

Irish Penal Reform Trust

Exploding Prisoner Numbers - Causes, Effects and Solutions

28th June 2010

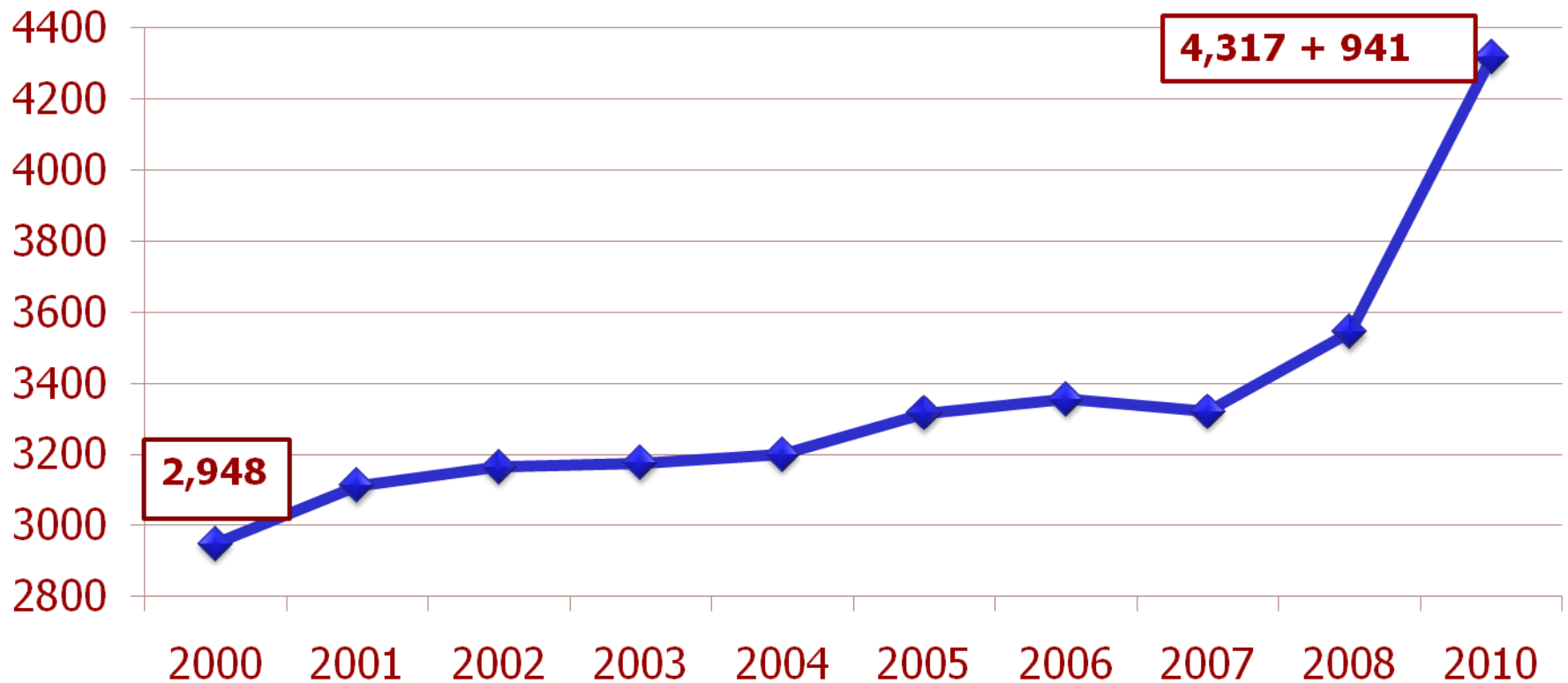


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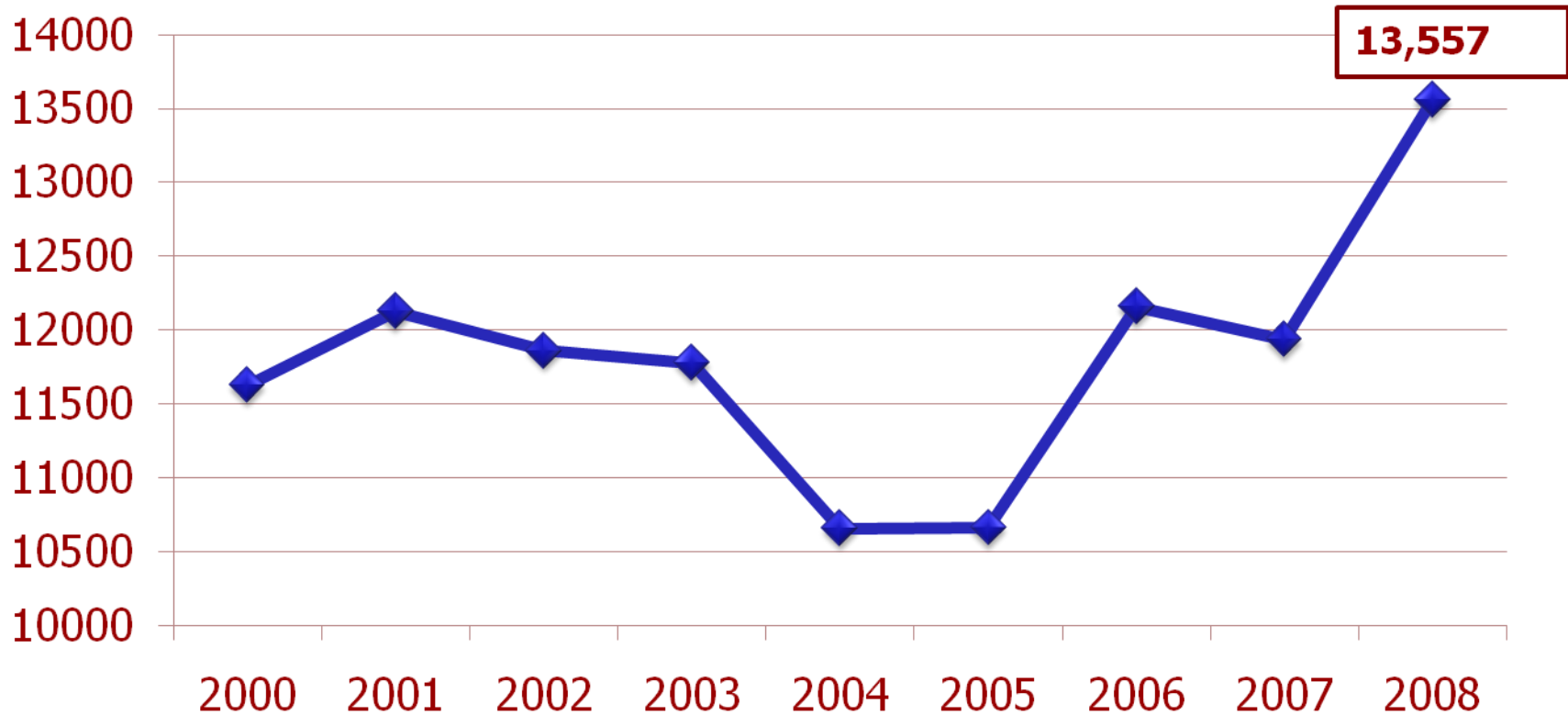
- Trends in the prison population
- Impact
 - Conditions
 - Planning
 - Policy
- The need for change



Average Daily Population



Committal Rate



Rate of Imprisonment:

- 2010:
 - Ireland: 93 per 100,000
 - Germany: 87 per 100,000
 - Northern Ireland: 81 per 100,000
 - Finland: 60 per 100,000
- Ireland:
 - In 1997, rate of 68.1 per 100,000
 - In 2000, rate of 80.4 per 100,000

Some other numbers...

- Capacities
 - “Bed capacity”: 4,066
 - Design capacity much smaller
 - Cell sharing
- 11th June 2010:
- Dóchas: at 151% of bed capacity
 - Mountjoy: 114% (or 125%)
 - Cork: 110%
 - Limerick (male): 108%

Dáil Questions, 15th June 2010

What does this mean in practice?

- Pressures
 - Conditions
 - Planning
 - Policy



Conditions

“The de facto overcrowding, combined with the conditions in certain of the old and dilapidated prisons, raises concerns as to the safe and humane treatment of prisoners kept in such establishments”.

*Committee for the Prevention of Torture, Report to the
Government of Ireland, 2006*

Conditions

“I was so concerned at the situation that I wrote on the 27th February 2009 to the Department and to the Irish Prison Service expressing my fear that this practice could lead to possible serious injury or loss of life”.

The Inspector of Prisons, August 2009, speaking of overcrowding in Mountjoy

Planning

- The use of Temporary Release
- A safety valve rather than a vital tool in reintegration
- Interference with regimes

Policy

- An emphasis on building prison places
- What are we building prison spaces for?
- Can we achieve these goals in other ways?
- Rethinking our approach to imprisonment

Some barriers to creative thinking

- The A & E argument
- Space is the problem, but is space the solution?
- How we measure the need for that space

“Building new prisons is unlikely in itself to offer a lasting solution. Instead, in addition to reviewing the current law and practice in relation to custody pending trial and sentencing, there is a necessity to develop the possibilities for alternative, non-custodial, sanctions.”

*Report of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture
to the Government of Ireland 2006*

Why change our approach?

- Prison should be a measure of last resort
- Inherent social, personal and financial harms of imprisonment
- The human rights of all those in the penal system can be protected through the use of appropriate alternative means
- Prison policy cannot be seen in isolation from all forms of social policy

5,258

- How did we get here?
- What can we do?
- Some of the reasons for overcrowding can be addressed quickly
- All of the reasons need to be addressed urgently
- IPRT believes that reversing the increase in prison numbers makes social, economic and political sense

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