



Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Service statistics: Background quality and information report.

Purpose of the statistics

The statistics contained in the accompanying publication are produced by the Department for Communities' (DfC) Professional Services Unit (PSU) to provide an overview on the performance of the Child Maintenance Service (CMS) with the most up-to-date statistics and breakdowns.

Context

Child maintenance is financial support between separated parents to help with the everyday living costs of looking after children.

If separated parents agree, they can arrange child maintenance themselves. This is called a 'family-based arrangement'. A family-based arrangement is a private way to arrange child maintenance. Parents arrange everything themselves and no-one else has to be involved.

The Child Maintenance Service is available when parents cannot agree to a family-based arrangement.

Parents wishing to use the Child Maintenance Service must first contact Child Maintenance Choices. Child Maintenance Choices provides free, impartial support and advice to help parents choose the child maintenance arrangement best suited to their situation.

When a parent makes an application to the Child Maintenance Service, they will be told how much child maintenance should be paid. Some parents will then arrange the payments between themselves: this service is known as Direct Pay.

If parents cannot arrange payments between themselves, or if the paying parent does not keep up with the payments, the receiving parent can ask the Child Maintenance Service to switch the case to the Collect and Pay service. This service collects and manages payments between the parents, including recovery of unpaid maintenance that built up under the Direct Pay service. This could involve the use of enforcement powers. To use the Collect and Pay service, paying parents are charged 20% of their child maintenance, and receiving parents 4%: this is intended to encourage parents to collaborate.

Time period covered

This edition of the 'Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Service statistics' publication contains information up to the quarter ending September 2022.

Definitions and terminology

A list of the definitions and terminology used within these statistics:

Appeals

Parents who have made an appeal to the Child Maintenance Service or Northern Ireland Courts & Tribunals Service to review a decision made by the Child Maintenance Service.

Applications

The total number of applications made to the Child Maintenance Service in a three-month period.

Arrangement

For the purpose of this publication, an arrangement is an agreement to provide financial support for a child's everyday living costs.

Case closure

The process of ending the liability and closing a case. Parents with a case closed on the 1993 (CSCS) and 2003 (CS2) schemes were then encouraged to contact Child Maintenance Choices to discuss what to do next.

Caseload

The number of child maintenance arrangements being managed by the Child Maintenance Service.

Change of circumstances

Parents can report a change to their circumstances. The Child Maintenance Service records this information and updates maintenance calculations where necessary.

Children covered

The number of children for whom the paying parent has a child maintenance arrangement.

Collect and Pay

The Child Maintenance Service collects and manages payments from the paying parent to the receiving parent. If required, the Child Maintenance Service will take enforcement actions.

Compliance

This measures how much maintenance has been successfully collected from the Paying Parent compared to the amount of new maintenance arranged via the Collect & Pay service in that three-month period. Note that, if a parent is trying to settle arrears that have previously accumulated, they would need to pay more than the amount of new maintenance arranged during the quarter.

Direct Pay

The Child Maintenance Service calculates the amount of maintenance to be paid, and parents arrange the payments between themselves.

Enforcement

When a paying parent using the Collect and Pay service does not pay their child maintenance the service can take action to recover money owed. The Child Maintenance Service can collect unpaid child maintenance in 3 different ways:

1. Deduction from earnings order or request – the Child Maintenance Service can instruct a paying parent's employer to deduct child maintenance from the paying parent's earnings.

2. Deduction order – the Child Maintenance Service may recover Unpaid Maintenance from a paying parent’s bank or building society account.
3. Civil enforcement actions – a Paying Parent can be taken to court over unpaid maintenance. The courts can grant liability orders, which allow further action to be taken. For example, the case could be referred to the Enforcement of Judgements Office, who can take action to recover any unpaid maintenance and costs. Where the Paying Parent is a homeowner, courts can grant a charging order against the property which would prevent any sale without repayment of the outstanding amount. Ultimately, the court would grant the power to force the sale of the property by an order for sale. If these methods fail, the CMS can apply for the courts to disqualify the parent from driving or to send them to prison.

Money due

The amount of child maintenance that is due to be paid. This is calculated by the Child Maintenance Service and should be paid in the quarter. It may include arrears from previous quarters or transferred from Direct Pay which have been rescheduled to be collected in that quarter. This does not include the fees due to the Child Maintenance Service.

Money paid

The amount of child maintenance paid. This does not include any fees paid to the Child Maintenance Service.

Paying parent

The parent who does not have main day-to-day care of the child and pays child maintenance.

Receiving parent

The parent with main day-to-day care of the child and who receives child maintenance.

Sanctions

These are enforcement actions such as sending paying parents to prison, disqualifying them from driving or from holding a passport. These sanctions are only used when every other method of recovering unpaid child maintenance has been tried and failed. The Child Maintenance Service only pursues these sanctions when they believe the paying parent can pay but they are refusing to do so.

Unpaid maintenance

The amount of child maintenance that the paying parent has not paid.

Users and uses

The ‘Child Maintenance Service statistics’ publication and main users are of the statistics contained within the publication are likely to be:

- DfC Minister
- Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Service and other officials in DfC
- Other government departments
- the public

These statistics can be used for a number of purposes:

- monitoring and reporting of the Child Maintenance Service’s performance in Northern Ireland;
- internal analysis to help measure and improve the performance of the Child Maintenance Service;
- informing ministerial briefings and press releases; and

- answering Assembly Questions and Freedom of Information requests.

Data sources

The statistics in the publication come from a number of data sources. The majority are from administrative data and management information, while some are sourced directly from clerical data. We have ensured that all our tables are based on the most accurate and relevant data available.

Administrative data

This is generated and stored on the Child Maintenance Service computer systems. Data on all parents using the service is collected. The quality of this information is good.

Management information

This is aggregate data collected and used by the Child Maintenance Service to manage the business, monitor performance and inform policies. It is usually based on administrative data but can also come from survey data. The terms administrative data and management information are sometimes used interchangeably. The quality of this information is good.

Clerical data

This is gathered manually and usually stored in spreadsheets. As the data is entered manually it goes through multiple checks to ensure its accuracy. The quality of this information is good.

We believe all our data sources meet publishable standards.

Data Quality

Relevance

These statistics are of interest to those in government who are responsible for the delivery of the Child Maintenance Service and the wider public. The statistics contained in this report show performance against some of the key performance measures in the Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Service. PSU will continue to liaise with the Northern Ireland Child Maintenance Service to develop and tailor this report to the specific user needs to ensure it remains relevant to both them and other users.

Accessibility and clarity

These statistics are published on the Department for Communities website. The publication is produced in PDF format and has met all accessibility regulations. Accompanying tables are available in Excel. In accordance with the Official Statistics Release Protocol a 4 week announcement is made on GOV.UK and the release date is published on the DfC website. In addition, approved officials receive a copy of the report 24 hours in advance of the release date. The list of approved officials is also published on the DfC website.

Accuracy

These statistics are produced from administrative data, management information and clerical data that have all been tested and validated. Any analysis carried out by PSU on this data has passed all internal quality assurance checks.

All figures and tables in this publication are collated by the statistician producing the report and quality assured by the Deputy Principal Statistician and Principal Statistician responsible for the work area.

Timeliness

This publication is produced quarterly and currently has a two - three month timeframe between the reporting period and publication, but it is envisaged that the time lag can be reduced for future editions.

Coherence and Comparability

PSU has defined procedures in place for producing the data ensuring data are comparable over time. The statistics are produced cover the same time period as the Department for Work and Pension's (DWP) Child Maintenance Statistics publication (covering Great Britain). The statistics are, where possible, comparable to those produced by DWP, as DfC work closely with colleagues in DWP to ensure a consistent methodology is applied across the regions of the UK.

Arrangements, paying parents, and children: criteria for inclusion in the statistics

Which arrangements are included in these statistics?

In general, counts of arrangements (including applications) include all open child maintenance arrangements for which some maintenance has been arranged under the Child Maintenance Service. For an arrangement to be open, either:

- the paying parent has an ongoing liability to pay child maintenance (even if the amount is calculated as zero as a result of the paying parent's circumstances), or
- there are outstanding child maintenance arrears owed by the paying parent

Some arrangements, which were previously managed by the Child Support Agency, have been transferred onto the Child Maintenance Service. These arrangements are included in counts if, and only if, ongoing maintenance has been arranged by the Child Maintenance Service since the case was transferred.

Counts of arrangements do not include those for which arrears that were incurred under the Child Support Agency have been transferred to the Child Maintenance Service, but no ongoing maintenance has become due under the Child Maintenance Service. However, statistics relating to other processes (for example, enforcement actions) may, unless otherwise indicated, include processes or actions relating to such arrangements.

Which children are included in these statistics?

Counts of children included in these statistics include all children who are associated with an open arrangement (as defined above), and are below 20 years of age.

This will include a small number of individuals, between 16 and 19 years of age, who are no longer considered a qualifying child for the purpose of calculating ongoing maintenance, for cases in which the relevant arrangement is still open (because there are arrears or other qualifying children).

Individuals in this age bracket only qualify for child maintenance if:

- they are in full-time non-advanced education, or

- the receiving parent is still entitled to Child Benefit in respect of that child

The data currently available to statisticians is not sufficient to allow us to determine whether children between 16 and 19 years of age meet these criteria.

Which paying parents are included in these statistics?

The counts in Table 4 only include paying parents who were due to pay some child maintenance in the relevant quarter. In this table, individual paying parents may be counted under both Direct Pay and Collect and Pay, because a paying parent may have more than one arrangement, and these arrangements may have different service types.

Status of the statistics

Experimental statistics

The statistics have been developed using guidelines set out by the UK Statistics Authority, while they undergo evaluation they are labelled as [experimental statistics](#).

Feedback

We welcome feedback

DfC would like to hear your views on our statistical publications. If you use any of our statistics publications, we would be interested in hearing what you use them for and how well they meet your requirements. Please email DfC at: PSU@communities-ni.gov.uk