



IPRT Briefing on Reintegration of Prisoners in Ireland

"[...] the successful re-integration of prisoners into society should be the primary function and central objective of the justice system".¹

Irish Penal Reform Trust

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) is Ireland's leading non-governmental organisation campaigning for the rights of everyone in the penal system, with prison as a last resort. IPRT is committed to reducing imprisonment and the progressive reform of the penal system based on evidence-led policies.

Context

Irish prisons are chronically overcrowded, incarceration rates are increasing, and the average sentence length is increasing.

The daily prison population in Ireland has more than doubled in the last 20 years, from 2,100 prisoners in 1990 to over 4,300 in June 2010. Additionally, nearly 950 people were on Temporary Release (TR) in the community in June 2010. This adds up to over 5,200 people who were subject to custodial sanctions mid-2010.

Nearly 50% of prisoners in Ireland are re-imprisoned within four years, with 27% going back to prison within the first year post-release.² In this context, the provision of appropriate reintegration support is vital to stem the number of people who return to prison.

Our Research

The recently published IPRT report into reintegration of prisoners in Ireland³ shows that there are inconsistencies in the provision of post release support, both in the different prisons and in different areas of the country. There is also a lack of awareness and understanding amongst the public of the plight faced by those in prison and their families. This lack of awareness impacts negatively on reintegration following release from custody.

The study undertaken by IPRT between October 2009 and February 2010 set out to investigate how reintegration services in Ireland meet the needs of the prison population. It found that some important progress has been made in recent years, in particular in the provision of homeless assistance and addiction support. Gaps still exist, however, in relation to mental health care; provision of accommodation and sheltered employment; sentence and pre-release planning; and provision of information to prisoners and their families as to the services available in custody and in the community.

¹ National Economic and Social Forum (2002) *Re-Integration of Prisoners, Forum Report No.22*, Dublin: NESF.

² O'Donnell, I., Palmer, E.P. and Hughes, N. (2008) 'Recidivism in the Republic of Ireland' in *Criminology and Criminal Justice*, Vol. 8, No. 2.

³ Martynowicz, A. and Quigley, M. (2010) *"It's like stepping on a landmine..." - Reintegration of Prisoners in Ireland*, Dublin: Irish Penal Reform Trust (available at: <http://www.iprt.ie/contents/1685>).

The report lays down a number of recommendations that IPRT hopes will assist improvements in the re-integration of prisoners and re-offending rates:

Our Recommendations

- 1. All prisons should provide the same basic services to prisoners in their care.**
- 2. Prisoners suffering from mental health difficulties should be directed to appropriate community and/or other non-forensic services.**
- 3. In circumstances where those suffering mental health difficulties are not diverted, mental health services equivalent to those in the community should be provided across the prison system.**
- 4. Appropriate facilities should be made available in prisons for treatment of addictions and mental health issues, to provide a therapeutic and confidential environment for prisoners.**
- 5. Drug free landings should be available in all prisons.**
- 6. There should be continuity of care from prison to the community with regard to treatment of addictions and/or mental health difficulties.**
- 7. An opportunity to set out a pre-release plan should be provided to both long- and short-term prisoners.**
- 8. Temporary release should be used as a tool of gradual re-integration into community upon release and not primarily as a safety valve for overcrowded prisons.**
- 9. There should be a statutory duty on state agencies to provide assistance where a need has been identified in terms of reintegration of prisoners.**
- 10. The passing of the Spent Convictions Bill should be a legislative priority in 2010.**
- 11. Information in a variety of formats and languages should be made available to all prisoners regarding services available while in custody and support available upon release.**
- 12. Accurate data should be kept by the Irish Prison Service (IPS) of the number of people leaving prison each year. Such information should be made publicly available in the IPS Annual Reports.**

Further information

For more information, or to request a copy of the IPRT report *"It's like stepping on a landmine...": Reintegration of Prisoners in Ireland*, please contact:

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