

SUMMARY INFORMATION ON PROBATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

General Information

- Number of inhabitants: 1.80 million at the end of November 2009.¹
- Prison population rate per 100,000 inhabitants: 81.
- Link to Probation Service:
 - www.pbni.org.uk (Probation Board Northern Ireland)
- Links to websites:
 - www.nio.gov.uk (Northern Ireland Office);
 - www.niacro.org.uk (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders);
 - www.extern.org
- Member of the CEP in: 1987.

Characteristics of the Probation Service

- Probation Services are administered by the Probation Board for Northern Ireland (The PBNI).
- The PBNI is a government body, which is accountable to the Secretary of State for NI. It is linked to the Northern Ireland Office (The NIO).
- The PBNI can deal with adults as well as juveniles (young persons).
- The Board has an appointed chairman and deputy chairman. It meets 9 or 10 times per year and does most of its work through committees that refer issues to the full board for decision. The daily management of the Board is in hands of the Director of Probation (formerly the Chief Probation Officer). The probation tasks are delivered by 18 area teams (managed by an area manager) covering all the court areas and prison establishments in Northern Ireland. These teams are supplemented by 10 specialist teams, which can for instance take care of preparing pre-sentence reports, work with youth and with sexual and violent offenders.
- PBNI provides annual financial assistance to more than 50 non-statutory, voluntary and community agencies to provide services which complement the work of the Probation Services.
- Two key non-statutory organizations, receiving core financial assistance from the NIO, consume the highest proportion of PBNI funding for partnership services with probation:
 - The Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (Niacro) is, amongst others, specialised in employability of offenders and services to the families of prisoners. The organization has played a vital role in the support

¹ International Centre for Prison Studies (2009), *Prison Brief for Northern Ireland*. London: King's College. Available online at: www.kcl.ac.uk/depsta/law/research/icps/worldbrief/

of young persons who been the subject of threats from paramilitary organisations that use an unofficial system of sanctions against persons suspected of anti-social behaviour within neighbourhoods.

- Extern is an organization specialised in working with ex-offenders. By means of workshops, hostels and other kinds of supported accommodation in communities the organisation provides crucial elements of the probation and inter-agency management and resettlement plans for those adjudicated offenders assessed as to require the most intensive supervision packages.²

Tasks

Within the pre-trial phase the PBNI has a few tasks. At a preliminary or pre-trial hearing they may be asked to make enquiries or appropriate referrals to assist a court in the consideration of bail instead of custody. Furthermore, the public prosecutor can ask the PBNI to make a report to assist in a decision as to prosecute. With regard to persons remanded in custody, probation workers fulfill tasks of social workers (inform the defendant, keep in contact with him and his family for instance). During the trial and enforcement phase, the PBNI is involved in making pre-sentence reports and has the responsibility for the management of community orders, like probations orders (with additional requirements), community service orders and combination orders. Within the post release phase, probation officers are involved in the statutory supervision of prisoners designated for release by the newly reconstituted (2008) Parole Commissioners.

Number of staff (average from April 2008-March 2009)

Management	36
Probation workers	219
Administrative and other staff	110
Total	365

- Daily average number of offenders/clients supervised on 31 March 2009: 4,042.

New developments

- Two new sentences, giving PBNI a significantly greater public protection role, have now been introduced for the more serious violent and sex offences. The first is an indeterminate sentence where there is a serious risk of harm from further offences. The second is an extended prison sentence for the commission of a sexual or violent offence, which carries a maximum penalty of less than ten years. Release is at the recommendation of Parole Commissioners. In both cases the release will be accompanied by a period of licence supervised by a probation officer (not more than ten years).

² Extern (2009). Available online at: www.extern.org/default.aspx?CATID=6480.

- Electronic monitoring has been authorized by legislation to be used as a condition of bail, of a community sentence or post-custodial supervision.
- Transfer of responsibility for Policing and Justice matters (including Probation) to the Northern Ireland Executive is scheduled to take place in April 2010. A new Ministry of Justice led by a locally appointed Minister of Justice will replace the current authority of the NIO and the Secretary of State.

Probation during the different stages of the criminal procedure

	Pre-Trial Phase	Trial and Enforcement Phase	Post Release Phase
Preparing a Social Enquiry report		x	
Supervision / assistance to pre-trial detainees	x		
Supervision / assistance to offenders whose pre-trial detention has been conditionally suspended	x		
Mediation/victim support		x	x
Supervising/organizing etc. community service		x	x
Supervising/organizing training or learning projects		x	x
Supervising etc. drug/alcohol treatment programs		x	x
a. A combination order – a mixture of probation and community service supervision		x	
b. A custody probation order – a combination of a period of imprisonment with a supervised probation period		x	x
Pre - sentence report		x	
Supervising etc. sanction of probation		x	x
Supervising etc. semi-liberty		x	
Supervising etc. Supervising etc. mentally ill or offenders with learning disability (in-out patient orders)		x	x
Supervising etc. special measures for drugs addicts		x	x
Assistance / support to prisoners in prison	x	x	x
Supervising etc. conditional release/parole		x	x

This summary is based on the country chapter in the book *Probation in Europe*, the most comprehensive survey of probation systems and services in Europe today. If you wish to order it, please click [here](#).

