

FOI DOF/2026-0339

Request

Under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, I'd like to request the following data.

1. For the most recent full year for which data is available, what percentage of prison officer staff employed in Northern Ireland prisons took at least one day of sickness absence where the reason stated was poor mental health (including stress, depression, anxiety or related conditions)?
2. For the same period, how many working days in total were lost due to sickness absence attributed to poor mental health among prison officer staff?
3. If available within the cost limit, please provide the same information for each of the two years previous to the most recent year for which there is data.
- 4 & 5. Please also provide the definitions or categories used for mental-health-related absence and confirm whether the figures include both short-term and long-term sickness

DoF response

I can confirm the department holds the information requested.

1. 15.5% of prison officer staff employed in Northern Ireland Prisons took at least one day of sickness absence, during the financial year 2025/26, where the reason stated related to poor mental health (including stress, depression, anxiety or other related conditions). This figure is based on Management Information and has not been officially ratified by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).
2. During the financial year of 2025/26, 13,272 working days in total were lost due to sickness absence attributed to poor mental health among prison officer staff. This figure is based on Management Information and has not been officially ratified by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).
3. The percentage of prison officer staff employed in Northern Ireland Prisons who took at least one day of sickness absence, during the financial year 2023/24, where the reason stated was poor mental health (including stress, depression, anxiety or related conditions) was 18.0%. During financial year 2024/25 this figure was 14.1% (source: NISRA Accredited Official Statistics).

During the financial year of 2023/24, 16,085 working days in total were lost due to sickness absence attributed to poor mental health among prison officer staff. During the financial year 2024/25 this figure was 12,498 (source: NISRA Accredited Official Statistics).

4. All sickness absence within the Northern Ireland Prison Service and wider NICS is categorised under a number of general categories for reporting purposes. Mental health related absences are categorised under the broad range of mental health illnesses, namely 'Anxiety/Stress/Depression/Other Psychiatric illnesses'. This includes the following sickness sub reasons:

Anxiety
Behavioural disorder
Bipolar disorder
Delusion disorder
Depression – not pregnancy related
Eating disorder
Insomnia
Manic disorder
Obsessive compulsive disorder
Panic attacks
Personality disorder
Phobic disorders
Psychosis
Schizo affective disorder
Schizophrenia
Self harm
Stress – not work related
Stress – work related
Other psychiatric illnesses
Not specified

5. The figures quoted in the responses to Questions 1, 2 and 3 include both short-term and long-term sickness.