## 4.2 Crown Court

In 2024–25, there were 115 cases prosecuted at Crown Court involving at least one offence under the Act. This is an increase from 93 cases in 2023–24, which may have been lower due to the time needed for cases to progress through the system after the legislation came into effect in February 2022.

Of the cases dealt with in Crown Court in 2024–25, 80.9% (93 cases) resulted in a conviction, compared to 88.2% (82 cases) in 2023–24. In 2024–25, there were 2 cases where the sole offence under the Act was the new DA offence, and both resulted in convictions.

For cases involving other offences with the statutory DA aggravator but no DA offence, the conviction rate was 80.4% (74 cases) in 2024–25, down from 89.3% (67 cases) in 2023–24.

In cases that included both the new DA offence and other offences with the statutory DA aggravator, 81.0% (17 cases) resulted in a conviction in 2024–25, similar to the rate of 81.3% (13 cases) in 2023–24. (Table 2b in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

## 4.3 Magistrates' courts

There were 2,386 cases with at least one offence under the Act prosecuted at magistrates' courts in 2024-25. This is a 9.4% decrease from 2,635 cases in 2023–24. Of the cases dealt with in magistrates' courts in 2024-25, 1,315 (55.1%) resulted in a conviction. This compared to 1,433 (54.4%) convictions for cases completed in 2023-24.

There was a conviction in 42.1% (40) of cases in 2024-25, where the sole offence prosecuted under the Act was the new DA offence. This was down from the rate of 50.0% (35 convictions) for similar cases dealt with in 2023-24.

Cases where there were other offences with the statutory DA aggravator but no DA offence, resulted in a conviction in 57.0% (1,123) of cases in 2024-25, compared to 54.9% (1,238) in 2023-24.

In cases with both the new DA offence and other offences with the statutory DA aggravator, there was a conviction in 47.5% (152) in 2024-25, a decrease from the conviction rate of 51.9% (160) for cases dealt with in 2023-24. (Table 2c in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

# 5 | Out of Court Disposals

## 5.1 About out of court disposals

Non-court disposals allow police to deal quickly and proportionately with low-level, often first-time offending that may be more appropriately resolved without prosecution in court. In Northern Ireland, a range of options are available, including:

- Cautionary disposals
- Informed warnings
- Completion of Youth Conferencing Plans ordered by the PPS
- Community-Based Restorative Justice schemes

In addition, Penalty Notices for Disorder (PNDs) were introduced on 6 June 2012 under the Justice Act (Northern Ireland) 2011. PNDs are fixed penalties aimed at addressing low-level, anti-social, and nuisance behaviour by offenders aged 18 and over. Unlike other out-of-court disposals, accepting a PND does not result in a criminal record.

Further information on out-of-court disposals is available in [Appendix 1](#) and on the [nidirect website \(opens in a new window\)](#).

## 5.2 Out of court disposals

Under the Act, cases involving the new DA offence may be dealt with by out-of-court disposal.

In 2024-25, there were 7 cases involving the new DA offence under the Act that were dealt with by out-of-court disposals. There were 8 such cases recorded in 2023-24. (Table 1 in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

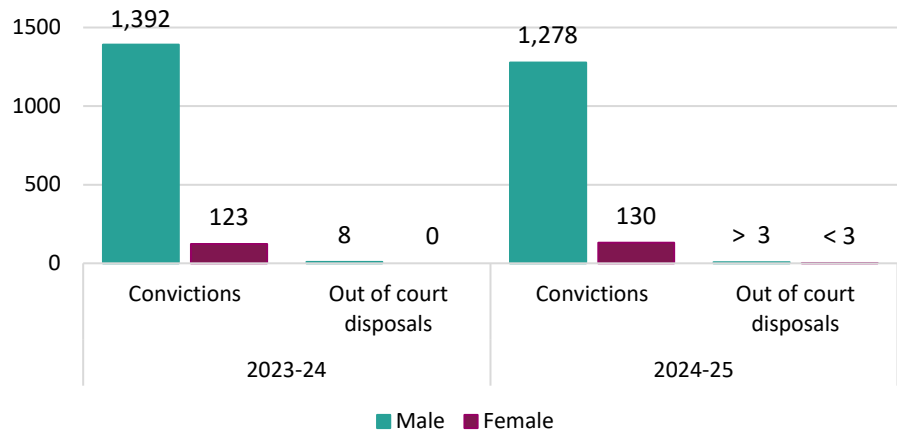
# 6 | Defendants

## 6.1 Gender

Where there was a conviction or out-of-court disposal for cases with an offence under the Act, almost all of the defendants were male. In 2024-25, 90.8% of those convicted in court (1,278 individuals) were male. Similarly, in 2023-24, the proportion was 91.9% (1,392 individuals).

Most of those receiving an out-of-court disposal in 2024-25, in cases involving the new DA offence, were male, with fewer than three cases where the defendant was female. (Figure 3 and Tables 3a and 3b in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

**Figure 3: Convictions and out of court disposals for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 by gender of defendant, 2023-24 and 2024-25.**



## 6.2 Age

Defendants aged 30 to 39 made up the largest proportion of those convicted in cases involving offences under the Act. In 2024-25, 36.8% of defendants (518 individuals) in DA related court cases were in this age group. In 2023-24, the proportion was 37.9% (574 individuals). Those in the 40 - 49 age group made up 20.5% (288) of those convicted in 2024-25 (18.1%, 274 in 2023-24).

For cases dealt with by way of out of court disposal, in 2024-25, 3 of the 7 cases with the new DA offence were cases where the defendant was aged 30 to 39.

For DA related cases dealt with at courts, only 3 were for cases where the defendant was aged under 18 in 2024-25 (6 in 2023-24). (Tables 4a and 4b in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

# 7 | Offence Category

## 7.1 Convictions at courts

The new DA offence introduced by the Act falls under the Violence Against the Person (VAP) offence category. As such, all cases where this offence was the main offence at disposal — 68 in 2024-25, slightly down from 77 in 2023-24 — are classified as VAP.

In 2024-25, there were 1,340 cases that included an offence with the statutory DA aggravator, whether or not it was for the main offence. Of these, the main offence fell into the following categories:

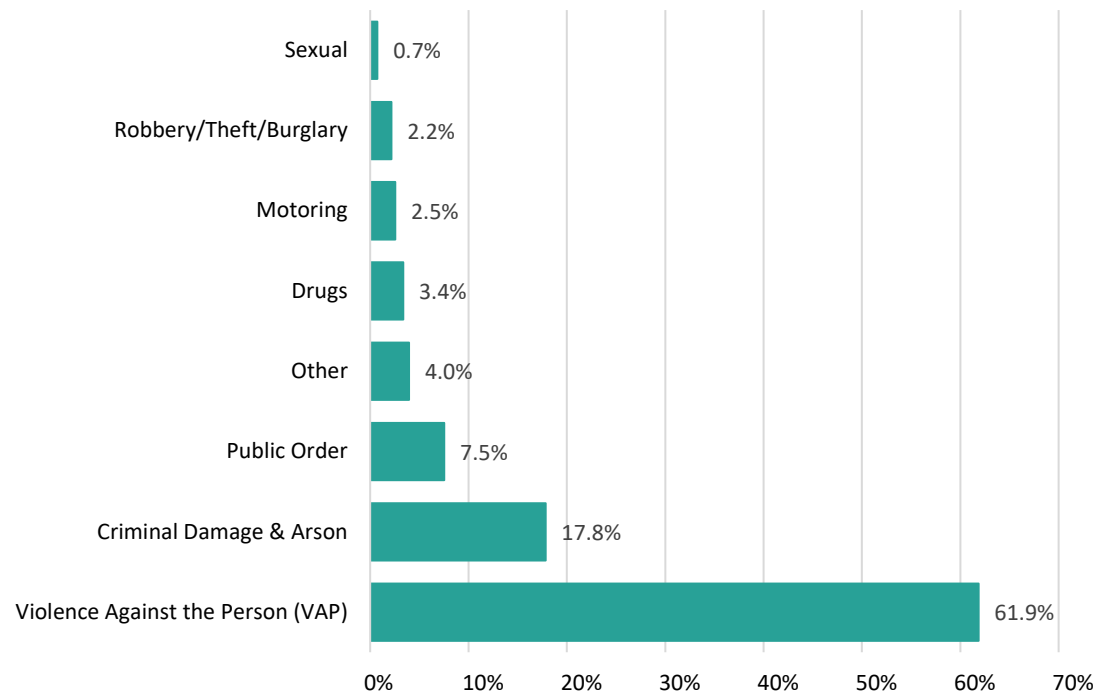
- 61.9% (829 cases) were categorised as VAP (60.3%, 867 cases in 2023-24)
- 17.8% (239 cases) fell under Criminal Damage and Arson (19.5%, 280 cases in 2023-24)
- 7.5% (101 cases) were in the Public Order category (8.4%, 121 cases in 2023-24)
- 3.4% (45 cases) were for offences in the Drugs category (4.2%, 60 cases in 2023-24)
- 2.5% (34 cases) were for Motoring offences (Figure for 2023-24 not reported under rules of disclosure)
- 2.2% (29 cases) were for Robbery/Theft/Burglary type offences (2.2%, 32 cases in 2023-24); and
- 4.0% (53 cases) were in the Other category (3.5%, 50 cases in 2023-24).

(Figure 4 and Table 5a in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

## 7.2 Out of court disposals

Since the new DA offence falls under the Violence Against the Person (VAP) category, all 7 cases in 2024-25 where it was the main offence at disposal and dealt with by out-of-court disposal are classified as VAP.

**Figure 4: Percentage of convictions for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 by offence category, 2024-25.**



# 8 | Convictions by Main Disposal Type

## 8.1 All courts

In 2024–25, the most common outcome across all courts following conviction in cases that included an offence under the Act - whether for the new DA offence or another offence with the statutory aggravator - was a custodial sentence, in 31.7% (446) of cases. In 2023–24, 30.6% (463) of cases resulted in a custodial sentence.

Other types of disposals in 2024–25 included:

- Suspended sentences in 28.6% (402) of cases, up from 25.9% (393) the previous year
- Community sentences in 17.9% (252) of cases, compared to 19.8% (300) in 2023-24
- Monetary penalties in 16.0% (225) of cases, compared to 16.8% (254) in 2023–24
- Other penalties, such as discharges, in 5.9% (83) of cases. In 2023-24, these made up 6.9% (105) of cases of disposals across all courts.

(Table 6a in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

## 8.2 Crown Court

In 2024–25, in cases where a conviction was made in cases with a DA related offence under the Act at Crown Court, the most common outcome was a custodial sentence, applied in 71.0% (66) of cases. In the previous year, 2023–24, 72.0% (59) of cases completed at Crown Court, resulted in custodial sentences.

In 2024–25, at Crown Court, 18.3% (17) of cases resulted in a community sentence, while 9.7% (9) were dealt with through a suspended sentence. No cases received a monetary penalty as the main outcome. In one case, the main disposal was classified as other penalties, such as a discharge. (Table 6b in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

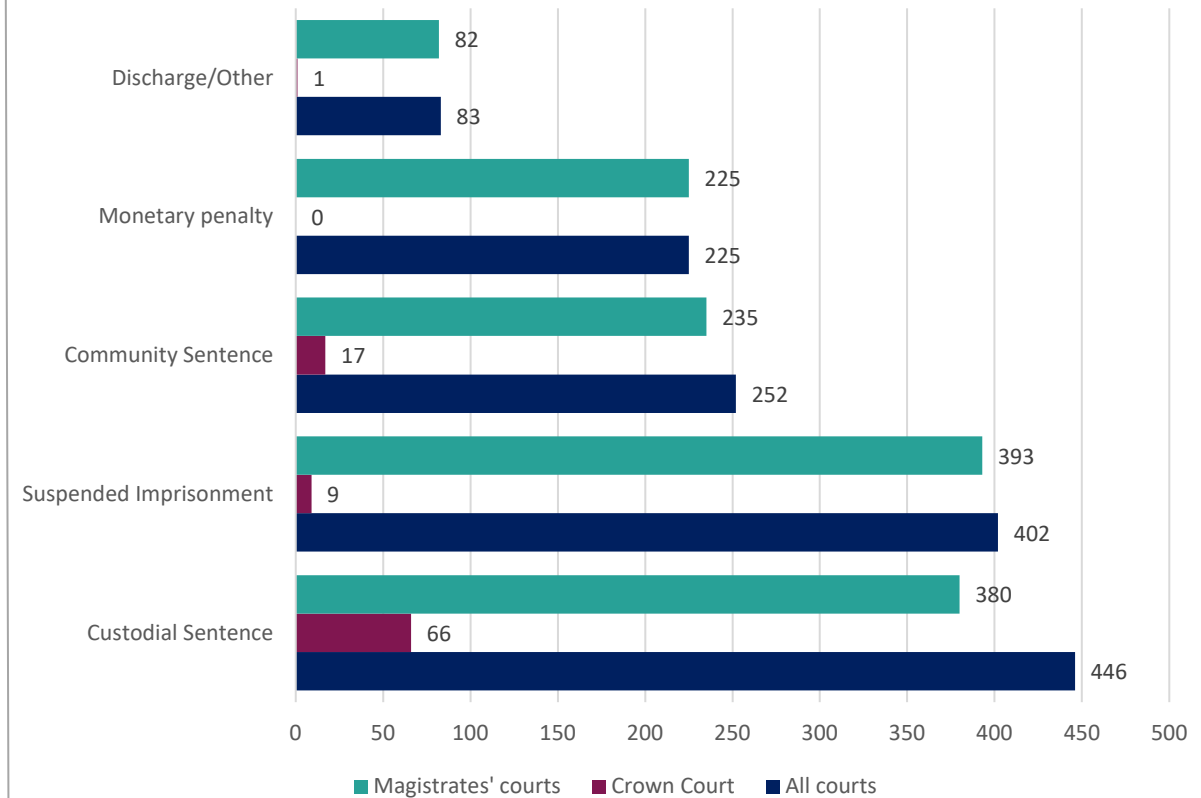
## 8 | Convictions by Main Disposal Type

### 8.3 Magistrates' courts

In 2024-25, where there was a conviction in a case with an offence under the Act, at magistrates' courts, the most common type of disposal was a suspended sentence (29.9%, 393 cases) (26.6%, 381 cases in 2023-24). In 28.9% (380) of cases, the main disposal was a custodial one. A custodial sentence was the most common disposal for DA cases dealt with at magistrates' courts in 2023-24 (28.2%, 404 cases).

A community sentence was the main disposal in 17.9% (235) of cases (20.3%, 291 cases in 2023-24). A monetary penalty was the main disposal in 17.1% (225) of cases in 2024-25 (17.7%, 254 cases in 2023-24). Other penalties, such as a discharge, were the main disposal in 6.2% (82) of cases in 2024-25 (7.2%, 103 cases in 2023-24). (Table 6c in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

**Figure 5: Main disposal types for cases with offences under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (NI) 2021 by court type, 2024-25.**





# 9 | Aggravators<sup>b</sup>

## 9.1 Child aggravators attached to the DA offence

The Act includes two child related aggravators: one applies when the victim is under 18 (Section 8), and the other when a child is involved in the abuse - such as witnessing the abuse, being used or threatened during the abuse, or being adversely affected by it (Section 9).

In 2024-25, there were 4 prosecutions involving an offence with an aggravator under Section 8, with 3 resulting in convictions. However, the aggravator was proven in none of those cases. In 2023-24, 3 cases were prosecuted under Section 8, but none led to a conviction.

For cases involving an offence with an aggravator under Section 9, there were 32 prosecutions in 2024-25, with 18 convictions and the aggravator proven in 6 cases. The number of convictions in such cases was similar to that recorded in 2023-24, when the number of prosecutions was 24, with 17 convictions and the aggravator proven in 8 cases. (Table 7 in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

## 9.2 Aggravators attached to other non DA offences

The Act also introduced a DA aggravator (Section 15), which can be applied to any offence other than the new DA offence. In 2024-25, there were 2,404 prosecutions with an offence where this aggravator was used. Of these, 1,366 resulted in convictions, and the DA statutory aggravator was proven in 1,106 cases. In 2023-24, the number of prosecutions was 2,656, with 1,478 subsequent convictions and the aggravator proven in 1,108 cases. (Table 7 in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

## 9.3 DA offence cases without aggravators

The Act also allows the new DA offence to be prosecuted, even when no child related aggravators (under Sections 8 or 9) are involved. In 2024-25, there were 404 such cases prosecuted, with 192 resultant convictions. In 2023-24, the number of such prosecutions was 369, with convictions in 193 of those cases. (Table 7 in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

<sup>b</sup> Figures in this section do not sum to the total number of cases, as there will be cases that have more than one aggravator attached.

# 10 | Enhanced Sentences and Special Measures

## 10.1 Enhanced sentences

Under the Act, where aggravation of an offence is proven - whether through child aggravators (Sections 8 or 9) or the general DA aggravator (Section 15) - judges may increase the sentence up to the maximum penalty available.

In 2024-25, a sentence was recorded as enhanced following conviction in cases with an offence under the Act in 455 cases. The main disposal was a custodial sentence in 203 of these cases and a suspended sentence in 136 of the cases. A community sentence was the main outcome in 63 cases where the sentence was enhanced and in 42 cases where the main disposal was a monetary penalty, whilst a discharge or other disposal was the main penalty in 11 cases. (Table 8 in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

## 10.2 Special Measures

The Act allows for the extension of special measures, as listed under the Criminal Evidence (Northern Ireland) Order 1999. This allows for special measures to be put in place for 'witnesses eligible for assistance on grounds of fear or distress about testifying'.

Special measures were put in place in 229 cases in 2024-25. These related to 32 cases dealt with at Crown Court and, for cases dealt with at magistrates' courts, special measures were put in place in 197 cases in 2024-25. (Table 9 in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

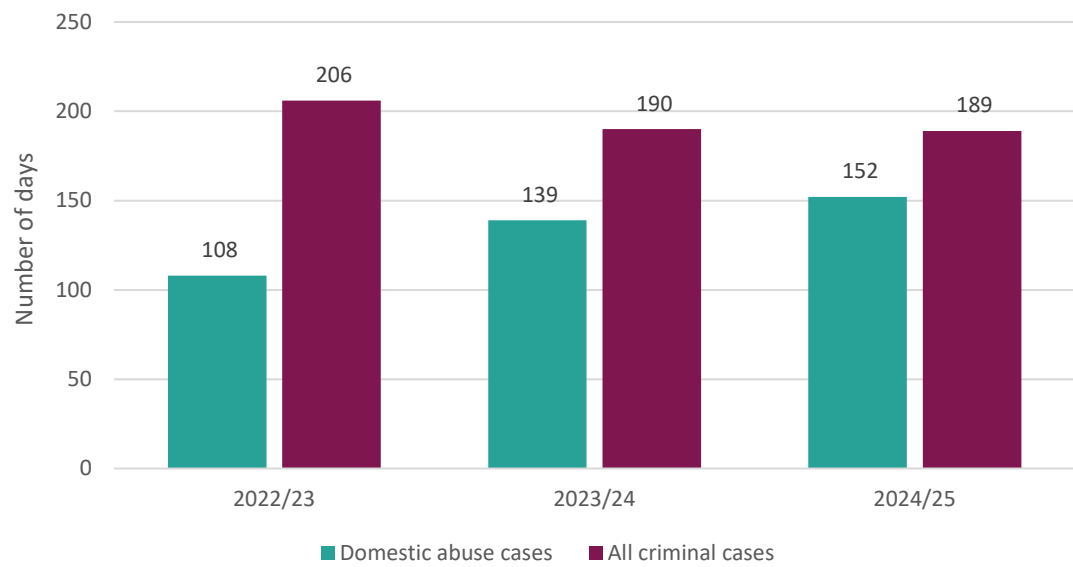
# 11 | Case Processing Times

## 11.1 All courts

The efficiency of the criminal justice system is vital for victims, witnesses, and their communities. Comparing the time taken to complete DA related cases with all criminal cases helps assess how well the system is working. Since some complex cases take longer to resolve, it's useful to report not only the average time but also how long it takes to complete the majority of cases - specifically, the time by which 80% and 90% of cases are finished. Case duration is measured from the date the offence was reported to, or detected by, the police to the date it was completed in court, using the median as the average.

In 2024-25, the median time to complete a case involving at least one offence under the Act was 152 days - an increase of 9.4% from 139 days in 2023-24. Still, this time was shorter than the median for all criminal cases, which was 189 days in 2024-25. For 80% of cases to be completed, it took 304 days in 2024-25, up from 268 days in 2023-24 (a 13.4% increase). Despite this rise, the figure remains lower than the time taken for 80% of all criminal cases to be completed - 408 days in 2024-25. (Table 10a in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

**Figure 6: Time taken for domestic abuse related cases and all criminal cases from date incident reported/detected to disposal at court, 2022/23 to 2024/25.**



# 11 | Case Processing Times

## 11.2 Crown Court

The number of cases under the Act that were dealt with at Crown Court in 2024-25 was low which should be kept in mind when reviewing the case processing times.

In 2024-25, the average (median) time taken to complete a case, from the date the incident was reported/detected to disposal at Crown Court, involving at least one offence under the Act was 486 days. This represents a 20.6% increase from the figure of 403 days in 2023-24. However, this time was still shorter than the median for all criminal cases dealt with at Crown Court in 2024-25 (752 days).

Looking at the time by which 80% of these cases were completed, it was 652 days in 2024-25, up from 521 days in 2023-24, a 25.1% increase. Still, the 2024-25 figure is significantly lower than the 1,398 days taken for 80% of all criminal cases to be completed that year. (Table 10b in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

## 11.3 Magistrates' courts

In 2024-25, the average (median) time taken to complete a case from the date the incident was reported/detected to disposal at magistrates' courts, involving at least one offence under the Act was 145 days. This marks a 7.4% increase from 135 days in 2023-24. However, this time was still shorter than the median for all criminal cases - 174 days in 2024-25.

Looking at the time by which 80% of cases were completed, it was 275 days in 2024-25, up 9.6% from 251 days in 2024-25. Despite the increase, the figure remains lower than the equivalent time for all criminal cases - 350 days in 2024-25. (Table 10c in accompanying [spreadsheet, opens in a new window](#))

# 12 | Appendix 1 – Methodology and Counting Rules

## What counts as a prosecution/conviction/diversionary disposal?

The data included in the bulletin are based on those for whom court proceedings were completed, or who had an out of court disposal recorded in Northern Ireland during the period of the report. The figures reported relate only to those cases with an offence covered under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, whether or not that offence is the main offence at disposal. They do not include cases which may have had a DA motivation prior to the introduction of the legislation on 21 February 2022. The bulletin counts criminal proceedings brought to court by the Public Prosecution Service on behalf of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), other law enforcement bodies and breaches of community sentences brought by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland. The numbers of prosecutions completed are split into those where a conviction followed and those which did not result in a guilty finding. Prosecutions brought by Government Departments, other public bodies and private individuals are not included. The Public Prosecution Service in Northern Ireland publishes details of the [prosecution process \(opens in a new window\)](#) in Northern Ireland on its website, detailing paths through the justice system, whether a case is dealt with by way of court disposal or by an out of court disposal.

For the purposes of this bulletin, out of court disposals include those that result in a criminal record (diversionary disposals) and those that do not (Penalty Notices for Disorder, (PNDs)). Diversionary disposals are those instances where an offender is subject to a caution, informed warning, a youth conference plan, or is subject to the community based restorative justice scheme. Police-issued 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. Further information on PNDs can be accessed at the [nidirect website \(opens in a new window\)](#).

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## Case Processing time - What counts as a case?

The figures reported in this bulletin relate to cases dealt with at court in the period specified, where the case was prosecuted by the PPS on behalf of PSNI and other law enforcement bodies. For the purposes of the statistics presented in this publication, a case may be considered to commence when an offence is first reported to, or detected by, the PSNI or another law enforcement body. The case then proceeds through the various stages of the criminal justice system until it is considered dealt with, as a result of a prosecution at court. The time period measured therefore, is the number of calendar days from Offence Reported/Detected Date to Courts Disposal Date, for cases dealt with at courts in the 12 months ending in the year specified in the tables. Court recess dates are not taken into account.

Cases dealt with through an out of court disposal, or which do not reach the end of the full court process for the reasons listed above, 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. They are therefore excluded from these tables. Similarly, cases relating to breaches of court orders previously imposed are excluded from these tables, as they relate to a court order made in relation 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. Due to the exclusions outlined above, the figures in this publication, therefore, should not be considered as the total number of cases dealt with in courts in the years concerned, rather, only as the number of cases in the dataset upon which the calculations derived for the case processing times tables in this publication are based.

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## How are offence categories counted?

The figures reported relate only to those cases with an offence prosecuted under the Domestic Abuse and Civil Proceedings Act (Northern Ireland) 2021, whether or not that offence is the main offence at disposal. 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. 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 out of court disposals, the offence counted is the one recorded at the time the out of court 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. The basis for selection of the principal offence is laid down in rules issued by the Home Office; the Department of Justice has developed a [methodology \(opens in a new window\)](#) applicable to Northern Ireland based on these. Further, these statistics are compiled on the basis of the date at which a defendant's case is considered dealt with by the justice system, rather than the date at which offences are reported or detected, as is the case for recorded crime statistics reported by the PSNI. More detail on recorded crime statistics in Northern Ireland is available in the relevant [User Guide \(opens in a new window\)](#) on the PSNI website.



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## Data source and coverage

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 that originated in the PSNI, PPS and from Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service. Causeway is an interconnected information system, launched as a joint undertaking by the Criminal Justice Organisations in Northern Ireland.

These statistics are produced on a financial year basis. This means that they match the reporting periods of police statistics in relation to DA and also the reporting period for case processing time statistics published by the Department of Justice (DoJ). Further, this allows for efficient sequencing of work by the small team that prepare these statistics, as they are also responsible for producing statistics on Prosecutions and Convictions at Courts, First Time Entrants to the Justice System, Case Processing Time Statistics and Youth Engagement statistics in Northern Ireland.

The court structure of Northern Ireland does not equate to the court structures of England and Wales, Scotland or the Republic of Ireland, and therefore no comparisons have been made between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK and Ireland.

A summary of the strength and weaknesses of the data are included on the following page.

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## Data strengths and limitations

### Strengths

- Causeway is a messaging system that helps the five main criminal justice organisations in Northern Ireland share information. Each organisation records its own data to manage daily tasks and communicate with the others, so the information needs to be very accurate.
- The system is reliable, works well, and is trusted by the staff who use it. It doesn't need much maintenance.
- Several key staff members manage Causeway and have built up strong skills and experience with it.
- The data comes from an administrative system, meaning it includes all cases—not just a sample. The important data fields used to create statistics are complete and make sense.
- Over time, the processes and systems have been improved to fix any issues with data quality. Statisticians have created detailed checks to find and correct any problems in the data.

### Limitations

- The system depends on staff within five separate Criminal Justice organisations inputting details and updating records on their own systems. While there is the potential for problems to occur if details aren't updated on a timely basis or if input errors occur, the nature of the information make accuracy critical.