



RECOMMENDATIONS

IRISH PRISONS AND COVID-19: ONE YEAR ON



Reducing the Prison Population

1. The courts should consider the impact of COVID-19 on prison life when making sentencing decisions.
2. The Department of Justice should explore all possible measures to reduce the use of pre-trial detention and reduce the prison population.
3. The Minister for Justice must fulfil her promise to establish the new statutory Parole Board by July 2021.

Access to Healthcare

4. Government should consider prioritising prisoners and prison staff for vaccination. At a minimum, Government must ensure that prisoners receive parity of access to the vaccine.
5. The Irish Prison Service should take all measures necessary to address the negative impacts of the pandemic on prisoners' mental and physical health.
6. The Irish Prison Service must act to ensure all prisoners, including those in quarantine, are provided with regular showers and access to all necessary hygiene products.

Easing of Restrictions in Prisons

7. Publish the IPS 'Framework for Restrictive Measures for Living with Covid-19' without delay.
8. Increase out of cell time and access to education and exercise for all prisoners.
9. Publish figures on the number of days prisoners are held on restricted regimes and the number of out-of-cell hours provided to the general population in each prison.
10. Take action on improving visits and contact with the outside world, as outlined above.

Preparing for Release

11. IPS must ensure ISM Coordinators' access to individuals due for release during COVID-19, and continue to facilitate prisoners in progressing through their sentence.
12. The Department of Justice should review how the Probation Service and community sanctions regimes have operated during the pandemic and consider what additional supports might be provided to people coming out of prison at this time.

Accountability

13. Minister for Justice must publish the Inspector's COVID-19 Thematic Inspection Reports once submitted and without delay.
14. Minister for Justice and the Department must take urgent steps, and provide sufficient resources, to ratify OPCAT and implement the new prison complaints system.
15. Department must improve data collection and publication in number of areas.
16. Minister for Justice must repeal the Prison (Amendment) Rules 2020 as soon as possible.
17. Government should consider establishing a Joint Oireachtas Committee on Equality, Human Rights and Diversity. In the meantime, the existing Committees must examine the effects of COVID-19 on the criminal justice system as part of their work.