

Home>Taking legal action>Legal systems - EU and national>National justice systems

In the field of civil justice, pending procedures and proceedings initiated before the end of the transition period will continue under EU law. The e-Justice Portal, on the basis of a mutual agreement with the UK, will maintain the relevant information related to the United Kingdom until the end of 2024.

National justice systems

Northern Ireland

This section provides you with an overview of the courts in Northern Ireland.

Organisation of justice – judicial systems

The UK has three jurisdictions: England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Types of courts - short description

The Supreme Court

In 2009, the new **Supreme Court of the United Kingdom** took over the jurisdiction of the Appellate Committee of the House of Lords. It also took over the devolved functions of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (the highest court of appeal in several independent Commonwealth countries, UK overseas territories and British crown dependencies).

The Supreme Court is the **final court of appeal** in the United Kingdom for both criminal and civil cases, although Scottish criminal cases do not have the right of appeal to The Supreme Court. Such cases will usually be granted permission to refer an appeal to the Supreme Court only if it involves points of law of public importance.

The Court of Appeal

The Court of Appeal hears criminal appeals from the Crown Court and civil appeals from the High Court

The High Court

The High Court deals with civil cases, hears appeals in criminal cases, and also has the power to review the actions of individuals or organisations to make sure they have acted legally and justly. The High Court usually deals with cases if the value of the claim is over £30,000. In some circumstances, a case over £30,000 can be sent from the High Court to the county court and, similarly, a case under the value of £30,000 may be transferred from the county court to the High Court.

The High Court has three divisions, as follows:

The Family Division -

deals with complex defended divorce cases, wardship, adoption, domestic violence and so on. It also deals with appeals from magistrates' and county courts in matrimonial cases, with the affairs of people who are mentally ill and simple probate matters.

The Queens Bench Division -

deals with large and/or complex claims for compensation. It also deals with a limited number of appeals from magistrates' courts or Crown courts, reviews the actions of organisations to see whether they have acted legally, and handles libel and slander actions.

The Chancery Division -

deals with trusts, contested wills, winding up companies, bankruptcy, mortgages, charities, contested revenue (usually income tax) cases etc.

The Crown Court

The crown court deals with the following types of cases:

More serious criminal offences which will be tried by judge and in most cases a jury

Convictions in the magistrates' court that are referred to the crown court for sentencing.

Imprisonment and fines in the crown court are more severe than in the magistrates' court.

The County Court

The County Court deal with civil cases and are heard by a judge or district judge. The county court usually deals with cases that are under £30,000 in value (or £45,000 in equity matters). Cases with higher value are heard in the High Court – see above. All claims arising from regulated credit agreements must be started in the county court, whatever their value.

Examples of cases dealt with by the County Court:

Landlord and tenant disputes: for example, possession (eviction), rent arrears, repairs

Consumer disputes: for example, faulty goods or services

Personal injury claims (injuries caused by negligence): for example, traffic accidents, falling into holes in the pavement, accidents at work

Undefended divorce cases, but only in some county courts

Race and sex discrimination cases

Debt problems: for example, a creditor seeking payment

Employment problems: for example, wages or salary owing or pay in lieu of notice

Appeals from the magistrates' court that are dealt with by a judge (and at least two lay magistrates if the defendant is a young person)

Small Claims Cases

Small claims cases are also heard in the County Court. In general, a small claim involves a claim with a value of not more than £3,000.

The Magistrates' Court

Magistrates' courts deal with criminal and some civil cases. Cases are heard by a district judge (magistrates' court).

Criminal Cases in the Magistrates' Court

Magistrates' courts deal with criminal offences where the defendant is not entitled to trial by jury. These are known as summary offences. Summary offences

involve a maximum penalty of six months imprisonment and/or a fine of up to £5,000.

Magistrates' courts also deal with offences where the defendant can choose trial by jury but decides to have his or her case heard in the magistrates' court. If the defendant chooses trial by jury, the case will be passed on to the Crown court.

The Youth Court

The youth court deals with young people who have committed criminal offences, and who are aged between 10 and 17. The youth court is part of the magistrates' court and cases will be heard before a district judge (magistrates' court) and two other specially-trained lay magistrates. If a young person is charged with a very serious offence, which in the case of an adult would be punishable with 14 years imprisonment or more, the youth court can commit them for trial at the crown court.

Civil cases in the Magistrates' Court

Magistrates' courts deal with a limited number of civil cases as follows:

Some civil debts: for example, arrears of income tax, national insurance contributions, VAT arrears, rates

Licenses: for example, granting, renewing or taking away licenses for pubs and clubs

Some matrimonial problems: for example, maintenance and removing a spouse from the matrimonial home

Welfare of children: for example, local authority care or supervision orders, adoption proceedings and residence orders.

Coroners' Courts

Investigate the circumstances of sudden, violent or unnatural deaths.

Hierarchy of courts

Further details and a diagram of the court structure in Northern Ireland can be found on the website of the [Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service](#).

Administration of the Courts

Responsibility for administration of the courts in Northern Ireland jurisdiction lies with the [Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service](#).

This includes:

Providing administrative support for the Northern Ireland courts and judiciary

Enforcing civil court judgments through a centralised enforcement service provided by the Enforcement of Judgments Office

Providing administrative support for various Tribunals.

Related Links

[Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service](#)

Last update: 28/08/2018

The national language version of this page is maintained by the respective Member State. The translations have been done by the European Commission service. Possible changes introduced in the original by the competent national authority may not be yet reflected in the translations. The European Commission accepts no responsibility or liability whatsoever with regard to any information or data contained or referred to in this document. Please refer to the legal notice to see copyright rules for the Member State responsible for this page.