
IPRT Pre-Budget Submission 2027

September 2026



Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) is Ireland's principal non-governmental organisation working for systemic penal reform. Our vision is a just, humane Ireland where prison is used as a last resort. Our mission is to advocate for a progressive criminal justice system that prioritises alternatives to prison, upholds human rights, and champions reintegration. We do this through research, campaigning and changing attitudes.

The current prison overcrowding crisis cannot be separated from the nationwide cost-of-living, housing and mental health crises. On any given day in 2026, almost 6,000 people are in prison in a system designed for 4,802, often for non-violent or minor offences that could be better addressed through community-based sanctions. Many people in prison experience serious mental health conditions, addiction, homelessness and poverty before committal to prison and face a similar situation on release.

Prison is expensive both in terms of the significant cost to the State as well as in terms of the toll it takes on individuals, their families and wider communities. In 2025, the average annual cost of a staffed prison space exceeded €103,000 while the average cost of a Community Service Order in 2024 was €1,450. The Department of Justice should benchmark spending on prisons against spending on prevention, diversion and community sanctions and track outcomes over time to determine efficacy and inform evidence-led approaches to desistance including a formal Justice Reinvestment model.

However, until it explores and fully adopts this type of model to redirect savings from reduced prison use into preventative interventions and supports including education, youth services, addiction supports, housing and employment initiatives, IPRT calls on the Government to strategically invest in four key areas.



1. Alternatives to imprisonment and community-based sanctions

Increase overall funding for the Probation Service by 10 per cent to operationalise expanded community service and conduct a strategic review to identify where probation supports are most needed

While IPRT welcomes the 11.2 per cent funding increase to the Probation Service in [Budget 2026](#), it is crucial that increased and sustained investment in the Probation Service remains a priority in Budget 2027. The welcome enactment of legislation to expand Community Service Ordersⁱ will require adequate staffing to ensure that the Probation Service can meet increased demand to operationalise CSOs and achieves its aim of reducing prison overcrowding. It would also be prudent to allocate funding for the Probation Service to commission a strategic review of its services nationwide to determine if there are regional differences, to take account of any demographic changes and to ensure that its services are meeting the needs of its clients.

Allocate and ring-fence €300,000 of Probation Service funding to cover staffing and operational costs associated with establishing a supported bail service for women

In August 2026, 18 per cent of people in Irish prisons were held solely on remand (pre-trial detention).ⁱⁱ Alternatives to remand custody, including bail support schemes, would improve compliance with bail conditions and better address some underlying causes of offending. This would follow the successes of the Bail Supervision Scheme for children and young people in Ireland, and long-operating bail support schemes for adults internationally.ⁱⁱⁱ While IPRT commends the proposed pilot Bail Support Scheme for women,^{iv} as recommended in the *Review of Policy Options for Prison & Penal Reform 2022 -2024*,^v Investment should be ring -fenced in Budget 2027 to ensure that the scheme is established as a priority and becomes operational in 2027.

2. Mental health and addiction supports in the criminal justice system

Invest €1.4 million in the expansion of the Prison In-reach and Court Liaison Service (PICLS)

The PICLS model is a multidisciplinary psychiatric service to assist Courts in identifying defendants with major mental illness and provide practical solutions to accessing appropriate mental health care through liaison with community services. PICLS has helped arrange diversions from custody to healthcare for over 1000 people with severe mental illness since 2006.^{vi} A range of bodies have recommended the expansion of the successful PICLS model.^{vii} Research on PICLS has noted the increased likelihood of successful transfer of care to the community through the addition of a “relatively low - cost” housing support worker to the model,^{viii} and the High Level Task Force on Mental Health and Addiction recommended that this should be “an integral component” of nationwide PICLS provision.^{ix}

IPRT is calling for further funding to expand the PICLS model to at least one additional prison in 2027. In addition to operating costs, the pilot expansion should include posts for 0.5 WTE Consultant Psychiatrist, one working grade psychiatrist, one Advanced Nurse Practitioner, one forensic mental health nurse, and one housing support worker. Cost savings could be achieved if some staff could serve on multiple sites and if administrative functions could be centralised. Outside of the greater Dublin area, the prison with the highest proportion of people on remand is Cork Prison, and as such, a similar service could be considered. This might also be supported by the relative concentration of other services in Cork City.

Allocate at least €200,000 to the Irish Prison Service to conduct a Mental Health and Disability Needs Assessment

The 2022 *Health Needs Assessment for the Irish Prison Service* (NHA) undertaken by Crowe Consulting provides a valuable overview of areas of improvement in delivering health services in Irish prisons.^x In 2025, the Irish Prison Service alongside the Health Service Executive and the Probation Service advertised a tender to commission a Mental Health and Disability Needs Analysis of the prison population. IPRT supports this important initiative as it will serve to set an accurate baseline of how many people in prison experience mental health concerns as well as how many have a disability. It is essential that it is appropriately resourced to ensure the analysis is robust, comprehensive, and will lead to meaningful improvements in the provision of mental health services in Irish prisons. IPRT therefore calls on the Government to allocate at least €200,000 to undertake a Mental Health and Disability Needs Analysis and to put in place an effective roadmap to implementation.

Allocate €730,000 to ensure the Irish Prison Service can provide adequate addiction services and reduce waiting lists for people in custody

It is welcome that the number of addiction counsellors, project workers and recovery educators in prison has increased in recent years, alongside the recruitment of a dual diagnosis lead. However, despite an estimated 70 per cent of the prison population (around 4,000 people) struggling with substance misuse and addiction, waiting lists for counselling remain long and inaccessible to many people in custody particularly those on remand and serving short sentences.

In the past, the IPS employed six dedicated addiction nurses, but as these posts became vacant, they have not been replaced. While general primary care and general nurses work within the prison system, they are not ring-fenced roles to screen people on committal to prison, triage them and determine what support is best suited to each individual. To enhance existing counselling services, the IPS should reinstate the six nursing posts and employ an additional six project workers across the prison estate to specifically target people on remand or on short sentences to ensure that they can access information about recovery and relapse and to link them in with community-based services on release to prevent relapse and further offending.

The Treatment and Recovery Programme, which provides participants in prison with addiction and rehabilitation supports, to prepare them for life after prison. It currently operates in Mountjoy Prison but should be expanded and rolled out to at least three other prisons in 2027 including the Dóchas Centre.

3. Supports for families and children impacted by imprisonment

Allocate €2 million to the Department of Social Protection to ensure access to financial and social welfare supports for people parenting alone when the other parent is imprisoned

The imprisonment of a child's parent or primary carer is recognised as a profoundly damaging experience and one of the ten Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) with lasting effects into adulthood. IPRT has previously estimated that over 5,000 children had a parent in prison on any given day, affecting more than 10,000 children annually. However, with record numbers of people currently in prison, this number is likely to be far higher. To address the significant challenges faced by children and families affected by imprisonment, IPRT has published comprehensive research exploring the financial impact of familial imprisonment on families with children.^{xi} One of the report's primary findings is the impact of the six-month waiting period to access the One Parent Family Payment on parents who are caring for children alone when the other parent is imprisoned. IPRT recommends updating the Department's operational guidelines and removing the six-month waiting period for the One Parent Family Payment and to align supports with those available to families who experience bereavement.

4. Modernising data systems across the criminal justice system

Provide an additional €250,000 in funding to criminal justice agencies including the IPS, Probation Service and Parole Board to modernise their respective data systems

Effective and trusted data systems and databases are essential to the effective operation and management of the criminal justice system. As well as ensuring that accurate and up-to-date data is maintained in a compliant way, they also ensure transparency, accountability and that systemic issues and trends are tracked to better inform interventions at all points of the system. This in turn ensures that the State records and retains necessary data to ensure that any policy responses are evidence-informed, proportionate and responsive. Currently the IPS and the Probation Service do not track necessary data in relation to outcomes while the Parole Board has repeatedly highlighted the need for a case-management system to improve efficiency, reduce delays, and support better-quality decision-making.

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