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National justice systems

Irland

This section gives you an overview of the court system in Ireland.

Organisation of Justice – Ireland

The **Courts Service**, which is an independent corporate body that came into existence in November 1999 and was established by the Government under the Courts Service Act, 1998, has the following statutory responsibilities:

- To manage the courts,
- To provide support services for the judges,
- To provide information on the courts system to the public,
- To provide, manage and maintain court buildings, and
- To provide facilities for users of the courts.

The Constitution of Ireland prescribes that justice shall be administered in courts established by law by judges appointed by the President on the advice of the Government; the judges of all courts are under the Constitution completely independent in the exercise of their judicial functions. A judge may not be removed from office except for stated misbehaviour or incapacity and then only on foot of resolutions passed by both Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament).

Hierarchy of courts

The Constitution outlines the structure of the court system as comprising a court of final appeal, the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal which has jurisdiction in both criminal and civil matters, and courts of first instance which include a High Court with full jurisdiction in all criminal and civil matters and courts of limited jurisdiction, the Circuit Court and the District Court organised on a regional basis.

In relation to criminal trials, Article 38 states that "No person shall be tried on any criminal charge save in the due course of law". Minor offences are tried in courts of summary jurisdiction while a person accused of a more serious offence cannot be tried without a jury. The Constitution also makes provision for the establishment of Special Courts to secure the effective administration of justice where the ordinary courts would be unable to do so.

The public are welcome to enter all courts except those displaying the 'in camera' sign which means that the case is not open to the general public.

The courts which try civil matters are organised in the following structures:

Supreme Court	Court of Appeal
(Based in Dublin) Appellate Jurisdiction	(Based in Dublin) Appellate Jurisdiction
High Court	Circuit Court
(Based in Dublin) Full original Jurisdiction and appellate Jurisdiction from the Circuit Court and certain other tribunals	(Based in each of the 26 county towns) Original Jurisdiction up to €75,000. (€60,000 in personal injuries actions) and appellate Jurisdiction from the District Court and certain other tribunals
District Court	
(Based in 24 districts) Original jurisdiction up to €15,000 (Includes Small Claims procedure for certain consumer claims up to €2,000)	

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