

Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) 2025

A framework for penal reform

Guiding Principles of Penal Reform

1. Imprisonment is viewed as a sanction of last resort.
2. The harms and costs associated with imprisonment are recognised.
3. The 'deprivation of liberty' principle is adhered to, whereby the loss of freedom is viewed as the punishment.
4. The security and protection of prisoners is balanced with provision of a safe and purposeful regime.
5. Human rights, equality, and social justice are protected and promoted.
6. There is a focus on rehabilitation, desistance, and reintegration.

Values of the Penal System

- Safety, protection of life and a duty of care;
- Respect, dignity, and protection from inhumane, discriminatory or degrading treatment;
- Accountability and transparency;
- Consistency and promotion of fairness and equality;
- Promotion and maintenance of good relationships between prisoners, staff and management.



Responsibility for the content of this report lies solely with the Irish Penal Reform Trust.

The Irish Penal Reform Trust is an independent nongovernmental organisation campaigning for the rights of everyone in the penal system, with prison as a last resort.

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Foundation
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Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) 2025

A Framework for Penal Reform



2025

List of acronyms

APT	Association for the Prevention of Torture
C&R	Control and Restraint
CMH	Central Mental Hospital
CPT	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
CSO	Community Service Order
DIC	Death in custody
ECHR	European Convention on Human Rights
EM	Electronic monitoring
ETBI	Education and Training Boards Ireland
GP	General Practitioner
HNA	Health Needs Assessment
HSE	Health Service Executive
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
IHREC	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission
ILU	Independent Living Unit
IPRT	Irish Penal Reform Trust
IPS	Irish Prison Service
ISM	Integrated Sentence Management
MQI	Merchants Quay Ireland
NFMHS	National Forensic Mental Health Service
NPM	National Preventive Mechanism
OIP	Office of the Inspector of Prisons
OPCAT	Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
PICLS	Prison In-reach and Court Liaison Service
PIMS	Prisoner Information Management System
PIPS	Progress in the Penal System
PQ	Parliamentary Question
PVC	Prison Visiting Committee
SPT	Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment of the Committee against Torture

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At a Glance

The Irish Penal System in 2025



14 prisons
in Ireland*

*IPRT counts Limerick Men's and Women's prisons as two separate facilities.



Average daily number of people in custody: **5,417**

280 women **5,137** men

9.6% increase on 2024



Highest daily prison population

(on 17 December 2025)

5,810

The prison system was operating at **124%** capacity on that day, with **657** people sleeping on mattresses on the floor



377 people shared a cell with three or more other people

October 2025

596

Number of people sleeping on mattresses

(on 31 December 2025)



117% Average operating capacity across the prison estate in 2025

Highest occupancy rates by prison:

Limerick Women's Prison: 147%

Mountjoy Female Prison (Dóchas Centre): 133%

Limerick Male Prison: 124%

Mountjoy Male Prison: 124%

3,653

Number of people in prison who could not toilet in private

October 2025



1,723

Community Service Orders made in 2025



7,354

Number of people committed to prison in 2025

For **22%** of these, it was their first custodial sentence

For **78%** this was not their first custodial sentence



€103,334

average annual cost of an available, staffed prison space vs **€1,450** to administer Community Service Order



€63.7 million

Funding allocated to the Probation Service in 2025



€579 million

Funding allocated to the Irish Prison Service in 2025



12 of 55

parole applications finalised by the Parole Board in 2025 were granted

Progress in the Penal System throughout 2025

35 Standards Assessed

Progress in 1 standard



Regress in 21 standards



No change in 3 standards



8 standards assessed as mixed



Unable to make final assessment on 2 standards

63 recommendations for improvement



Acknowledgements

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) would like to express sincere gratitude to our donor-advised family fund and Community Foundation Ireland for their continued financial support, which makes the Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) project possible. Without their support, this multi-annual agenda-setting piece of work would not exist.

IPRT would also like to thank the PIPS Advisory Group – Ashling Golden (Chair), Dr. Róisín Mulgrew, Vivian Geiran, Keith Adams and Dr. Charles O'Mahony – for their support, insights and time commitment throughout the preparation of PIPS 2025.

IPRT would like to thank the Irish Prison Service for its engagement on PIPS. We appreciate the information that was provided in response to our information request, and hope that we can collaborate further on this issue for future editions of PIPS.

IPRT would like to sincerely thank the individuals with lived experience of the prison system and the community-based organisations working in prisons who shared their insights for this report. These inputs provided vital context and direction for PIPS 2025.

IPRT would like to extend special thanks to former IPRT staff members who have previously worked on the PIPS project, including Michelle Martyn, Sarahjane McCreery, Pamela Drumgoole and Tom Lord. The strong foundations laid in previous iterations of the PIPS project are critical for its continued success.

The author would like to warmly thank present IPRT staff members for all their work on PIPS 2025.

Responsibility for the content of the report lies solely with IPRT.

Martha Lewis

Author of PIPS 2025 and Policy and Research Coordinator,
Irish Penal Reform Trust

Foreword

This year's edition of the Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) report marks the ninth year of monitoring and assessing 35 standards across the penal system. In 2025, there was progress in only one standard with 21 standards assessed as regressing. Notably we saw mixed progress or no change in 11 standards but this clearly illustrates the current predicament faced right across the prison estate – positive efforts and developments to improve conditions are too often undermined by the serious strain on overstretched prison services and supports, intensified by the unsustainable volume of people currently accommodated in Irish prisons.

Previously, we have described the Irish Prison Service (IPS) as treading water. However, Ireland is now considered to have one of the most severe overcrowding crises in Europe, so we are now sinking under the weight of prison numbers. At what point will we see meaningful measures to reduce the prison population and stem the flow? With one in five people held in pre-trial detention and 74 per cent of committals to prison resulting in short sentences of less than 12 months, we need to ask why many of these people were required to go to prison at all. And to be clear, the IPS is legally required to admit and accommodate anyone sent to custody. The onus is on the State to legislate for workable alternatives and ensure that prison truly is a sanction of last resort. It also has a moral and legal duty to address the lack of dignity and the inhumane conditions experienced by so many people in custody.

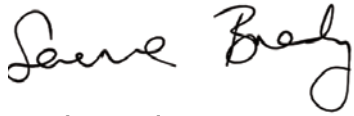
Construction of new prison spaces is not a silver bullet – many issues analysed in PIPS 2025 show significant, systemic issues that would not be immediately solved even if the prison population was substantially reduced. Many of these are outlined in our report – which although detailed, cannot paint a full picture of life in prison due to gaps in data, including on serious issues like the length of detention in solitary confinement or how many people share a cell with more than four people.

All of this coincides with the 2025 report by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) who visited Ireland in May 2024 when the number of people in prison had not yet reached 5,000. It painted a stark picture of chronic overcrowding and highlighted its “deep concern” about “the deterioration of physical safety”. The report described squalid conditions that amounted to inhumane and degrading treatment at times and paid particular attention to the situation of people with mental health issues in prison without access to adequate healthcare.

This year's PIPS picks up on that theme as the 2025 spotlight focuses on access to mental healthcare in prison. While the institutionalisation of people in Ireland has a long and dark past, unfortunately due to limited alternatives and a lack of pathways into the healthcare system, we routinely see people imprisoned who require dedicated psychiatric care or access to mental health community supports. This phenomenon is only exacerbated by the housing and homelessness crisis. IPRT is extremely concerned that prisons are acting as inadequate waiting rooms for people with psycho-social disabilities and mental health challenges with nowhere else to go.

2025 marked the 40-year anniversary of the Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, known as the Whitaker Report. Many of its findings and enlightened recommendations apply as much today as they did four decades ago. Like more recent calls by the CPT and the Office of the Inspector of Prisons to prevent the current unsafe operating levels across most of the prison estate, the report recommended the introduction of an upper ceiling on the number of people in prison. It stated that prison should be “reserved for the most serious offences only” and called for “a progressive strengthening” of the Probation Service which it described as “essential for more effective and extensive use of alternatives to imprisonment”. There are echoes of the Whitaker Report in the CPT's 2025 report when it warns against “human warehousing”. More than forty years on, IPRT calls on the Government to revisit the findings and recommendations of the Whitaker Report, heed the warnings within and take concrete action.

While we are encouraged by recent legislative provisions to enhance and expand the use of community service, we are conscious that this will require adequate funding, as well as the time and patience to see the results of this investment. Ultimately what is required is the political will to take a different approach, which may not appear to be the most politically popular option but is evidence-informed and will go a long way towards helping to deliver a more proportionate, humane and effective system.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Saoirse Brady', with a stylized, cursive script.

Saoirse Brady
Executive Director

Introduction

Introduction

This is the eighth edition of the Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) report. When the PIPS project was first launched in 2017, it aimed to set out a clear vision for the future of the penal system in Ireland. It took at its starting point that as a small wealthy country, Ireland should work towards becoming a leading model of international best practice. Nearly a decade later, and the penal system has changed significantly. Unprecedented levels of overcrowding affect almost every aspect of the system, and with no sign of a significant reversal – either in 2025, or in 2026 to date. Nevertheless, PIPS will continue to act as a benchmark, to advocate for rights protections and standards to be upheld in the penal system, and that progress in this regard is not only achievable, but absolutely necessary.

Overview of the PIPS project

The purpose of the PIPS project is to assess and promote progress in a broad range of issues in Ireland's penal system. It does so through assessing a set of 35 standards developed by IPRT. The standards, which cover a broad range of issues in the Irish penal system – from family visits and time out of cell to complaints mechanisms – were informed by international human rights standards and best-practice. They act as a framework for periodically assessing progress and regress in the penal system, and each assessment is accompanied by recommendations to encourage progress. They are not minimum standards, and IPRT maintains that they can and should be exceeded.

Current edition of PIPS

In PIPS 2025, IPRT reviewed all 35 standards. In PIPS 2024, 31 out of 35 standards were reviewed, due to difficulties in obtaining relevant, up-to-date data. It is important to note that the fact that all 35 standards were reviewed this year does not mean that difficulties relating to the provision of data did not persist. IPRT took the decision that if data for a standard was not forthcoming, this report would still provide analysis on the issue where possible by relying on different avenues of obtaining information and also increased desk-based research.

IPRT sought data from the Irish Prison Service (IPS) for PIPS 2025 in early 2026. Parts of this data request were returned incrementally throughout the second and third quarters of 2026. IPRT would like to thank the IPS for the data it did make available, noting the significant work it takes to collate and return a wide-ranging data request. However, not all of the data was returned by the time PIPS 2025 was going to print. IPRT notes that one of the deliverables under Pillar 5 of the IPS' Strategy 2023-2027 is to "strengthen data information and requests process". The data that was not returned predominantly relates to issues of safety and security in Irish prisons and this creates a concerning gap in monitoring and oversight of rights protections. IPRT was not informed why this data was not provided, making it unclear whether it is not gathered, or if there are reasons it cannot be made available or shared. To increase transparency, reasons should be provided if data cannot be shared. The IPS' Census reports for October 2025 were also not published for almost a year, with these reports providing key insights into the number of people on restricted regimes, sharing cells and required to toilet in front of others. These reports crucially also relate to a time when the prison system was operating at its highest levels of overcapacity in 2025. The delay for the publication of these reports also remains unclear.

PIPS 2025 was guided by an Advisory Group of six experts on Irish penal policy and issues related to the rights of people in prison. The Advisory Group met three times throughout 2026 and provided insights and feedback on the PIPS standards, draft sections of the report and assessment of progress.

In attempts to best reflect the experiences of people in the prison system in PIPS 2025, IPRT engaged with individuals who had experience of the prison system in 2025 through a semi-structured focus group. It also convened a roundtable discussion with representatives of community-based organisations who provide crucial services and supports to people in prison. It also disseminated a survey to a broader group of stakeholders who work in prisons, whether through service provision or research. These consultations are referenced throughout the report as 'Stakeholder Consultation' and 'Stakeholder Survey'. They aim to provide a human perspective to the statistical information contained in the report. IPRT hopes that in future editions of PIPS it will be able to engage with people in prison more directly.

How to read PIPS 2025

Through our assessment of the PIPS standards, PIPS considers a broad range of issues across the Irish penal system.

The first section of this report explores several issues related to the provision of mental healthcare in Irish prisons and the imprisonment of individuals facing mental health difficulties. The following sections outline developments across the PIPS standards, clustered by themes. These are:

Section A. An effective and humane penal system

Section B. Prison conditions

Section C. Prison regimes

Section D. Complaints, accountability, and inspection mechanisms

Section E. Safety and protection in Irish prisons

Section F. Release and reintegration

PIPS does not capture every incident or issue in a given year under each standard. Rather, it provides insights into discrete areas of penal policy and practice, collating them together in a single report.

PIPS provides an overarching assessment of developments throughout 2025 as 'Progress', 'Regress', 'Mixed', or 'No change'. These are explained below:

Progress: Where there is clear movement towards achieving a standard.

Regress: Where there is clear movement away from achieving a standard.

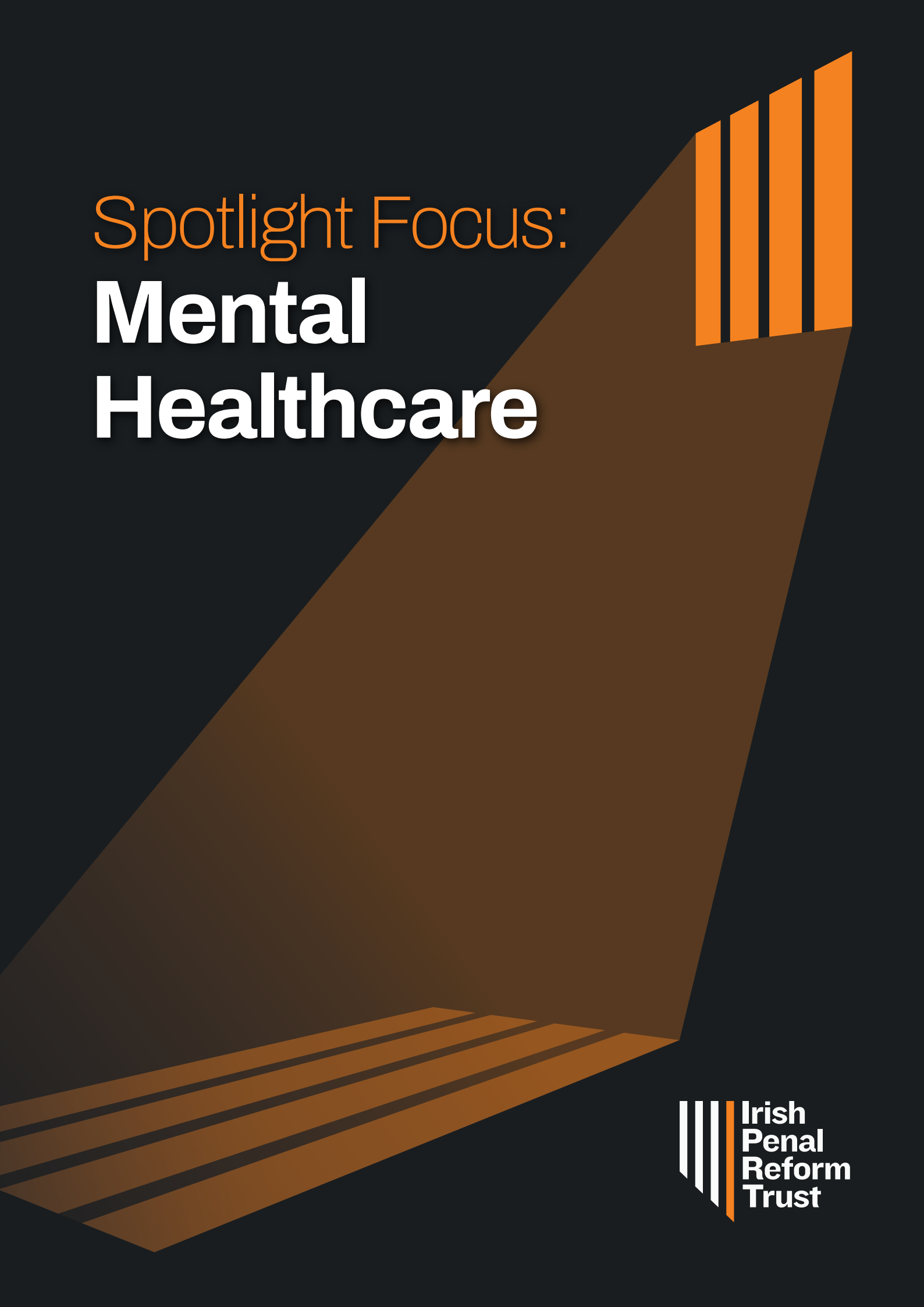
Mixed: Where there has been both movement towards and away from achieving a standard.

No change: Where there has been neither significant movement towards or away from achieving a standard.

Assessment of progress

IPRT uses a variety of different sources to assess progress under each standard. This includes a comprehensive desk review of published information and reports; examining information provided in response to parliamentary questions and debates; requesting written information and data directly from stakeholders; and engaging directly with stakeholders, including community-based organisation and people with lived experience of the criminal justice system. It also relied on reports by Prison Visiting Committees, reports by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture.

Through the PIPS project, IPRT has established a system where the national situation in the penal system is tracked and independently analysed on a regular basis. In doing so, it seeks to inform a wide range of stakeholders about the current state of the Irish penal system, including criminal justice professionals, policymakers, legislators, politicians, media and the general public. IPRT hopes that this report and its recommendations will encourage and inspire stakeholders to lead and work towards a progressive penal system that respects, protects, promotes, and fulfils the rights of all individuals in contact with the penal system.

A large, stylized spotlight beam in shades of brown and orange originates from the bottom left and points towards the top right, illuminating the title. The beam is composed of several parallel lines that create a sense of depth and focus.

Spotlight Focus: **Mental Healthcare**

Spotlight Focus

Mental health in Irish prisons: the imprisonment of people with mental health difficulties, inadequate service provision in prisons, and the impact of prison overcrowding on mental health

In 2025, people experiencing mental health difficulties continued to be held in prison, some indefinitely, due to the lack of alternative facilities and services, and many people in prison did not receive adequate mental healthcare. Both issues were compounded by and linked to the impacts of severe overcrowding levels across Irish prisons.

The problem facing the system is two-pronged. On one hand, there are not enough forensic psychiatric facilities to support the number of people who require care. This means that people with severe mental health difficulties are in inappropriate settings in prison, waiting weeks and months for places to become available in the Central Mental Hospital (CMH) while their condition is worsening. This particularly impacts those who have committed a serious offence and are experiencing severe mental illness, as they may only be transferred to the CMH.

The CMH is part of the National Forensic Mental Health Service (NFMHS), the arm of the HSE that provides forensic mental health care. Forensic psychiatry is the branch of psychiatry focused on the treatment of people who experience severe mental health difficulties who come into contact with the criminal justice system – whether that be the Gardaí, the courts or prisons. Under Section 15 of the Criminal Law (Insanity) Act 2006, a person in prison suffering with a “mental disorder” may be transferred to a “designated centre” for the purposes of receiving treatment. However, the CMH is currently the only “designated centre” in the country. Section 4 of the Act (fitness to be tried) also allows courts to direct an assessment of an individual at a designated centre.

For those with a severe mental illness who have committed a minor offence and do not need to be held in a facility as secure as the CMH, treatment in a civil psychiatric hospital is often the most suitable alternative. However, there is no statutory framework to ensure that civil psychiatric hospitals will accept a transfer of a patient from prison, meaning that admissions can be rejected at the discretion of the hospital. Official reports suggest that such rejections are based on the offender status of the patient.¹ As the CMH is the only designated forensic psychiatric facility in the country, there are no step-down facilities for “prisoner-patients” in the CMH to transition to, meaning that beds at the CMH have essentially become permanently filled.²

On the other hand, people in prison are not being provided with adequate mental healthcare and are living in conditions that take a serious toll on a person’s mental well-being and dignity such as sleeping on thin, roll-up mattresses on a floor in a cell with up to three other people, with an open toilet, beside which they have to eat their meals, and with limited time outside their cell.³ The provision of mental healthcare in prison has been and continues to be significantly under resourced,⁴ despite the recognition of the “increased need” in the prison population.⁵ This situation has deteriorated due to the levels of overcrowding observed in 2025.

¹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Thematic Inspection: An Evaluation of the Provision of Psychiatric Care in the Irish Prison System February – March 2023’ (2024) 32 <https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/OIP-Thematic-Inspection-Report-on-Provision-of-Psychiatric-Care-in-Prisons_Feb-2024-Publish.pdf>; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 25 January to 5 February 2010’ (2011) CPT/Inf (2011) 3 87–88; Mental Health Commission, ‘Access to Mental Health Services for People in the Criminal Justice System’ (2021) 40 <<https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2021-11/Access%20to%20mental%20health%20services%20for%20people%20in%20the%20criminal%20justice%20system%20FINAL.pdf>>.

² Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 18.

³ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (2025) CPT/Inf (2025) 22 6 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60a>>.

⁴ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 8; Mental Health Commission (n 1) 5; Irish Prison Service, ‘Health Needs Assessment for the Irish Prison Service’ (2022) 36 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/health-needs-assessment-for-the-irish-prison-service.pdf>>; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 3) para 237.

⁵ Irish Prison Service, ‘Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025’ 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e243cb1e/IPS_Annual_Report_2025_English.pdf>.

Both aspects of this issue trigger significant concern regarding the State's obligation under international human rights law to ensure that those in its custody are protected from inhuman and degrading treatment.⁶ Reporting by human rights and oversight bodies indicates that the Irish Government has not provided people with mental health difficulties in prison with this protection, as individuals continue to be subjected to detention conditions that are harmful to their mental integrity and human dignity, denied appropriate care, and with their mental illness left untreated.⁷ The State also has obligations to ensure that people in prison have the same standard of healthcare as people in the community, which is not being fulfilled for those in prison facing mental health difficulties.⁸

A longstanding issue

Most of the issues around the imprisonment of people with mental health difficulties and inadequate mental healthcare provision in Irish prisons have been raised repeatedly at the national and international level for years.⁹ As far back as 2010, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) warned the Irish Government that it had “limited options” in response to what it observed in the country's prisons and the provision of mental healthcare.¹⁰ According to the CPT, the Irish authorities could “either increase the bed capacity at the CMH for mentally ill prisoners, or enhance the possibilities, including legal, for regular psychiatric hospitals to receive mentally ill prisoners”.¹¹ More than a decade later, the State has still not faced up to this issue.

In an official visit to Ireland in 2019, the CPT noted that the treatment of people with mental health difficulties in prisons was “one of the most pressing issues in Irish prisons”.¹² In the same year, the IPS commissioned independent consultants Crowe Ireland to conduct a health needs assessment of the Service.¹³ In 2020, *Sharing the Vision*, the new policy for the provision of mental healthcare in Ireland was launched, replacing the 2006 *Vision for Change* policy, which had brought about the closure of the country's psychiatric hospitals and sought to prioritise mental health services in the community.¹⁴ In this new policy, the commitment to equivalence of care between the forensic mental health services (FMHS) and mental health services in the community was reiterated.¹⁵ So too was the vision for “stepped” or tiered forensic mental health services – this has yet to be realised.¹⁶

In 2021, the Mental Health Commission's *Access to Mental Health Services for People in the Criminal Justice System* report found that the principle of equivalence of care was “not yet embedded and some prisoners are receiving inappropriate or no treatment for their mental illness”.¹⁷ It concluded that “mentally ill people are being criminalised”, an indication that both the criminal justice system and mental health system required significant changes.¹⁸ In 2022, the ‘High Level Task Force to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those who come into contact with the criminal justice sector’ (HLTF), comprising the Departments of Health and Justice, and criminal justice agencies,

⁶ United Nations General Assembly, ‘International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’ (1966) Resolution 2200A (XXI) art 7 <<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ccpr.pdf>>; United Nations General Assembly, ‘Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment’ (1984) Resolution 39/46 art 1 <<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/cat.pdf>>. European Convention on Human Rights 1950 art 3.

⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ 21 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/OIP-AR-2025.pdf>>; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 3) para 240.

⁸ UN General Assembly, ‘Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities’ (2006) A/RES/61/106 art 13,16,25; ‘The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)’ (2005) r 24 <https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf>.

⁹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 25 January to 5 February 2010’ (n 1) para 87; Mental Health Commission (n 1) 5.

¹⁰ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 25 January to 5 February 2010’ (n 1) para 88.

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 23 September to 4 October 2019’ (2020) CPT/Inf (2020) 37 para 63 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680a078cf>>.

¹³ <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-health/publications/sharing-the-vision-a-mental-health-policy-for-everyone/>> Department of Health, ‘Sharing the Vision A Mental Health Policy for Everyone’ (2020).

¹⁴ Department of Health, ‘A Vision for Change’ (2006) 8.

¹⁵ ‘Sharing the Vision: A Mental Health Policy for Everyone’ (n 13) 50.

¹⁶ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 14.

¹⁷ Mental Health Commission (n 1) 64.

¹⁸ *ibid*.

published its own report, with 60 recommendations.¹⁹ The HLTF also highlighted the inequivalence of care, finding that for those in prison awaiting transfer “this care is not comparable to what is provided in the CMH and represents a significant patient safety issue”.²⁰ The same year, the final Crowe report concluded that keeping people with mental health difficulties in prison awaiting transfer to the CMH was “clinically inappropriate”.²¹

In 2023, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) conducted a thematic investigation into the provision of psychiatric care in prisons and asserted that safe and effective psychiatric treatment for people in prison must be “an urgent priority”, and that “the time for working groups and reports alone must draw to a close, action is now required”.²² The 2025 report of the CPT indicated that the Irish Government had not heeded this strong call to action. It stated that the treatment of people with mental health difficulties in Irish prisons was a “recurrent concern” for the Committee, and highlighted the lack of change in this regard since 2010.²³

This series of reports and growing scrutiny have not resulted in requisite action by the Irish authorities. This inertia is made worse by the fact that there is no clear, current picture of the mental health of and mental illness in the prison population.

Lack of up-to-date, comprehensive, disaggregated data

There is a critical need for up-to-date and disaggregated data on the prevalence and type of mental health difficulties or psycho-social disabilities in the Irish prison population. The systematic collection and publication of this data would allow the IPS, policymakers and the NFMHS to fully understand the needs of this cohort and the mental healthcare and treatment required within prisons. This is also of note as the State has an obligation under Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) to collect appropriate information, including statistical and research data, to enable it to formulate and implement policies giving effect to the CRPD, and to disaggregate and disseminate such information as appropriate. The absence of publicly available data of this kind makes it impossible to determine the extent of the issues facing both systems.

The last comprehensive study conducted on the prevalence of mental illness in Irish prisons was by the NFMHS in 2003, when the prison population was 2,989.²⁴ Of 1,582 people in prison surveyed (1,396 men, 186 women), psychosis was identified in 7.6 per cent of men on remand, 2.7 per cent of sentenced men and 5.4 per cent of women.²⁵ Major depressive conditions were identified in 10 per cent of men on remand, five per cent of men serving a sentence, and 16 per cent of women serving a sentence.²⁶ On the basis of these results, the report estimated that such rates would require approximately 376 transfers from prison to psychiatric facilities per annum, and that between 122-157 extra secure psychiatric beds were needed.²⁷ More than two decades later, the number of secure psychiatric beds that have been created still does not reach this figure. This is despite the prison population almost doubling since then, and the evidence indicating that there has been an increase in the number of people being committed to prison who are presenting with ‘severe and enduring mental illness’.²⁸

Academic research has filled some of the gaps regarding the prevalence of mental health conditions amongst the Irish prison population. A 2019 study found that the pooled percentage of people experiencing psychosis in Irish prisons was 3.6 per cent, and 4.3 per cent for major affective disorder – with the rate of affective disorder being an estimated 9.1 per cent when considering a women-only cohort.²⁹ It concluded that “this study confirms that a significant proportion of Irish

¹⁹ Department of Health and Department of Justice, ‘High Level Task Force to Consider the Mental Health and Addiction Challenges of Those Who Come into Contact with the Criminal Justice Sector – Final Report’ (2022) <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/final-report-of-the-high-level-task-force-to-consider-the-mental-health-and-addiction-pdf>>.

²⁰ *ibid* 83.

²¹ Irish Prison Service, ‘Health Needs Assessment for the Irish Prison Service’ (n 4) 53.

²² Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 8.

²³ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 3) para 230.

²⁴ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Tuesday, 17 Jun 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (17 June 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-06-17/603>>

²⁵ HG Kennedy and others, ‘Mental Illness in Irish Prisons – Psychiatric Morbidity in Sentenced, Remanded and Newly Committed Prisoners’ (National Forensic Mental Health Service 2005) <https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/6393/1/4338_Kennedy_Mental_illness_in_Irish_prisoners.pdf>.

²⁶ *ibid*.

²⁷ *ibid* 3.

²⁸ Department of Health and Department of Justice (n 19) 83.

²⁹ Gautam Gulati and others, ‘The Prevalence of Major Mental Illness, Substance Misuse and Homelessness in Irish Prisoners; Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses’ [2019] *Irish Journal of Psychological Medicine* 5 <<https://researchrepository.ul.ie/server/api/core/bitstreams/Oc9c4da6->

prisoners present with a current psychotic or major affective disorder, which are potentially treatable mental illnesses".³⁰

When asked to provide the number of people in prison with a personality disorder diagnosis from 2020–2025, the Minister for Justice responded that the IPS did not have that specific data.³¹ However, the IPS has observed changes in clinical presentations over the past 20 years, noting increased numbers of people presenting with a broad range of mental health illnesses, including developmental conditions, personality disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and complex post-traumatic stress disorder, dual diagnosis, and intellectual disability, amongst others.³²

In this context, where the understanding of the prevalence of mental health conditions and issues in the Irish prison population is evidently incomplete, the need for the Mental Health and Disability Needs Analysis of the IPS – as recommended by the Crowe report – is obvious (discussed further under Standard 12, p. 56).

Inadequate pathways in and out of forensic psychiatric care for people in prison

When the CMH relocated in November 2022, 93 patients in Dundrum were transferred to the new facility in Portrane.³³ When it opened, 112 beds were operational, meaning that the move to the new facility did not alleviate pressure on waiting lists of people in prison awaiting transfer, as it provided just 19 new beds.³⁴ By September 2025 the number of operational beds remained at 112, and by year end, that number appeared unchanged.³⁵ The facility is envisioned to ultimately have a 170-bed complex, including the 130-bed CMH, a 30-bed Intensive Care Rehabilitation Unit (ICRU) and a 10-bed forensic Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service unit.³⁶ The ICRU is an adjunct to the CMH, serving as a step-down facility designed to provide long-term rehabilitation for individuals who no longer require the level of care provided in the CMH. The 2020 Sharing the Vision policy aimed to establish ICRUs in the South and West of the country, but no timeline was or has since been provided as to when they will be delivered.

Concerns had been raised before the opening of the new facility that this would be the case, that it would soon be filled after opening, and remain at full capacity.³⁷ Prior to its opening, Ireland already had fewer adult psychiatric beds than almost any other country in the European Union – despite having comparatively higher levels of severe mental health difficulties.³⁸ A 2020 study found that Ireland had two psychiatric beds per 100,000 people.³⁹ The new CMH only brought this up to 3.5 per 100,000.⁴⁰

Regrettably, those concerns were realised and waiting lists for transfers for people with mental health difficulties from prison to the CMH have remained an almost permanent feature since its relocation. In 2025, the average number of people in prison awaiting transfer to the CMH was 28, up from 20.2 in 2024.⁴¹ The number of people awaiting transfer in each quarter was higher in 2025 than in 2024 (see Table 1).⁴² This overall increase in the number of people awaiting transfer may be in correlation with the overall increase in the prison population, which rose by 9.6 per cent from 2024 to 2025.⁴³

[46e4-4de6-a60c-9fc9c2d6d63e/content](https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-01-13/1653).

³⁰ *ibid* 7.

³¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Departmental Data – Tuesday, 13 Jan 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (13 January 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-01-13/1653>> accessed 3 September 2026.

³² *ibid*.

³³ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Wednesday, 4 Mar 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (4 March 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-03-04/262?highlight%5B0%5D=central&highlight%5B1%5D=mental&highlight%5B2%5D=hospital&highlight%5B3%5D=mental&highlight%5B4%5D=mental&highlight%5B5%5D=mental&highlight%5B6%5D=mental&highlight%5B7%5D=mental>> accessed 4 September 2026.

³⁴ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Mental Health Services – Thursday, 25 Sep 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (25 September 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-09-25/332>> accessed 28 August 2026.

³⁵ *ibid*; Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Hospital Facilities – Tuesday, 16 Dec 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (16 December 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-12-16/1128?highlight%5B0%5D=mental>> accessed 28 August 2026.

³⁶ Oireachtas, 'Mental Health Services – Thursday, 25 Sep 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (n 34).

³⁷ Mental Health Commission (n 1) 48.

³⁸ Harry Kennedy, 'Opinion: Prisons Now a Dumping Ground for Mentally Ill Young Men' (The Irish Times) <<https://www.irishtimes.com/opinion/opinion-prisons-now-a-dumping-ground-for-mentally-ill-young-men-1.2651034>> accessed 4 September 2026.

³⁹ Mental Health Commission (n 1) 148.

⁴⁰ *ibid* 48.

⁴¹ Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁴² *Ibid*.

⁴³ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 5).

Table 1: Number of people in prison awaiting transfer to the CMH on specific days each quarter, 2024-2025⁴⁴

Prison	2024				2025			
	01-Jan	01-Apr	01-Jul	01-Oct	01-Jan	01-Apr	01-Jul	01-Oct
Arbour Hill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlerea	3	3	4	4	3	4	3	5
Cloverhill	7	6	6	7	10	12	15	12
Cork	1	0	1	1	1	2	3	3
Limerick Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick Male	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1
Loughan House	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Midlands	2	1	0	2	4	2	2	5
Dóchas Centre	1	1	2	1	0	1	0	0
Mountjoy Male	4	8	8	3	3	4	4	5
Portlaoise	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Shelton Abbey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Training Unit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wheatfield	4	0	1	0	0	0	0	3
Total	22	19	22	18	22	27	28	35
Average	20.2				28.0			

The IPS does not hold data on the average wait times for transfer to the CMH from prison for 2023-2025, and the NFMHS was unable to provide this data prior to the publication of this report.⁴⁵ According to publicly available information for 2022-2024, however, the average wait time decreased year-on-year. In 2024, the average wait time for transfer to the CMH from prison was 102 days, down from 230 in 2023 and 253 the year before that.⁴⁶ Whilst this decrease in waiting times is welcome, it still represents a significant amount of time for a individual with mental health difficulties to be left without the treatment they require, leaving them at risk of deteriorating further in an unsuitable, even unsafe, environment for their condition. In some cases, the individual may never actually be transferred to the CMH before the expiration of their sentence, meaning they are potentially released from prison in a worse state than when they were committed, or face barriers in being referred to or accessing community health services upon release.⁴⁷

The OIP reported that waiting list numbers for CMH transfers from prison are not an accurate reflection of the need for transfer as several clinical prison staff described numerous cases of people with mental health difficulties who required transfer, but had not been referred to the CMH as they believed “there was no chance they would be accepted”.⁴⁸ This suggests that the acute shortage of beds in the CMH is acting as a deterrent for referrals of people in vulnerable situations who are in need of those beds.

Since 2023, despite an increase in the prison population, there has been an annual decrease in the number of transfers from prison to the CMH (see Table 2).⁴⁹ In 2025, there were 31 transfers from prison to the CMH, down from 35 in 2024 and 41 in 2023. The reason for the decrease in the number of transfers may be due to the unavailability of beds and beds becoming “blocked” due to a lack of step-down facilities.

⁴⁴ Data obtained by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁵ IPRT made separate Freedom of Information requests to both the IPS and the NFMHS regarding this figure and did not receive the information from the NFMHS in time for publication.

⁴⁶ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2024’ (2025) 24 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7726/iprt_pips_2024_report_final_digital.pdf>.

⁴⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 34.

⁴⁸ *ibid*.

⁴⁹ Data obtained by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

Table 2: Number of transfers to the CMH by prison, 2023-2025⁵⁰

Prison	2023	2024	2025
Arbour Hill	0	0	0
Castlerea	5	1	4
Cloverhill	11	9	10
Cork	3	2	3
Limerick (F)	0	0	0
Limerick (M)	0	0	0
Loughan House	0	0	0
Midlands	4	2	2
Dóchas Centre	5	13	9
Mountjoy	6	4	1
Portlaoise	4	1	1
Shelton Abbey	0	0	0
Training Unit	0	0	0
Wheatfield	3	3	1
Total	41	35	31

The practice of ‘therapeutic bail’, whereby an accused person would be granted bail on the condition that they receive treatment at an appropriate facility, evolved as an informal workaround in response to the lack of available CMH beds.⁵¹ The individual could stabilise in a hospital facility until they were in a position where they could return for trial. In December 2025 however, the practice was halted due to a judicial review challenge, with the case reportedly settling out of court as a suitable placement was found for the individual.⁵² It would appear that no cases of therapeutic bail have been granted since then, and the rationale for this has not been made clear. This situation highlights the lack of formal, statutory pathways to divert people with mental health difficulties from prison to a more suitable healthcare facility.

The need for formalised diversion pathways and legislation to underpin them is demonstrated by the ability of local psychiatric hospitals to refuse transfers from prisons.⁵³ At present, there is no legislation setting out the process by which an individual in prison may be transferred to a local psychiatric hospital, and the relevant procedure for that hospital to accept the individual. Over a decade ago, the CPT recommended to the Irish authorities that they rectify this issue as a means of preventing people with mental health difficulties from being held in prison, including through legislative change if necessary.⁵⁴ Yet none has been taken in the years since, with the CPT reiterating this point in its 2025 report to the Irish Government.⁵⁵

The decision to accept a transfer from a prison is at the discretion of the hospital, which may cite inadequate resources, inappropriate facilities or a lack of expertise as reasons for refusal.⁵⁶ This was a source of frustration for clinicians in prisons, with one psychiatrist stating “psychiatric hospitals can refuse to take people, we in prison cannot” and that obtaining a transfer for a patient required having contacts in the hospital and calling in favours, and one likening it to

⁵⁰ Data obtained by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁵¹ Mental Health Commission (n 1) 20.

⁵² Conor Ryan, ‘Surge in Actively Psychotic Patients Held in Prisons, RTÉ Finds’ <<https://www.rte.ie/news/investigations-unit/2026/0209/1557379-psychotic-patients-held-in-prisons/>> accessed 30 August 2026.

⁵³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 32.

⁵⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 25 January to 5 February 2010’ (n 1) para 88.

⁵⁵ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 3) para 233.

⁵⁶ Mental Health Commission (n 1) 40.

“horse trading”.⁵⁷ Research indicates that the CMH has refused transfers from prison, citing a lack of resources and capacity to care for individuals deemed violent or disruptive.⁵⁸

Individuals experiencing mental illness and homelessness prior to prison are acutely impacted – an issue raised by the CPT in 2020 and reiterated again in 2025.⁵⁹ Civil psychiatric hospitals have refused to take responsibility for and admit these vulnerable individuals as they fall outside the formal catchment area, which is determined by place of residence and Eircodes.⁶⁰ Essentially, individuals are refused necessary treatment on the basis that they are homeless. As one senior clinician expressed to the OIP, “hospitals shouldn’t be able to refuse admission to a patient just because he lives under a bush”.⁶¹

Whilst there may be legitimate factors that make it difficult for civil psychiatric hospitals to receive transfers of people with mental health difficulties from prison, the fact remains that these individuals have been denied their right to access necessary healthcare. This is in contravention of the Irish State’s obligation to ensure people in prison have equal access to “preventive, curative and palliative health services”.⁶² The Government has a responsibility to implement policies, practices and provide sufficient resources to ensure civil psychiatric hospitals are equipped to receive individuals with mental health difficulties transferred from prison, and that treatment can be administered whilst ensuring both the safety of the patient and the staff caring for them.

When a civil psychiatric hospital or the CMH refuses the transfer of individuals with mental health difficulties from prison for necessary treatment, or they are placed on lengthy waiting lists, these individuals then remain in prison, effectively untreated. Not only are they not provided with the forensic psychiatric care and treatment their condition requires, but they are in many instances isolated from any social contact, given limited time out of their cell, denied any meaningful activity and critically, not provided the psychological, occupational, social rehabilitative therapies that may help improve their condition.⁶³ There is also an overreliance on pharmacotherapy.⁶⁴

During its most recent visit to Ireland, the CPT carried out follow-up visits to the “High Support Units” (HSU) at Castlerea and Mountjoy prisons, and the D2 Unit in Cloverhill, where individuals with mental illness are held.⁶⁵ It remarked that the designation of these units as “high support” was a misnomer, based on the treatment it observed.⁶⁶

At Castlerea, the CPT found that men were being held on “impoverished regime[s]”, with those in the C2 unit being allowed just one hour out of their cell per day, and their human contact essentially limited to medication or meals being delivered through their cell hatch.⁶⁷ The CPT found that the men did not have access to any therapeutic or activity programme or occupational therapy, only limited access to a psychologist and an overall reliance on pharmacotherapy”.⁶⁸ No care or management plans had been drawn up to guide how they were cared for, or how to eventually progress them out of C2 Unit.⁶⁹ The CPT ultimately concluded that the treatment of the men in C1 and C2 Units may be considered inhuman and degrading – a violation of Article 3 of the ECHR.⁷⁰ In its inspection of Castlerea prison in September 2025,

⁵⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 32.

⁵⁸ Mental Health Reform, ‘Mental Health Services & Supports in Prisons: Service Mapping & Reflections from Lived Experiences’ 77 <<https://mentalhealthreform.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Main-Mental-Health-Services-Supports-in-Prisons-Service-Mapping-and-Reflections-from-Lived-Experiences.pdf>>.

⁵⁹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 3) para 256. European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 23 September to 4 October 2019’ (n 12).

⁶⁰ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 32.

⁶¹ *ibid* 34.

IPRT requested information from the NFMHS regarding the number of people who were refused transfer from a prison to a local civil psychiatric hospital in 2025, however this data was not made available at the time of publication.

⁶² Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, ‘General Comment No. 14 (2000) – The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights)’ (2000) E/C.12/2000/4 para 34 <<https://docs.un.org/en/E/C.12/2000/4>>.

⁶³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 1) 8.

⁶⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 3) para 238.

⁶⁵ *ibid* 234.

⁶⁶ *ibid* 231.

⁶⁷ *ibid* 238.

⁶⁸ *ibid*.

⁶⁹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Response of the Irish Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Its Visit to Ireland from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (2025) para 238 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60b>>.

the OIP found that “there had been no changes to these Divisions since the CPT’s visit.”⁷¹

The CPT observed similar regimes at Mountjoy’s HSU, with no occupational therapy, group psychotherapy or recreational therapy, only recourse to pharmacotherapy.⁷² The nine men, nearly all of whom had “severe and enduring” long-term mental illnesses, wandered idly around the unit or yard.⁷³ Three of the men were awaiting transfer to the CMH.⁷⁴ One man, who required daily healthcare assistance, was being held in a cell described as “filthy”, and with no bed sheet or pillow – conditions unbefitting of a country as wealthy as Ireland in 2025.⁷⁵ The CPT noted that the mental health team – a psychiatrist and a mental health nurse – visited the unit once a week.⁷⁶

Whilst prison is undoubtedly an inappropriate place for a person with mental health difficulties to be held, the fact remains that individuals with severe mental health difficulties are in its care. Therefore, the IPS must ensure that at the very least, individuals with serious mental health difficulties are provided with care and management plans, and regimes that include meaningful activity. Whilst the safety and security of prison staff and the individual in question must be a strong consideration, a balance must also be struck of providing necessary care to these individuals, rather than isolation.

Existing diversion initiatives

Crucial diversion initiatives have been implemented in recent years, to divert people with mental health difficulties away from the criminal justice system to receive the psychiatric treatment they need. However, such diversion initiatives require expansion and formalisation. Since 2006, the Prison In-Reach Court Liaison Service (PICLS) has been based in Cloverhill Remand Prison, and through a two-stage screening can transfer individuals from the prison system to receive treatment in the CMH, a civil psychiatric hospital or another mental health service in the community.⁷⁷ PICLS provides in-reach clinics in Cloverhill, Mountjoy, Wheatfield, Midlands, Portlaoise, Arbour Hill and Castlereagh prisons, and attends the court at Cloverhill.⁷⁸

Between 2006 and 2019, PICLS diverted 1,571 people from the courts to receive necessary treatment, with 195 being referred to the CMH, 431 to general adult mental health services and 945 to mental health services in the community.⁷⁹ The Mental Health Commission’s report credited PICLS as being “the single largest contributor to mitigating the effect of the bed crisis at the Central Mental Hospital in recent years”, as it has “enabled the broader forensic service to function in the absence of adequate admission facilities”.⁸⁰ It is therefore welcome that the HLTF 2024-2025 report indicated that PICLS would be expanded for remand and sentenced individuals.⁸¹

A positive diversion initiative commenced in January 2025: the pilot Community Access Support Team (CAST) project in Limerick Garda Division, a partnership between An Garda Síochána and the HSE Mental Health Services. With a team comprising a Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS), a Social Work Practitioner, a Social Care Worker and two Gardaí, CAST responds to incidents where mental health crisis or vulnerability is identified, and based on the individual’s needs, diverts them to appropriate care pathways. It also follows up with the individuals it engages with.

A recent evaluation of the CAST pilot explicitly stated that through “offering meaningful alternatives to detention and supporting appropriate pathways to care, CAST plays a vital role in addressing systemic pressures while improving

⁷⁰ *ibid* 240.

⁷¹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 7) 21.

⁷² European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 3) paras 241–242.

⁷³ *ibid*.

⁷⁴ *ibid* 241.

⁷⁵ *ibid* 241–242.

⁷⁶ *ibid*.

⁷⁷ Mental Health Commission (n 1) 39.

⁷⁸ Mental Health Reform (n 58) 17.

⁷⁹ Mental Health Commission (n 1) 39.

⁸⁰ *ibid*.

⁸¹ Department of Health and Department of Justice, ‘High Level Taskforce on Mental Health and Addiction Third Annual Progress Report September 2024 - 2025’ (2026) 8–9 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/74ff5c30/High_Level_Taskforce_on_Mental_Health_and_Addiction_Third_Annual_Progress_Report_September_2024_-_2025.pdf>.

outcomes for vulnerable individuals”.⁸² During the pilot, the CAST team prevented an estimated 133 detentions under Section 12 of the Mental Health Act (2001).⁸³ This means that not only is there less pressure on Gardaí custody suites and fewer unnecessary presentations at Emergency Departments, but crucially, there is a better outcome for the individual through a health-led pathway rather than one into the criminal justice system.⁸⁴ Crucially, service users and their families reported “improved experiences of safety, dignity and trust”.⁸⁵

Based on the significant impacts delivered in the pilot, the evaluation recommended that CAST be established as “a formally recognised national interagency crisis response service, with named operational leadership and phased implementation based on population need and service demand”.⁸⁶ While IPRT welcomes the recommended expansion and formalisation of CAST, the *Vision for Change* policy notably recommended a diversion model very similar to that of CAST in 2006.⁸⁷

Diversion options should be provided at all points of interaction with the criminal justice system, but must be complemented by adequate provision of mental healthcare in prison for those whose mental health issues do not meet the threshold for diversion out of prison.

Provision of mental health care in Irish prisons

For those serving a custodial sentence and struggling with their mental health, access to psychology services is undermined by under-resourcing of healthcare staff. This is compounded by the levels of severe overcrowding across the Irish prison estate, which has significant consequences for people’s mental health and sense of dignity.

In recent years, and in tandem with rising levels of overcrowding, the waiting lists for access to psychology services in prison have continued to grow. By the end of July 2025, the number of people on waiting lists to see a psychologist was 2,273 – 41 per cent of the average monthly prison population.⁸⁸ By November 2025, the number of people on the waiting list for psychology services had risen to 2,410, which represents 42 per cent of the prison population for that month, when it averaged 5,699.⁸⁹ When comparing these waiting lists to previous years, the year-on-year increase is substantial.

Table 3: Waiting lists for psychology services and percentage of the average prison population that month⁹⁰

	Waiting list for psychology services	Percentage of prison population
July 2025	2,273	41.00%
July 2024	2,090	41.60%
August 2023	1,754	37.60%
August 2022	1,315	31.30%

Lengthy waiting lists mean that many people do not get access to the necessary care, particularly those serving short sentences. A significant proportion of people serving short sentences have committed non-violent offences linked to anti-social behaviour, mental illness, substance dependency issues, survival crime such as petty theft or homelessness, or a combination of these factors.⁹¹ Such individuals could benefit immensely from prompt and regular engagement with psychology services in prison, even potentially contributing to preventing their re-entry to prison for further similar low-level offending. However, these individuals and people in remand custody are least likely to gain access to the mental healthcare they need.⁹² One GP working in the system summarised the sense of apathy as a result of the extensive waiting lists:

⁸² University of Limerick, ‘An Evaluation of the Community Access Support Team (CAST): A Joint An Garda Síochána and Health Service Executive (HSE) Mid West Mental Health Service Pilot Project’ 39.

⁸³ *ibid* 40.

⁸⁴ *ibid*.

⁸⁵ *ibid* 9.

⁸⁶ *ibid* 54.

⁸⁷ Department of Health (n 14) 139.

⁸⁸ Information obtained through a FOI request to the IPS. Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Monthly Information Note – July 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JULY-2025.pdf>.

⁸⁹ Oireachtas, ‘Departmental Data – Tuesday, 13 Jan 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (n 31).

⁹⁰ Information obtained through an FOI request to the IPS, and taken from IPS Monthly Information Notes for those months.

⁹¹ Department of Health and Department of Justice (n 19) 163.

⁹² Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Rethinking Remand: An Assessment of Pre-Trial Detention in Ireland’ 36–41.

The waiting list is just at the point where I don't really bother referring to psychology much anymore because if somebody's only doing a one-year sentence, the waiting list is 20 months, there's really no point.⁹³

Between January and July 2025, the IPS recorded that 433 psychology interventions were not completed before the person was released.⁹⁴ Of this group, 95 per cent were serving a sentence of less than three years.⁹⁵ In 2024, this was the case for 629 interventions.⁹⁶ Each one represents a missed opportunity to provide necessary support to an individual, that may contribute to addressing their offending behaviour.

A shortage of psychologists in prison contributes to lengthy waiting lists. In July 2025, the IPS documented that additional psychologists were needed to support the increased prison population, as the ratio at that time was one psychologist per 183 people in prison, compared to the internationally recognised target standard of 1:150.⁹⁷ The IPS had sought funding for five Senior Psychologists and eight Staff Grade Psychologists, and while awaiting budgetary approval, had requested permission to fill these posts with agency staff.⁹⁸

Across the prison estate, the ratio of psychologists to people in prison varied substantially (see Table 4). According to IPS data, the prisons with the most disparate average ratios in 2025 were Midlands Prison (1:297), Cloverhill Prison (1:289), Mountjoy Men's Prison (1:277) and Arbour Hill (1:274).⁹⁹ Notably, only Cork and Portlaoise prisons had the recommended ratio of psychologist to people in prison in 2025. The ratio in Cloverhill and Castlerea prisons decreased compared to 2024, but increased in Arbour Hill and Mountjoy. This makes it clear that any change in staffing levels can have a profound impact on bringing down the ratio of staff to patient or to substantially increase the workload of an individual psychologist. The CPT not only recommended an increase in the number of and access to psychologists in all prisons in Ireland, but also occupational therapists and social workers, to ensure holistic support and help mitigate risks for individuals prior to release.¹⁰⁰

Table 4: Ratio of psychologists to people in prison, 2024-2025¹⁰¹

	2024	2025
Arbour Hill	1:91	1:274
Castlerea	1:346	1:185
Cloverhill	1:866	1:289
Cork	1:118	1:118
Limerick (M & F)	1:136	1:158
Loughan House	0	0
Midlands	1:175	1:297
Dóchas Centre & Training Unit	1:161	1:162
Mountjoy Male	1:194	1:277
Portlaoise	1:152	1:150

Those who did get to see a psychologist had to wait between three and six months, although waiting times did improve overall since 2024. In 2025, 649 people in prison were seen by a psychologist for triage.¹⁰² Almost half of them (47.3 per cent) waited approximately six months to be seen, 18 per cent had to wait three to six months, and 33.9 per cent waited

⁹³ Mental Health Reform (n 58) 67.

⁹⁴ Documents from IPS obtained by RTÉ under Freedom of Information and shared with IPRT in January 2026.

⁹⁵ Documents from IPS obtained by RTÉ under Freedom of Information and shared with IPRT in January 2026.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

¹⁰⁰ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 3) para 256.

¹⁰¹ Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

¹⁰² Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

three months.¹⁰³ This is a slight improvement since 2024, when more than half of the 638 people who saw a psychologist waited more than six months.¹⁰⁴

Following referral, 586 people in prison in 2025 saw a psychologist for specific mental health intervention.¹⁰⁵ More than half of them (56 per cent) were seen after approximately six months, while 13.1 per cent were seen in roughly three to six months and 30.9 per cent were seen within three months. This is also an improvement since 2024, when waiting times were around six months for 60.1 per cent of people.¹⁰⁶

In its 2025 report, the CPT noted that prison officers working in high support units at Mountjoy and Castlerea prisons did not receive systematic or ongoing mental health training, other than attending the occasional mental health first aid course.¹⁰⁷ This is not only potentially unsafe for the men under their care, but also places staff in an unfair position of heightened responsibility without requisite training to equip them for it. A survey of staff in prisons by the OIP found that only 14 per cent of those surveyed (31 of 218) felt satisfied with their training when working with people in prison with mental health issues.¹⁰⁸ The Prison Visiting Committee for the Dóchas Centre echoed this, stating that staff in the prison continue to deliver above and beyond both their remit and their training in the care they demonstrate for women with mental health difficulties assigned to their custody, but it is an inappropriate setting for the women and an inappropriate burden on staff, who are already over-capacity.¹⁰⁹

Levels of overcrowding in prisons not only negatively impact waiting lists for psychology services, but also the material living conditions for people in prison, which can both exacerbate existing mental health issues and cause a person's mental health to deteriorate.¹¹⁰ Severe overcrowding across the Irish prison estate has meant that individuals in prison have little to no privacy, barely any physical space for themselves, reduced access to sanitation, limited time outside of their cell, and live in close proximity to others who may be suffering with mental illness or in active addiction. All of these factors over a sustained period can take a significant toll on a person's mental well-being and sense of dignity, exacerbated by the fact that they may not be accessing psychology services to ameliorate their condition. This means that many individuals may be released from prison in a worse state mentally than when they entered, indicating that the IPS cannot deliver on its mission to provide rehabilitation to individuals in custody.¹¹¹

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 3) para 234.

¹⁰⁸ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 7) 26.

¹⁰⁹ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' (2026) 10 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/41ae0e7a/D%C3%B3chas_Centre_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Mental Health Reform (n 58) 9.

¹¹¹ 'Mission and Values' (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/about-us/mission-and-values/>> accessed 22 July 2026.

Table 5: Instances of self-harm and attempted, actual or suspected suicide, 2023-2025

Prison	2023	2024	2025
Castlerea	14	19	26
Cloverhill	28	34	34
Cork	12	21	29
Limerick Female	6	7	6
Limerick Male	7	11	18
Loughan House	0	1	1
Midlands	52	29	34
Mountjoy Female	41	27	19
Mountjoy Male	41	35	53
Portlaoise	0	3	6
Shelton Abbey	0	0	0
Training Unit	0	0	0
Wheatfield	11	16	21
Arbour Hill	3	0	1
Total	215	203	248

Notably in 2025, the number of instances of self-harm and attempted, actual or suspected suicide increased in all prisons except the Dóchas Centre.¹¹² The IPS recorded 248 instances across the prison estate in 2025, up from 203 the previous year.¹¹³ While a direct connection has not yet been made, this increase coincides with an increase in overcrowding levels and the number of individuals sharing cells, as discussed in Standards 3 and 9, respectively. This means that these instances may occur in a shared cell in the presence of others which could have a deeply traumatic impact requiring psychological support. While the full Self-harm in Irish Prisons report is not yet published for 2025, the 2024 report records that:

The most recorded contributory factors were mental health difficulties, substance misuse, interpersonal conflict, and stressors linked to imprisonment (e.g., court dates, family separation, or bereavement). Multiple contributory factors were often noted for the same incident, highlighting the complex and multifactorial nature of self-harm in prison settings.¹¹⁴

The data also indicates that people on remand, women and younger people in prison have higher rates of engaging in self-harm.¹¹⁵ The rate of self-harm for people on remand was twice that for people serving sentences.¹¹⁶ People serving short sentences of 12 months or less represented a quarter of incidents recorded amongst the sentenced cohort.¹¹⁷ Almost one third of people who self-harmed did so more than once and the most likely time of day for self-harm incidents to occur was during the day, when cells were unlocked.¹¹⁸ These patterns suggest that both the level of staff supervision and the availability of daily routines may play a role in influencing the timing and opportunity for self-harm in custody. This underlines the importance of meaningful activity during the prison day, and of staffing levels in order to reduce the incidence of self-harm.¹¹⁹ The report also found that almost 60 per cent of self-harming incidents “may be driven by factors other than a direct intent to end life, such as coping with distress, expressing emotional pain, or managing interpersonal or environmental stressors”.¹²⁰

¹¹² Data received by IPRT on 26 August 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Irish Prison Service, ‘Self-Harm in Irish Prisons: Sixth Report from the Self-Harm Assessment and Data Analysis (SADA) Project’ (2025) 7 <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Self-harm-in-Irish-Prisons-2024-Sixth-report-from-the-SADA-Project-1.pdf>.

¹¹⁵ Irish Prison Service, ‘Self-Harm in Irish Prisons: Sixth Report from the Self-Harm Assessment and Data Analysis (SADA) Project’ (n 114).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Conclusion

The issues outlined in this report are issues of longstanding concern, and their impacts are compounded by a growing prison population. This is a systemic problem with very real consequences for thousands of people in Ireland. Its impact reaches beyond people in prison and affects their families, the individuals charged with providing them with medical care in prison, and prison staff.

The National Forensic Mental Health System is inadequately resourced, with not enough beds in the CMH and insufficient step-down facilities to allow for transition and progression through the system. The remaining beds in the CMH must be operationalised as soon as possible. The financing and creation of additional forensic psychiatric beds is also necessary, as even when the CMH is fully operationalised, the supply will not meet the demand. Lower security forensic psychiatric care facilities are also needed for individuals with serious mental health difficulties who have committed minor offences, and do not require the level of security in the CMH. In the wait for such beds, people with severe mental health difficulties are being held in prisons, a wholly inappropriate setting for acutely vulnerable people. Not only is prison itself inappropriate, but the regimes these people are being held on have been described by the CPT as treatment that may amount to inhuman and degrading. The IPS must ensure that it provides these individuals with care and management plans to ensure, where possible, that their condition does not worsen in custody, until they can be transferred.

Legislation and policy must be implemented to ensure that local psychiatric hospitals are equipped to accept transfers of people with mental health difficulties from prison, and that the decision is not at the hospital's discretion. Therapeutic bail should be placed on statutory footing through the amendment of the Bail Act 1997, to enable courts to grant bail to someone on the condition that they receive treatment at an appropriate facility. Both the diversion initiatives PICLS and CAST have demonstrated that they can mitigate the number of individuals with mental illness ending up in prison, but both require expansion and formalisation, to ensure they can continue this crucial work. Resources for the provision of mental healthcare in prison must be swiftly and significantly increased, to ensure those with mental health issues can receive the care they need. Given the mutually aggravating factors of severe levels of overcrowding and a lack of access to psychology services, or other services or activities that may help improve a person's mental well-being, the increased incidents of self-harm and attempted, actual or suspected suicide are regrettably unsurprising – but they should not be treated as inevitable.

There is no shortage of recommendations that have already been made to the Irish Government repeatedly, to address this crisis. However, we need the political will to take decisive action.

IPRT recommends:

- The Central Mental Hospital (CMH) urgently operationalise all beds and allocate with sufficient staffing and resources to ensure adequate provision of care and removal of people in need of psychiatric treatment from prison settings.
- The Health Service Executive (HSE) ensure that local psychiatric hospitals are equipped to accept transfers of people with mental health difficulties from prison. The Government should enact legislation to safeguard decision-making and ensure that the decision is not at the hospital's discretion.
- The State open Intensive Care Rehabilitation Units ('ICRUs') in the South and West of the country to facilitate provision of appropriate step-down, as recommended in 'A Vision for Change' and by the CPT.
- The Government should amend the Bail Act 1997 to provide that prison capacity and material conditions should be considered as a key factor when determining whether it is appropriate to remand a person to custody, given the impact imprisonment would likely have on the accused individual, particularly anyone with particular vulnerabilities including severe mental illness.
- The State implement the recommendations of the HLTF and the Office of the Inspector of Prisons to invest in and expand the Prison In-Reach Court Liaison Service (PICLS) nationwide. This should include funding for a housing support worker on each team.
- The Departments of Justice and Health formalise and expand the CAST programme nationwide, and ensure it is adequately resourced, staffed and effectively linked with other relevant agencies.
- The IPS expedite the recruitment of psychologists for the prison system, as well as occupational therapists and psychiatric nurses.
- The IPS, HSE and Probation Service ensure the Mental Health Needs and Disability Assessment for the prison system is conducted as soon and as swiftly as possible following the granting of the successful tender.
- The Department of Justice undertake a review of the Criminal Law (Insanity) Act 2006, to ensure that it reflects the proposed changes to the Mental Health Act 2001 that enhance human rights protections, and that it aligns with international standards.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

Section A

An effective and humane penal system

Section A

An effective and humane penal system

Standard 1 Towards progressive penal policy

Penal policy is continually monitored, implemented, evaluated and evolving in line with established international best-practice. Policy development is supported by the collection and publication of relevant, reliable, and up-to-date data on the operations and outcomes of the penal system.

Assessment: **Mixed**

Penal policy encompasses national legislation, strategies, policies and practices that relate to the sentencing and management of people who come in to contact with the justice system. It can cover issues including alternatives to custody, sentencing, prison accommodation and regimes, and support for rehabilitation and reintegration.

Penal policy should both reflect the principles of penal reform and international best practice and standards, whilst remaining adaptable to emerging issues. IPRT believes that Irish penal policy should reflect the guiding principles of penal reform:

1. Imprisonment is used as a last resort;
2. The harms and costs associated with imprisonment are recognised and mitigated;
3. The deprivation of an individual's liberty is the punishment – the conditions of the place where they are detained must not be viewed or used as further punishment;
4. The security, safety and protection of people in prison must be balanced against ensuring humane prison practices and regimes;
5. The rights of all people in the criminal justice system must be respected, protected and promoted, and there is a focus on equality and social justice; and
6. There is a clear emphasis on rehabilitation and reintegration.

The development and review of penal policy should consider the evolving needs of the prison population and the overall penal environment. In 2025, there were a number of encouraging policy developments, coupled with a lack of implementation of previous policy commitments, as well as others that raised concern regarding their human rights impacts.

In September 2025, the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025 underwent pre-legislative scrutiny by the Oireachtas Justice Committee.¹²¹ The Bill provides for the amendment of the Firearms Act 1925, to allow prison officers to use incapacitant spray, where specified by the Minister under the Prison Rules. IPRT is concerned that this legal change could escalate rather than reduce tensions between prison staff and people in prison, and does not address underlying causes of violence – such as overcrowding, strained mental healthcare support and a lack of investment in violence reduction and peer mediation programmes.¹²² Notably, following its pre-legislative scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Bill in November, the Oireachtas Joint Committee recommended that this provision be removed in full due to its potential human rights implications, and that officers not be provided with incapacitant spray.¹²³

¹²¹ Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, General Scheme of the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025: Discussion, 30 September 2025.

¹²² Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Submission by the Irish Penal Reform Trust on the General Scheme...' (*Irish Penal Reform Trust*, 23 June 2025) <<https://www.iprt.ie/iprt-submissions/submission-by-the-irish-penal-reform-trust-on-the-general-scheme-of-the-criminal-law-and-civil-law-miscellaneous-provisions/>> accessed 6 June 2026.

¹²³ Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, 'Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025' (2025) 34/JC/04 7 <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/34/joint_committee_on_justice_home_affairs_and_migration/reports/2025/2025-11-13_report-on-pre-legislative-scrutiny-of-the-general-scheme-of-the-criminal-law-and-civil-law-miscellaneous-provisions-bill-2025_en.pdf>.

A more positive aspect of the Bill is its reform of community service orders (CSOs), through amending the Criminal Justice (Community Service) Act 1983. Through these amendments, the maximum number of hours that can be imposed under a CSO was increased from 240 to 480 hours, and established an obligation on the courts to consider a CSO if a sentence of up to 24 months is being considered, up from the current threshold of 12 months. In addition, where a judge decides not to give a community order, an explanation of this decision must be provided. In its submission to the General Scheme of the Bill, IPRT recommended that the reasoning in each case be collected as a dataset, so that trends and patterns in sentencing can be monitored and inform any further legislative proposals.¹²⁴ However, it remains unclear whether or not the judge must provide this reasoning in writing or whether such a dataset will be created. Nonetheless, IPRT welcomed these provisions of the Bill, but cautioned that there must be proportionality between the custodial sentence and CSO hours.¹²⁵ The need for proportionality in the issuance of CSOs and the human rights implications of the use of incapacitant spray by prison officers are discussed in further detail under Standard 2 (p. 25) and Standard 27 (p. 103), respectively. The Bill also encouragingly allows for prison governors to take bail recognisance, meaning they can process the legal paperwork for an individual who has been granted bail without having to appear before the court. This may improve staffing efficiency and reduce unnecessary escorted court trips when prison services and staffing are overstretched.¹²⁶

In November 2025, the Department of Justice published *An Assessment of the Efficacy of Bail Laws in Ireland* ("Staines Review"), a report by Lorcan Staines SC, which reviewed bail practices in Ireland.¹²⁷ The report contained 15 recommendations, including a number relating to penal policy. Namely, the implementation of an adult bail supervision scheme, the amendment of bail legislation to significantly expand the conditions whereby bail can be granted, analysis as to whether cash bail should be abolished, and further consideration as to how electronic tagging would work, both legally and practically.¹²⁸ Following its release, Department of Justice officials were tasked with considering the feasibility of implementing each of the recommendations, and by the end of the year the Minister indicated that "some of the recommendations relate to actions that are already in progress or under consideration".¹²⁹ The implementation of these recommendations, particularly the implementation of an adult bail supervision scheme and the introduction of positive bail conditions, has the potential to reduce the number of people remanded to custody – a significant contributor to overcrowding – and enable measures that can support individuals in a cycle of addiction and reoffending.¹³⁰ **IPRT encourages their prioritisation for implementation as a matter of urgency and necessity, to ensure prison remains a measure of last resort and that prison overcrowding can be meaningfully reduced.**

The Programme for Government was published in January 2025 and contained a commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) through enacting the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022 ('the Bill').¹³¹ It is worth noting however, that the previous Programme for Government in 2020 stated its intent for OPCAT to be ratified within 18 months of the Government's formation.¹³² In mid-2025, the Minister for Justice confirmed that the Bill was on the Government's priority list for drafting with the aim to publish it by the year's end,¹³³ but by the end of 2025 the Bill had yet to be published and Ireland remains the only Member State of both the European Union and the Council of Europe not to have ratified OPCAT. In its report from its visit to Ireland in 2024, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) noted that it had "over the years repeatedly been informed" by the Department of Justice that the Bill would soon be realised.¹³⁴ The

¹²⁴ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Submission by the Irish Penal Reform Trust on the General Scheme...' (n 2).

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ Department of Justice, 'Minister Jim O'Callaghan Publishes Report into Operation of Bail in Ireland' (gov.ie, 27 November 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/press-releases/minister-jim-ocallaghan-publishes-report-into-operation-of-bail-in-ireland/>> accessed 17 June 2026.

¹²⁸ Lorcan Staines, 'An Assessment of the Efficacy of Bail Laws in Ireland' (Department of Justice, Migration & Home Affairs 2025) 107–108 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/047f01c7/An_Assessment_of_the_Efficacy_of_Bail_Laws_in_Ireland.pdf>.

¹²⁹ Department of Justice, 'Minister Jim O'Callaghan Publishes Report into Operation of Bail in Ireland' (n 7). Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Legislative Reviews – Thursday, 4 Dec 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (4 December 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-12-04/384>> accessed 17 June 2026.

¹³⁰ 'IPRT Statement on the Publication of the Staines Report on The...' (1 November 2025) <<https://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/iprt-statement-on-the-publication-of-the-staines-report-on-the-efficacy-of-bail-laws-in-ireland/>> accessed 30 June 2026.

¹³¹ Department of the Taoiseach, 'Programme for Government – Securing Ireland's Future' (2025) 119 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/programme-for-government-securing-irelands-future.pdf>>.

¹³² Department of the Taoiseach, 'Programme for Government – Our Shared Future' (2020) 86 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/programme-for-government-our-shared-future-c0e5f2fe-ebb0-4430-9a42-68b34be57a16.pdf>>.

¹³³ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Detention Centres – Thursday, 3 Jul 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (3 July 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-07-03/292>> accessed 7 July 2026.

¹³⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (2025) CPT/Inf (2025) 22 10 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60a>>.

CPT once again recommended that OPCAT be ratified as soon as possible, noting that its ratification was “all the more pressing in light of the issues raised” in its report.¹³⁵ **IPRT reiterates that given the protracted delay in the publication and enactment of the Bill, the Government should proceed with ratification of OPCAT under Article 24.**¹³⁶ This provides the State with time to receive technical support to establish OPCAT mechanisms and pass national legislation.

There was similar stagnation regarding legislation, specifically the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014, which is intended to expand and facilitate the use of community sanctions by the courts.¹³⁷ By November, the Department of Justice reported that it was considering the policy review of the Bill’s Scheme and ‘next steps’.¹³⁸ This constitutes little progress since 2024, when the then-Minister for Justice provided assurances that the revised General Scheme would be brought to Government “shortly”.¹³⁹ There has been no progress on the Irish Prison Service Bill 2023, which would establish the IPS as an independent statutory body, despite pre-legislative scrutiny being completed in October 2023.¹⁴⁰ The Minister for Justice indicated in mid-2025 that the General Scheme of the Bill had been referred for drafting.¹⁴¹

There was also no recorded progress regarding the publication of the revised Irish Prison Rules 2007, a project initiated in 2021 to update them in line with the European Prison Rules (2020). Disappointingly, this is the second year in a row that PIPS has recorded a lack of progress regarding this legislation, and means that, now at 20 years old, the Rules are significantly outdated for the current context.

One area where there were indications of progress was regarding the development of a policy for transgender people in prison. The IPS began developing this policy in response to a recommendation by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) in 2021, with previous commitments that it would be completed by the end of 2023.¹⁴² The most recent official update on the policy by the IPS was made in 2024, in which it stated that the policy was still in development and stakeholder consultation was ongoing.¹⁴³ While no official update was provided by the IPS in 2025, it has publicly indicated that the policy was nearing finalisation.¹⁴⁴ The need for a rights-based, evidence informed policy for trans people in prison was stressed in the CPT’s report on Ireland, in which it detailed the “squalid conditions” experienced by Prisoner X, a trans woman being held in Limerick men’s prison D1 unit.¹⁴⁵

Other policy areas where there was little advancement included the establishment of the ‘Penal Policy Consultative Council’, tasked with advising on issues related to penal policy and ensuring all initiatives are evidence-led.¹⁴⁶ Its creation was recommended in both the 2014 *Strategic Review of Penal Policy* and again in the 2022 *Review of Policy Options for*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*

¹³⁶ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Irish Penal Reform Trust Submission to the Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights on the Fourth Universal Periodic Review of Ireland’ (2026) <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7810/iprt_upr_submission_2026.pdf>.

¹³⁷ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Courts Service – Thursday, 6 Nov 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (6 November 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-11-06/309>> accessed 8 July 2026.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

Note: The Policy Review of the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014 was released in June 2026 by the Department of Justice, and will therefore be considered in the Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) report for 2026.

¹³⁹ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 22 Jan 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (22 January 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-01-22/958>> accessed 18 August 2026.

¹⁴⁰ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘The Joint Committee on Justice Publishes Its Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Irish Prison Service Bill 2023 – 14 Dec 2023, 13:18 – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (14 December 2023) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/press-centre/press-releases/20231214-the-joint-committee-on-justice-publishes-its-report-on-pre-legislative-scrutiny-of-the-general-scheme-of-the-irish-prison-service-bill-2023>> accessed 18 August 2026.

¹⁴¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Tuesday, 29 Jul 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (29 July 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-07-29/2099?highlight%5B0%5D=irish&highlight%5B1%5D=prison&highlight%5B2%5D=service>> accessed 7 July 2026.

¹⁴² Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘COVID-19 Thematic Inspection of Limerick Prison 6 – 7 April 2021’ (2021) 33,52.

¹⁴³ ‘Inspections Recommendation and Status Update’ (Inspector of Prisons) <<https://www.oip.ie/inspections-recommendation-and-status-update/>> accessed 17 July 2026.

¹⁴⁴ ‘Prison Policy on Trans Inmates Nearing Final Stage’ (Irish Legal News, 16 June 2025) <<https://www.irishlegal.com/articles/prison-policy-on-trans-inmates-nearing-final-stages>> accessed 17 July 2026.

¹⁴⁵ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 14) 27–28.

¹⁴⁶ Department of Justice, ‘Department of Justice, Strategic Review of Penal Policy: Final Report (2014)’ (2014) 111 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/strategic-review-of-penal-policy.pdf>>.

Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024.¹⁴⁷ Despite this, no progress on its establishment was reported or recorded in 2025 – as IPRT noted in PIPS 2024.¹⁴⁸ Nor was it included in the 2025 Programme for Government, despite having been included in the previous Programme.¹⁴⁹ This potentially indicates a change in approach.

Assessment of Standard 1: **Mixed**

The progression of legislation that expands the use of community service orders was a welcome development in 2025, signifying a commitment to implementing alternatives to custody. However, the same legislation will enable prison officers to carry incapacitant spray, which IPRT views as having the potential to escalate tensions in prisons, rather than diffuse them. There was also a lack of progress regarding the ratification of OPCAT, establishing the IPS as a statutory body and appointing a Penal Policy Consultative Council. Given the severity of overcrowding in Irish prisons in 2025, swift policy action and measures to ease this were also lacking.

Standard 2 Imprisonment as a last resort

Imprisonment is only ever used as a sanction of last resort. There is a clear focus on establishing and implementing community-based sanctions and associated services as alternatives to custodial sentences.

Assessment: **Regress**

To deprive an individual of their liberty is one of the most significant powers the State can exercise. It removes an individual from the course of their life, effectively putting the life they knew and lived on pause indefinitely. In some cases, imprisonment is a necessary and proportionate legal sanction for committing an offence. However, it should be the exception rather than the rule, once all other sanctions available to the State have been exhaustively considered. This is due to the recognition of the harmful impact on an individual of depriving them of their liberty as punishment in and of itself – practically, psychologically and socially.

This point was made more than 40 years ago in the 1985 Whitaker Report:

Imprisonment is a severe personal punishment for the offender. It is of limited protective, deterrent or corrective value. It is an expensive sanction, costing some £29,000 a year per prisoner. It should be employed only as a last resort. The principle should be that sentences of imprisonment are imposed only if the offence is such that no other form of penalty is appropriate.¹⁵⁰

The price of imprisoning an individual has changed significantly since 1985 – reaching a daily average of €103,334 in 2025, yet the logic behind imprisonment as a last resort has not.¹⁵¹ Nonetheless, this principle has not been enunciated in Irish law, despite repeated commitments and recommendations to do so – notably the 2022 *Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform*, Action 111 of the *Justice Plan 2023*, and the 2020 *Suspended Sentences Report*.¹⁵² IPRT maintains that the principle of imprisonment as a sanction of last resort must be included in statute, and urges the Department of Justice to include it in the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014, and to prioritise the publication of the Bill.

¹⁴⁷ Department of Justice, 'Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024' (2022) 46 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/review-of-policy-options-for-prison-and-penal-reform-2022-2024.pdf>>.

¹⁴⁸ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (2025) 15 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7726/iprt_pips_2024_report_final_digital.pdf>.

¹⁴⁹ Department of the Taoiseach (n 12) 86.

¹⁵⁰ Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 'Whitaker Report (Report of the Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System, 1985)' (1985) (PL 3391) 11 <https://mega.nz/file/XsZHkZt#2yUoqP_i8Yz4OgJg7_DFArqoW5bOIZTVHSemZAZTE1E>.

¹⁵¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 26 May 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (26 May 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-05-26/863?highlight%5B0%5D=103%2C334>> accessed 8 July 2026.

¹⁵² Department of Justice, 'Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024' (n 27) 29. Department of Justice, 'Justice Plan 2023' (2023) 36 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/justice-plan-2023.pdf>>. Law Reform Commission, 'Suspended Sentences' (2020) (LRC 123-2020) para 4.31 <https://www.lawreform.ie/_fileupload/Reports/LRC%20123-2020%20Suspended%20Sentences.pdf>.

Despite incremental progress towards the legal recognition of the principle of prison as a last resort, the available data points to a starkly different picture of this principle being implemented in practice.

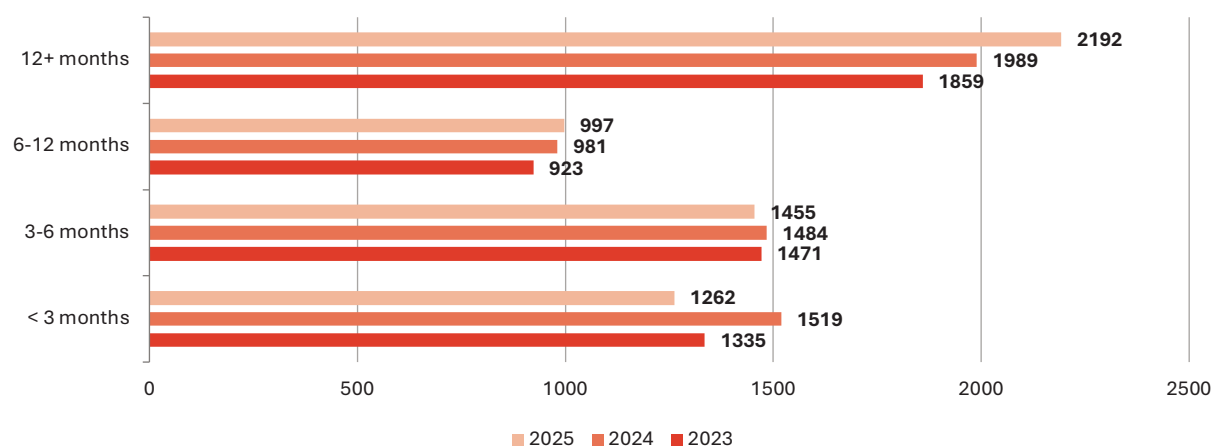
The daily average prison population in 2025 was 5,417 – an increase of almost 10 per cent (9.6 per cent) since 2024, when the daily average was 4,941.¹⁵³ The overall number of committals in 2025 also increased since the previous year, growing by 1.1 per cent from 8,704 to 8,798.¹⁵⁴ These figures mean that in 2025, Ireland's rate of imprisonment rose to 99 per 100,000 people, up from 92 in 2024.¹⁵⁵ To put this increase into perspective, the rate of imprisonment in 2017, the year the first PIPS report was released, was 79 per 100,000. In that first PIPS report, IPRT set the goal of reducing the imprisonment rate to 50 per 100,000. IPRT maintains that this is an achievable and necessary goal but requires significant political will and policy change.

The issuance of short prison sentences (considered by IPRT as a sentence less than 12 months in duration) continues to be an issue of concern, as it underscores that prison as a last resort is not being implemented in practice. In 2025, data indicates that 74 per cent of those committed to prison were sentenced for 12 months or less.¹⁵⁶ While this is a welcome reduction from 2019 to 2024 data, when this figure ranged from 76 to 79 per cent, this still means that almost three quarters of committals to prison in 2025 received a sentence of 12 months or less.¹⁵⁷

Table 6: Sentence committals for 12 months or less as a proportion of all sentence committals¹⁵⁸

2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
N/A*	74%	76%	78%	79%	78%	78%	77%	74%

Figure 1: Short sentences issued 2023 – 2025 (excluding fine defaulters)¹⁵⁹



Due to a significant body of research from a variety of contexts and jurisdictions, it is now widely accepted that prison sentences of less than 12 months serve little deterrent or rehabilitative purpose. A short custodial sentence disrupts an individual's employment, housing circumstances, addiction treatment, receipt of social welfare, caring responsibilities, etc., yet it is not a long enough amount of time to allow for meaningful access to rehabilitation programmes and contribute to interventions that will prevent re-offending.¹⁶⁰ As stressed by the Dóchas Centre Prison Visiting Committee

¹⁵³ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' 2
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e243cb1e/IPS_Annual_Report_2025_English.pdf>.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid* 71.

¹⁵⁵ Based on an approximate population of 5.48 million, as estimated by the Central Statistics Office.
'Key Findings Population and Migration Estimates, April 2025 - Central Statistics Office' (26 August 2025)
<<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pme/populationandmigrationestimatesapril2025/keyfindings/>> accessed 8 July 2026.

¹⁵⁶ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 33) 71.

¹⁵⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (n 28) 17.

¹⁵⁸ Data taken from Irish Prison Service Annual Reports from those years.

¹⁵⁹ Irish Prison Service Annual Reports from 2023, 2024, 2025:
'Annual Reports' (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/publications/annual-reports/>> accessed 18 August 2026.

¹⁶⁰ Ian O'Donnell, 'The Short Prison Sentence: An Obituary?' 8 Irish Judicial Studies Journal 125–126
<<https://researchrepository.ucd.ie/server/api/core/bitstreams/b77b5ac7-ab01-429e-bd3b-6e521d9ece1f/content>>.

in its 2025 Annual Report:

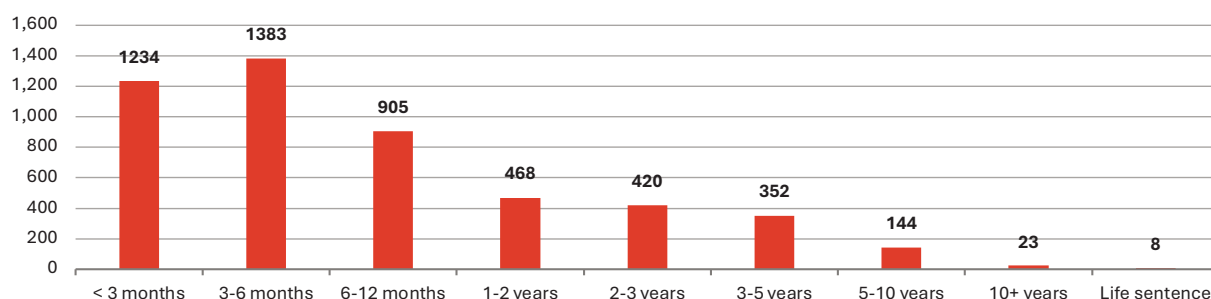
Women serving short sentences are not incarcerated long enough to do the rehabilitative work that might change the trajectory of their lives for the better post-release but they are locked up long enough to lose their accommodation, their job prospects, and key relationships with family. By locking them up, we further disrupt the already fragile infrastructure of their lives.¹⁶¹

The disruption caused by short sentences means that individuals are not provided with support on release, leading them to commit similar minor offences, particularly survival-related offences like petty theft, drug possession, and public order offences linked to addiction and mental health struggles – therefore creating a cycle of recidivism.¹⁶² Short sentences can also be self-defeating, as District Court judges have previously expressed that they are less likely to issue CSOs if the individual has a number of previous convictions, even if for minor offences.¹⁶³ Short sentences are therefore not only harmful to the individual in question, they do not serve broader society and come at a significant economic cost to the State.

In IPRT's stakeholder consultations for PIPS 2025, many of those working in organisations that worked directly with people in prison observed that individuals were becoming homeless as a result of entering prison to serve short sentences, as they were losing their rented accommodation and then being released from prison into an extremely inaccessible rental market during a housing crisis.¹⁶⁴ One stakeholder was of the view that overcrowding would be significantly reduced if those serving sentences of six months or less were not serving a custodial sentence, but rather a community based sanction or other alternative.¹⁶⁵ It is worth recalling that more than a decade ago, the Oireachtas Subcommittee on Penal Reform recommended in its 2013 report that sentences of six months or less be eliminated.¹⁶⁶ The Subcommittee noted that release planning for sentences of such a short length is incredibly difficult, and recommended that diverting these people from prison to community service may be a more effective sanction.¹⁶⁷

With this in mind, it is particularly concerning that of the 5,906 people who were sentenced in 2025, the most common custodial sentence issued was for three to six months.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore the number of individuals who received a sentence of six to 12 months increased since 2024 – rising by 1.6 per cent.¹⁶⁹ One welcome development, however, is that the number of individuals who received a sentence of less than three months decreased by 11.4 per cent between 2024 and 2025.¹⁷⁰

Figure 2: Sentence length of all sentences issued in 2025¹⁷¹



¹⁶¹ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' (2026) 14 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/41ae0e7a/D%C3%B3chas_Centre_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

¹⁶² Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'From Punishment to Prevention: Poverty, Inequality and Pathways into the Irish Criminal Justice System' (2026) 40 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7788/iprt_from_punishment_to_prevention-final_report.pdf>.

¹⁶³ Niamh Maguire and Nicola Carr, 'Community or Custody? A Review of Evidence and Sentencers' Perspectives on Community Service Orders and Short-Term Prison Sentences' (Department of Justice, Migration & Home Affairs 2024) 57 <<https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/42225/>>.

¹⁶⁴ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (8 June 2026).

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ Houses of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Justice, Defence and Equality, Subcommittee on Penal Reform, 'Report on Penal Reform' (2013) 14–15 <<https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/19618/1/Penal-Reform-Report-13-March-2013-Final.pdf>>.

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 33) 71.

¹⁶⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *ibid* 71–72.

For prison to genuinely be a last resort, short prison sentences should be replaced with effective and meaningful community-based alternatives. Community sanctions in Ireland are typically community service orders (CSOs), supervised by the Probation Service. People whose offending would meet the threshold for a custodial sentence may instead be sentenced to a period of unpaid work in the community as an alternative to imprisonment.

The number of CSOs issued in 2025 was 1,734.¹⁷² This constitutes a minimal increase of 0.6 per cent from 2024, when 1,723 were issued.¹⁷³ This number falls far short of the target outlined in the *Probation Service's New Directions Implementation Plan*, which set the aim of increasing the number of CSOs by 25 per cent each year from 2025-2027.¹⁷⁴ It is worth noting that in 2025, the Probation Service calculated that the average cost of a CSO in 2025 was €1,450 – a fraction of the cost of a staffed prison space.

As mentioned in Standard 1, the expansion of community service orders under the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025 – through increasing the maximum available hours from 240 hours to 480 hours in cases where a 24-month sentence is being considered, up from the current 12-month threshold – is a welcome one. Nonetheless, IPRT reiterates that this legislative expansion must go further than surface level and consider the practicalities and feasibility of CSOs by reviewing the type of activities being prescribed, or addressing potential barriers to their completion – caring responsibilities, employment, addiction or mental health struggles, etc.¹⁷⁵ This view was echoed during IPRT's stakeholder consultations for PIPS 2025, whereby participants indicated that although they had observed an increase in the issuance of CSOs, there was a lack of analysis regarding their use and effectiveness.¹⁷⁶ Too often, individuals on CSOs are assigned menial tasks without consideration of their support needs, skills or interests, therefore limiting the potential for meaningful engagement and longer-term rehabilitation.¹⁷⁷

Interviews with District Court judges as part of 2024 research on judicial perspectives on CSOs suggested that judges would be more likely to issue CSOs if they were provided with information about completion rates, recidivism rates and if the number of CSO projects in their districts increased.¹⁷⁸ In response to these research findings, the Probation Service initiated a Judicial Engagement Strategy, to improve communication with and promote the use of CSOs among the judiciary at the national, regional and local level.¹⁷⁹ According to information obtained through an FOI request, the Department of Justice noted that “this is a work in progress but initial indications, both from staff and the Judiciary, are promising”.¹⁸⁰ **IPRT recommends that the expansion of CSOs be accompanied by an ongoing monitoring and evaluation framework around the efficacy and outcomes of CSOs, developed by the Probation Service, and its findings regularly reported on. The Department of Justice should publish an annual ‘custody versus community’ expenditure report to inform evidence-led approaches to desistance.**

Following IPRT's recommendation in PIPS 2024, the increased budget provided for the Probation Service in Budget 2026 was a welcome development.¹⁸¹ The 11.2 per cent budget increase (€6.7 million) was allocated for the recruitment of 100 additional staff, oversight of the Bail Supervision Scheme, the expansion of a national supervised Temporary Release scheme and also restorative justice services.¹⁸² **While this budget increase is welcome, the amount pales in comparison to the wider funding landscape, particularly the IPS budget for capital expenditure represents almost ten times that of the Probation Service total increase.¹⁸³ To meaningfully address overcrowding and ensure prison is used as a last resort, IPRT recommends that budget for expanding the prison estate should be redirected to investment in alternatives to custody, including through increased funding for the Probation Service.**

¹⁷² Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the Probation Service.

¹⁷³ Probation Service, 'Probation Service Annual Report 2024' 42 <[https://www.probation.ie/EN/PB/O/8A38BC44920311B180258D1500383468/\\$File/PS%20Annual%20Report%202024.pdf](https://www.probation.ie/EN/PB/O/8A38BC44920311B180258D1500383468/$File/PS%20Annual%20Report%202024.pdf)>.

¹⁷⁴ Information received by IPRT on 19 August 2026 through a FOI request to the Department of Justice.

¹⁷⁵ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Submission by the Irish Penal Reform Trust on the General Scheme...' (n 2).

¹⁷⁶ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 44).

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Niamh Maguire and Nicola Carr, 'Community or Custody? A Review of Evidence and Sentencers' Perspectives on Community Service Orders and Short-Term Prison Sentences' (Department of Justice, Migration & Home Affairs 2024) 80–82 <<https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/42225/>>.

¹⁷⁹ Probation Service, 'Probation Service Strategic Statement Action Plan 2024' 11 <[https://www.probation.ie/EN/PB/O/AB7BD275B0A2D62880258B6C00327BAD/\\$File/PS%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan.pdf](https://www.probation.ie/EN/PB/O/AB7BD275B0A2D62880258B6C00327BAD/$File/PS%20Strategy%20Action%20Plan.pdf)>.

¹⁸⁰ Information received by IPRT on 19 August 2026 through a FOI request to the Department of Justice.

¹⁸¹ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (n 28) 18.

¹⁸² 'Record €6.17 Billion for Justice Sector in Budget 2026' (gov.ie, 8 October 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/departments-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/news/record-6-17-billion-for-justice-sector-in-budget-2026/>> accessed 7 August 2026.

¹⁸³ 'IPRT Statement on Budget 2026' (1 October 2025) <<https://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/budget-2026-provides-a-welcome-increase-in-probation-funding-however-additional-prison-spaces-will-not-solve-our-prison-overcrowding>> accessed 29 June 2026; Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 9 Jun 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (9 June 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-06-09/1454>> accessed 29 June 2026.

In line with international standards and best practice, IPRT emphasises that any electronic tagging pilot or eventual programme must be accompanied by robust safeguards, in order to protect against undue interference with an individual's private and family life, that the use of personal data is strictly regulated, that the measure is ordered without undue discrimination against an individual's personal characteristics, ethnicity and circumstances, and that it does not undermine an individual's right to a fair trial.¹⁸⁹ The use of electronic tagging for individuals on bail could impact the right to the presumption of innocence, but there are concerns that such a measure could be preferred to granting bail and become the default measure as in other jurisdictions. There are also concerns regarding the privatisation of the pilot. **IPRT maintains that bail support schemes are a more effective and cost-efficient alternative to custody for individuals arrested and charged with an offence, as they are more likely to address the root causes of the person's offending.**¹⁹⁰ Any electronic tagging programme must be consistently implemented and in strict adherence to international standards and best practice, to ensure its use does not infringe on other rights.

A concerning development in 2025, was the detention in prisons of hundreds of individuals ahead of being deported. In December, the Minister for Justice indicated that out of the 344 deportation orders that had been enforced so far that year, 267 people had been detained prior to deportation: 206 in Cloverhill Prison, 24 in the Dóchas Centre in Mountjoy, 16 in Cork prison, 10 in Limerick prison, seven in Castlerea prison, three in Midlands prison and one in Dublin Airport Garda Station.¹⁹¹ Documents released under Freedom of Information indicate that the IPS wrote to the Department of Justice, emphasising the additional strain that the detention of these individuals was causing the prison administration when it was already stretched beyond capacity.¹⁹² Not only does the detention of individuals awaiting deportation place heightened pressure on overcrowded prisons, it is contrary to international human rights standards as the CPT is clear that individuals should not be detained for administrative purposes.¹⁹³ Immigration detention should be exceptional, proportionate and, by consequence, an individual measure assessed on a case-by-case basis – not used as a default policy for enforcing deportation orders.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁴ 'IPBT Statement on Budget 2026' (n 63). Department of the Taoiseach (n 11).

¹⁸⁵ Oireachtas. 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 9 Jun 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (n 63).

¹⁸⁶ Information received by IPRT on 19 August 2026 through a FOI request to the Department of Justice.

¹⁸⁷ Conor Gallagher Crime Correspondent, 'Prison Service Abandons Electronic Tagging for Offenders' (The Irish Times) <<https://www.irishtimes.com/news/crime-and-law/prison-service-abandons-electronic-tagging-for-offenders-1.4757358>> accessed 27 August 2026.

188 *ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Council of Europe, 'CM/Rec(2014)4 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Electronic Monitoring (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 February 2014, at the 1192nd Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)' <https://search.coe.int/cm/#f%7B%22CoEIdentifier%22:f%2209125948801dde6e%22%22sort%22:f%22%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22%7D>. UN General Assembly, 'United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for Non-Custodial Measures (The Tokyo Rules)' <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/united-nations-standard-minimum-rules-non-custodial-measures>.

'IPRT Statement on Budget 2026' (n 63).

¹⁹⁰ 'JPRT Statement on Budget 2026' (n 63).

¹⁹¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Deportation Orders – Thursday, 4 Dec 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (4 December 2025) <https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-12-04/83/> accessed 18 August 2026.

¹⁹² Ken Foxe, 'Irish Prison Service Said It Could Not Cope with Large Groups of Deportees Being Held in Overcrowded Jails before Charter Removal Flights – TheStory.ie' (12 June 2026) <<https://www.thestory.ie/2026/06/12/irish-prison-service-said-it-could-not-cope-with-large-groups-of-deportees-being-held-in-overcrowded-jails-before-charter-removal-flights/>> accessed 14 July 2026.

¹⁹³ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Factsheet: Immigration Detention' (2017) CPT/Inf(2017)3 <<https://rm.coe.int/16806fbf12>>.

194 *ibid.*

Assessment of Standard 2: Regress

In 2025, it cannot be said that the principle of prison as a last resort was given true effect. There were encouraging developments, including the proposed increase in the maximum available hours for Community Service Orders (CSOs) under the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and the increased budget for the Probation Service. However, these were somewhat undermined by the rise in the rate of imprisonment, the minimal increase in the number of CSOs issued compared to the target for 2025, and the concerning trend of detaining individuals awaiting deportation in already overcrowded prisons.

Standard 3 Safe custody limits

Every prison operates at a safe capacity level in line with international best practice. The number of people detained in each prison never exceeds the design capacity.

Assessment: Regress

As outlined in the Introduction, it is difficult to overstate the gravity of the overcrowding crisis in Irish prisons in 2025. On the last day of the year, Irish prisons were operating at 122 per cent capacity, with almost 600 individuals sleeping on thin mattresses on the floor of cells which they were sharing with at least one other person.¹⁹⁵ On 10 December, the number of people on mattresses reached 636.¹⁹⁶ The women's prisons – the Dóchas Centre in Mountjoy and Limerick women's prison – were the most overcrowded prisons in the prison estate, respectively operating at 148 per cent and 164 per cent on that day.¹⁹⁷

As outlined in Standard 9 (p. 46), hundreds of people in prison in 2025 were forced to sleep on thin mattresses on the floor, with four or more other people in the same cell.¹⁹⁸ In addition to this, they also had to sleep next to unpartitioned toilets, which is not only unsanitary but is a serious affront to an individual's dignity. As described by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) in its 2025 Annual Report, such conditions are “a national disgrace”.¹⁹⁹

Operating at such unsafe levels is not only dangerous but represents a failure by the State to uphold its human rights obligations for those in its custody. When depriving an individual of their liberty, there is a positive obligation on the State to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of that individual while in detention. In its 2025 report on its visit to Ireland in 2024, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) stated that the cumulative effect of the living conditions for people in prison as a result of overcrowding may “amount to inhuman and degrading treatment”, potentially constituting a violation of Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).²⁰⁰ Since that visit, the prison population has only continued to rise, forcing the prison system to operate far beyond its capacity. In 2025, the Council of Europe (CoE) classified Ireland as having ‘severe’ overcrowding, making it one of the most overcrowded prison systems across the 46 member states.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁵ On 31 December 2025, the IPS recorded that the prison population was 5,753 (5,445 men, 308 women), whilst the prisons had a capacity of 4,718 beds. On that day, the IPS recorded that 596 people were sleeping on mattresses on floors – 22 of them women, all in the Dóchas Centre in Mountjoy. See here: Irish Prison Service, ‘Prisoner Population on Wednesday 31st December 2025’ (2025) <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/31-December-2025.pdf>.

¹⁹⁶ Irish Prison Service, ‘Prison Population on Wednesday 10th December 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/10-December-2025.pdf>.

¹⁹⁷ Irish Prison Service, ‘Prisoner Population on Wednesday 31st December 2025’ (n 75).

¹⁹⁸ Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Census Prison Population January 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation’ (2025) <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JANUARY-2025-Cell-Information.pdf>; Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Census Prison Population April 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation’ (2025) <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/APRIL-2025-In-Cell.pdf>; Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation’ (2025) <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JULY-2025-In-Cell.pdf>.

¹⁹⁹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ 2 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/OIP-AR-2025.pdf>>.

²⁰⁰ *ibid.*

²⁰¹ ‘Serious Overcrowding and Increasing Proportions of Older and Women Detainees in European Prisons – Portal’ <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/serious-overcrowding-and-increasing-proportions-of-older-and-women-detainees-in-european-prisons>> accessed 14 June 2026.

Table 7: Operating capacity of each prison on the last day of each month in 2025²⁰²

Prison	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Average
Arbour Hill	97%	99%	98%	99%	98%	99%	98%	99%	100%	100%	100%	99%	99%
Castlereagh	117%	117%	118%	117%	117%	123%	126%	122%	120%	121%	123%	127%	121%
Cloverhill	107%	101%	111%	112%	111%	124%	112%	115%	122%	127%	124%	111%	115%
Cork	122%	123%	118%	115%	118%	125%	132%	129%	124%	121%	130%	135%	124%
Limerick (M)	121%	119%	136%	122%	119%	123%	124%	122%	123%	116%	118%	120%	122%
Limerick (F)	143%	117%	152%	152%	141%	129%	155%	152%	143%	154%	161%	164%	147%
Loughan House	94%	98%	94%	97%	94%	93%	94%	96%	97%	97%	94%	98%	96%
Midlands	112%	110%	112%	113%	116%	116%	119%	96%	116%	118%	121%	121%	114%
Mountjoy	123%	119%	121%	122%	123%	123%	127%	120%	120%	127%	133%	135%	124%
Portlaoise	108%	117%	120%	122%	123%	120%	124%	125%	125%	120%	135%	135%	123%
Shelton Abbey	95%	67%	96%	93%	100%	99%	99%	99%	99%	98%	99%	94%	95%
Dóchas Centre	117%	117%	122%	127%	127%	129%	136%	134%	138%	148%	155%	148%	133%
Wheatfield	100%	104%	111%	109%	110%	109%	112%	115%	112%	116%	117%	112%	111%
Overall	112%	112%	115%	115%	115%	117%	120%	118%	118%	120%	123%	122%	117%

Overcrowding impinges on every aspect of life for those in prison, both in material day-to-day conditions and in the longer course of serving a sentence. Management of the movement and interactions of such numbers of people in custody becomes the priority, and the potential for rehabilitation is significantly undercut. Stakeholders working with people in prison have indicated that as a result of overcrowding and the IPS response to managing the increase, out-of-cell time is significantly curtailed, tensions and violence have escalated, access to addiction, mental health and healthcare services are further limited, sentence planning and management is not prioritised, the quality and frequency of education and training is affected, family visits are more difficult to schedule, and preparation for release and reintegration is disregarded.²⁰³

Managing unprecedented levels of overcrowding presents an immense challenge for the IPS, particularly as it must receive all individuals committed to prison and does not have the authority to refuse a committal. However, combating overcrowding requires “a systemic approach and concerted action by *all* relevant stakeholders” (emphasis added).²⁰⁴ Therefore, the IPS must exercise the authority it has, in tandem with government policies and action, and engagement with the judiciary to manage the numbers in custody and reduce overcrowding. One such example is the use of unstructured temporary release.

Notably, the IPS has greater authority than most prison administrations to use unstructured temporary release.^{205*} Encouragingly, the numbers of individuals on temporary release recorded by the IPS steadily increased overall in 2025, when compared to recent years.²⁰⁶ This is due in part to the fact that in November 2022, in response to overcrowding, the IPS began to “grant significant additional unstructured temporary release concessions to prisoners serving

²⁰² Taken from IPS Daily Prison Population Stats for the last day in each month in 2025: ‘2025 Prison Population’ (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/2025-prison-population/>> accessed 18 August 2026.

²⁰³ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44).

²⁰⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 14) para 34.

²⁰⁵ Department of Justice, ‘Prisoner Population and Trends – Discussion Paper’ para 3.1 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/prisoner-population-and-trends-discussion-paper.pdf>>.

Note: Structured temporary release initiatives, such as the Community Return Scheme (CRS) and the Community Support Scheme (CSS), which are overseen by the Probation Service, are discussed under Standard 20 (p. X).

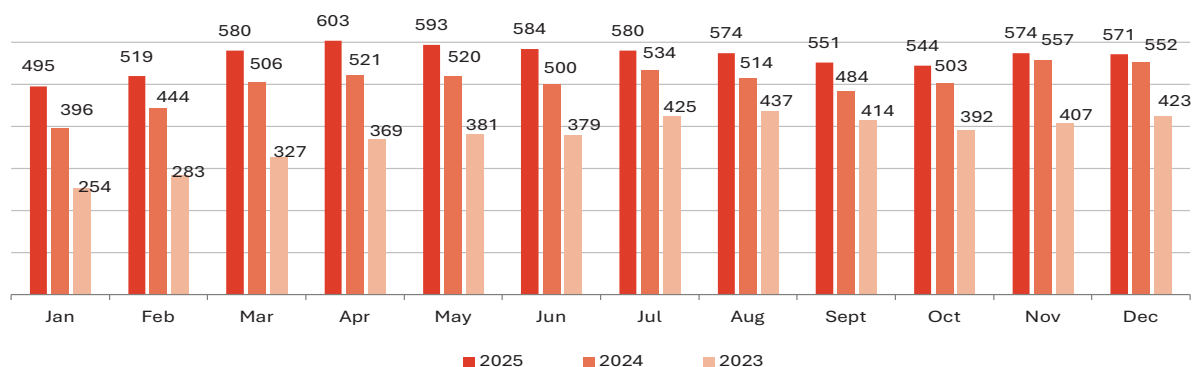
²⁰⁶ Monthly information notes for each month in 2025 available at <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/monthly-information-note/>>.

sentences of 1 year or less who are deemed, by the nature of their offence, to pose a low risk to public safety”.²⁰⁷ This increase is also in line with the commitment by the IPS in its *2023-2027 Strategy* to explore alternative pathways for individuals who do not pose a serious risk of harm, in order to reduce overcrowding.²⁰⁸ On 6 March 2025, the IPS communicated to the Department of Justice that it had:

[...]exhausted all options to release low-risk offenders, with 566 persons on temporary release today and this consideration will include prisoners who pose a medium to high-risk of re-offending/de-stabilisation in the community. There will continue to be instances where the balance of public safety will mean it is more prudent to have a prisoner sleep on a mattress than return to the community.²⁰⁹

The letter to the Department of Justice detailed the “severe overcrowding” that the IPS was experiencing, and included proposals to alleviate the number of people in custody.²¹⁰ The letter stated that “drastic measures are immediately needed to reduce prison numbers to safer levels” and that whilst it was acknowledged that “these policy choices are difficult they are nevertheless necessary to provide a safer environment for prisoners and staff” in order to ensure against the risk of “a major prison disturbance”.²¹¹ Despite these warnings in early 2025, the prison population continued to rise throughout the year, with no indications that the necessary “drastic measures” were taken that may alleviate overcrowding and mitigate the risks it presented.

Figure 3: Average number of individuals on temporary release per month, 2023-2025²¹²



Notwithstanding the numerous human rights concerns that overcrowding raises, there is also a potential economic argument to be made against overcrowding. As indicated above, the price of imprisoning an individual has increased year on year, costing approximately €103,334 in 2025.²¹³ This increase has notably occurred in line with the increase in the prison population and the capacity of the prison system being greatly exceeded. Whilst several factors contribute to the increased cost of imprisoning an individual, notwithstanding inflation in recent years, research suggests that the impacts of overcrowding, such as increased violence and healthcare needs, place additional demands on staffing and resources. Therefore, sustained overcrowding is associated with higher operational costs, compared to a prison operating at safe capacity.²¹⁴ Overcrowded prisons are also less likely to provide necessary rehabilitation opportunities, therefore contributing to recidivism – ultimately costing the State more.²¹⁵ In addition to this, there are also the potential

²⁰⁷ Department of Justice, 'Prison Overcrowding Response Group Report' (2024) 11 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7498/prison_overcrowding_response_group_report_web.pdf>.

²⁰⁸ Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Strategy 2023-2027' 15 <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS_Service_Strategy-2023-2027-1.pdf>.

²⁰⁹ Information received by IPRT on 19 August 2026 through a FOI request to the Department of Justice.

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² 'Monthly Information Note – January 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – February 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – March 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – April 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – May 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – June 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – July 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – August 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – September 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – October 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – November 2025' (n 86); Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Monthly Information Note – December 2025' (n 86).

²¹³ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 26 May 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (26 May 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-05-26/853>> accessed 9 August 2026.

²¹⁴ William N Trumbull and Ann D Witte, 'Determinants of the Costs of Operating Large-Scale Prisons with Implications for the Cost of Correctional Standards' (1981) 16 Law & Society Review 115, 134 <<https://doi.org/10.2307/3053552>>.

²¹⁵ European Committee on Crime Problems, 'White Paper on Prison Overcrowding' (2016) PC-CP (2015) 6 rev 7 20 <<https://rm.coe.int/16806f9a8a>>.

downstream effects of people being held in overcrowded prisons, such as worsening mental health and addiction issues. Addressing overcrowding through increased use of community-based sanctions, rather than the expansion of the prison estate, could free up available funding for prevention and diversion programmes, to address the upstream drivers of engagement with the criminal justice system.²¹⁶

Table 8: Cost per person in prison per year in line with increased population and capacity²¹⁷

	Daily Average prison population	Annual average operating rate across Irish prisons (percentage)	Estimated cost of imprisoning an individual for one year
2025	5,418	124	€103,334
2024	4,941	109	€99,072
2023	4,582	103	€88,523

Assessment of Standard 3: Regress

For the last two years, the Irish prison system has faced severe and worsening overcrowding. Operating at more than 120 per cent capacity over a sustained period has both safety and human rights implications for those in custody, arguably placing them in more vulnerable and dangerous positions than when they entered prison. Throughout 2025 and into 2026, numbers in prison have only increased, and do not appear to be reducing in any meaningful sense, creating a protracted crisis that undermines Ireland's human rights record.

²¹⁶ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'From Punishment to Prevention: Poverty, Inequality and Pathways into the Irish Criminal Justice System' (n 42) 8–9.

²¹⁷ Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 26 May 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (n 93); Irish Prison Service, 'Annual Report 2024' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Annual Report 2023' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-2023_.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 33).

Standard 4 Prison size

Each prison is limited to a maximum operating capacity of 250.

Assessment: Regress

The number of people that a prison accommodates plays a significant part in its operation and the experience of those detained there. A prison's size can determine access to services that can facilitate rehabilitation, safety and security, foster positive relationships between staff and people in prison, and create the conditions for individuals in custody to be treated as individuals with varied needs. Smaller prisons tend to be easier to govern, can foster respectful relationships based on familiarity, with less likelihood of strong cliques and divisions forming, therefore reducing the potential risks of violence and bullying.²¹⁸ On this basis, safe custody limits (Standard 3, p. 30) should be in place and each of the larger prisons should be working towards implementing a maximum operating capacity of 250 people.

By the end of 2025, only eight prisons had an operating capacity below 250 – Portlaoise, Limerick women's prison, Arbour Hill, Loughan House, Shelton Abbey and the Dóchas Centre and Training Unit at Mountjoy.²¹⁹ This was unchanged from 2024; however there were 187 beds added across the prisons – most of which were added to prisons already operating above 250 bed capacity.

Table 9 – Number of beds in each prison on 31 December 2020-2025²²⁰

Place of detention	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	Change
*Arbour Hill	138	138	138	137	137	137	-
Castlerea	340	340	340	340	346	371	+ 25
Cloverhill	431	431	431	433	433	433	-
Cork	296	296	296	296	296	296	-
*Limerick (F)	28	28	28	56	56	56	-
Limerick (M)	210	210	210	286	286	338	+ 52
*Loughlan House	140	140	140	140	143	153	+ 10
Midlands	875	875	875	875	875	891	+ 16
*Mountjoy (F)	146	146	146	146	146	146	-
Mountjoy (M)	755	755	755	755	770	831	+ 61
*Portlaoise	291	291	231	229	226	225	-1
*Shelton Abbey	115	115	115	115	111	121	+ 10
*Training Unit	-	-	96	96	96	98	+ 2
Wheatfield	610	610	610	610	610	622	+ 12
Total number of beds	4,375	4,375	4,411	4,514	4,531	4,718	+ 187

* Denotes where maximum prison population is less than 250 people.

The Government's allocation of significant capital expenditure for building new prison spaces is discouraging. A record €495m was earmarked for the IPS for investment in building projects as part of the Prisons Capital Plan.²²¹ The Plan

²¹⁸ Becky Clifford, 'Smaller Prisons Are Smarter' (OUPblog, 7 September 2020) <<https://blog.oup.com/2020/09/smaller-prisons-are-smarter/>> accessed 14 July 2026.

²¹⁹ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 33).

²²⁰ Data taken from IPS Daily Prison Population data at the end of December each year.

²²¹ 'Minister Jim O'Callaghan Secures Cabinet Approval for €2.18 Billion Sectoral Investment Plan for Justice 2026-2030' (gov.ie, 4 December 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/press-releases/minister-jim-ocallaghan-secures-cabinet-approval-for-218-billion-sectoral-investment-plan-for-justice-2026-2030/>> accessed 10 June 2026.

aims to carry out construction projects at nine prisons, including a new block in Wheatfield, an extension block at Midlands, an extension to Cork Prison, and additional spaces at Castlerea, Mountjoy, Cloverhill, Portlaoise, Limerick and Dóchas, creating 1,500 additional prison places by 2031 – “the largest ever building programme in the prison estate”.²²² IPRT continues to oppose the construction of a new prison at Thornton Hall in north County Dublin, a 150-acre site that has been the subject of significant contestation over the last two decades, following its purchase by the State in 2004 for €29 million in order to build a ‘super prison’.²²³ The Programme for Government contained a commitment to construct a prison at Thornton Hall, with the Minister for Justice stating later in the year that a master plan for the site would be developed in 2026, including consideration as to whether it would be used as a combined site for the IPS, the International Protection Accommodation Services and An Garda Síochána.²²⁴ Information is not yet publicly available on the bed capacity of the planned development of Thornton Hall, but there is no reassurance that bed capacity would be below 250.

Funding allocated for the construction of new blocks or entire new prisons would be better used to modernise and improve conditions in existing prisons and work towards maximum capacity limits of 250 people in each prison. As highlighted by the CPT in its report, the multiple-occupancy cells it visited across the prison estate did not have fully-partitioned sanitary annexes, some had mould on the ceilings, were dilapidated and dirty, with insufficient access to natural light and limited ventilation.²²⁵ As IPRT has previously advocated, a Justice Reinvestment approach should also be prioritised, redirecting capital for prison estate expansion to community supports in deprived communities that can contribute to prevention, such as education, youth services, addiction supports, housing and employment initiatives.²²⁶ **As stated in PIPS 2024, while IPRT does not advocate for the expansion of the prison estate, it maintains that if new prison spaces are to be established, they should be in open prisons.**²²⁷ It is worth noting that this was recommended by the Strategic Review Group on Penal Policy in 2014, which was established by the then Minister for Justice.²²⁸

Assessment of Standard 4: Regress

The increase in bed capacity of prisons already operating beyond the 250-capacity threshold is a disappointing development. The revived political discussion around the need for a ‘super prison’, which would be unlikely to have less than 250 spaces, represents a missed opportunity to create more open prison spaces in place of closed spaces. Construction of such a prison would constitute a significant regression in Ireland’s penal policy and practice.

²²² Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 10 Dec 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (10 December 2025) <<https://doi.org/10/250/%3Fhighlight%25B0%25D=prisoners&highlight%25B1%25D=prisoners&highlight%25B2%25D=prisoners>> accessed 14 July 2026.

²²³ ‘Minister Jim O’Callaghan Secures Cabinet Approval for €2.18 Billion Sectoral Investment Plan for Justice 2026–2030’ (n 101). Paul Hosford, ‘New Valuation for Stalled Thornton Hall Prison Site’ (Irish Examiner, 17 April 2026) <<https://www.irishexaminer.com/news/arid-40853321.html>> accessed 14 July 2026.

²²⁴ Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 10 Dec 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (n 102).

²²⁵ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 14) 34–35.

²²⁶ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘From Punishment to Prevention: Poverty, Inequality and Pathways into the Irish Criminal Justice System’ (n 42) 9.

²²⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2024’ (n 28) 21.

²²⁸ Department of Justice, ‘Strategic Review of Penal Policy – Final Report’ <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/strategic-review-of-penal-policy.pdf>>.

Standard 5 Minimum prison security settings and incentivised regimes

People in prison are detained in the least restrictive security setting applicable, following a fair and thorough individual risk assessment. People in prison are placed on an incentivised regime that is appropriate for their needs and are fairly progressed during their time in custody.

Assessment: **unable to assess**

In early 2025, IPRT requested information from the IPS regarding its risk-assessment procedures and how it ensures that people in prison are assigned the lowest appropriate security classification. IPRT did not receive a response to this request in time for publication, meaning it was unable to assess this standard. This standard was also not assessed in PIPS 2024 due to the unavailability of up-to-date, accurate, accessible data.²²⁹

However, an issue that was raised by stakeholders and people with experience of prison in 2025 was incentivised regimes.²³⁰ IPRT therefore decided to consider this issue, as it was evidently a significant issue for people in prison, and one that has been impacted by the levels of overcrowding and its effects on daily life in prison.

The IPS introduced an Incentivised Regimes Policy in 2012, which “provides for a differentiation in privileges between prisoners who behave well in prison while engaging with services and prisoners who do not”.²³¹ It provides for three different regimes: Basic, Standard and Enhanced. Upon committal to prison, an individual will automatically be placed on a Standard regime, and through good behaviour and engagement with services, may be progressed to an Enhanced regime. The incentives include: a higher level of gratuity than the standard, higher levels of access to cash and tuck shop expenditure, priority access to better quality accommodation, enhanced daily regime, enhanced facilities and increased access with the outside community.²³²

Similarly, an individual may be relegated to a lower regime based on their behaviour. According to the IPS policy, a serious breach of discipline, such as an assault, refusal to take a drug test or possession of a prohibited article may result in an individual on an Enhanced regime being reduced to a Basic regime – skipping the Standard regime assignment.²³³ The IPS does not publicise data on the number of individuals on each regime. However, the issues that were raised with IPRT by stakeholders including individuals with experience of the prison system in 2025 primarily related to: regimes being determined by availability or unavailability of certain services, and the difficulties faced by individuals being transferred from Oberstown Children’s Detention Campus to an adult prison.²³⁴

Access to an enhanced regime is determined based on attendance at school or workshops. However, this means that the number of people that can go on an Enhanced regime being restricted to the number of places in school and workshops. As discussed in Standard 19 (p. 74), there were waiting lists for schools in a number of prisons in 2025, due in part to overcrowding levels. This meant that some individuals were unable to progress to or lost Enhanced status due to reasons beyond their control, and despite their interest in engaging in school and education and which had a discouraging effect.²³⁵ Another issue in this regard that was raised by people with experience of prison in 2025 was the fact that if an individual could not attend school due to a medical or other appointment, this was not communicated to staff, and risked their Enhanced status.²³⁶

Another issue raised with IPRT was regarding the challenges faced by young people who are transferred to Wheatfield adult prison from Oberstown.²³⁷ Coming from an environment where they are provided with support and encouragement, many of the young people face significant challenges when they enter an adult prison, with stakeholders describing it as having the effect of undoing much of the progress they had previously made.²³⁸ On this basis, stakeholders who regularly

²²⁹ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2024’ (n 28) 22.

²³⁰ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (13 July 2026); ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44).

²³¹ Irish Prison Service, ‘Incentivised Regimes Policy’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Incentivised-Regimes-Policy-1.pdf>.

²³² *ibid* 3.

²³³ *ibid* 3–4.

²³⁴ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (n 110); ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44).

²³⁵ Stakeholder Consultation by the Traveller Justice Initiative (TJI) in March 2026.

²³⁶ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (n 110).

²³⁷ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44); ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (n 110).

²³⁸ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44); ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (n 110).

work with young people in Oberstown suggested that they could be placed on an Enhanced regime when transferred to an adult prison, to mitigate the “cliff drop” effect they had observed occurring for many.²³⁹

The type of regime an individual is on also determines the daily gratuity they receive.²⁴⁰ Individuals on a Basic regime receive €0.95 per day, those on a Standard regime receive €1.70 a day and those on Enhanced receive €2.20 per day. The Prison Visiting Committee for the Dóchas Centre highlighted this issue in its Annual Report, noting that while the rates have not been increased in line with inflation, prices of items in the prison tuck shop have increased significantly.²⁴¹ In a 2020 review of the Incentivised Regime Policy, it was recommended that “consideration be given to an increase in the level of gratuity awarded” under the Policy.²⁴² Five years later, however, and the rates have remained unchanged. Gratuity is particularly important for those in prison who may not have family members or others who can support them through sending them money in prison.

Assessment of Standard 5: **unable to assess**

To improve transparency and ensure proper oversight, accurate and up-to-date data on risk-assessments and incentivised regimes should be collected, collated and published regularly and routinely. This would ensure that IPRT can assess this standard in future editions of PIPS.

Standard 6 Open prison provision

Open prisons comprise at least 30 per cent of the prison estate.

Assessment: **Mixed**

The IPS currently operates two open prisons: Shelton Abbey, in Co. Wicklow, and Loughan House, in Co. Cavan. With the exception of Portlaoise Prison, all other prisons in the State are medium-security prisons. There is currently no open prison in Ireland for women, and based on available information, there is no formal plan to establish one. The need for open prisons, and specifically open prisons for women, was recommended as far back as 40 years ago in the Whitaker report.²⁴³

Open prisons have lower security measures than medium-security prisons, allowing individuals detained there to move freely around the building and grounds. There is also an increased focus on rehabilitation and reintegration, with individuals serving their sentence in open prisons facilitated to work and access training opportunities outside of the prison, and engage with the community where possible, whether through volunteering or work. If eligible for transfer to an open prison, individuals tend to serve the latter part of their sentence there, as it is seen as a means of progression and preparation for release. IPRT’s consultations with those with lived experience of the prison system highlighted the importance of open prisons, as they provide crucial time for readjustment prior to release, therefore mitigating the cliff fall effect that many experience when leaving prison.²⁴⁴ Time in an open prison can also reduce the impact of institutionalisation on men who have spent long or frequent periods in prison.

In terms of capacity, the two open prisons constitute a small portion of the Irish prison system. In 2025, their capacity was increased with 10 places being added to both Loughan House and Shelton Abbey, bringing their respective capacities up to 153 and 121. Whilst these are welcome additions, as they are still below the operating capacity of 250 places, they still only comprise a combined 5.8 per cent of the prison estate in Ireland. The IPS has indicated that it has

²³⁹ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44).

²⁴⁰ Irish Prison Service, ‘Incentivised Regimes Policy’ (n 111).

²⁴¹ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 41) 26.

²⁴² *ibid.*

²⁴³ Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System (n 30) para 2.23, 2.29.

²⁴⁴ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (n 110).

no current plans to introduce new open prison spaces across the prison estate.²⁴⁵

Regarding an open prison for women, welcome reference was made to establishing one in the Programme for Government, published in early 2025.²⁴⁶ However, the reference did not amount to a firm commitment, with the Government stating it will “consider the need for a new Women’s Open Prison”.²⁴⁷ This is despite a significant body of research literature and now wide acceptance of the fact that a gender-specific approach is required for women in prison.²⁴⁸

The Whitaker report went as far as to say that the majority of women who had committed offences should be held in open prisons, with “one small closed institution”.²⁴⁹ The UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in its review of Ireland in 2025 repeated its previous recommendation that an open women’s prison should be established and called on the State to “take immediate and effective measures to address overcrowding in women’s prisons” and “expand community-based alternatives to detention”.²⁵⁰

In its inspection report for the Dóchas Centre, carried out in 2023 but submitted to the Minister in 2025, the OIP stated that the lack of progression pathways for women amounts to gender discrimination, as women had “no possibility of transfer to an open centre and there was a paucity of step-down facilities”.²⁵¹ The lack of such opportunities for women in prison can establish a “ceiling” mindset, and does not serve them upon release.²⁵²

Assessment of Standard 6: **Mixed**

The increase in spaces available at Loughan House and Shelton Abbey is a welcome addition, particularly as both prisons continue to operate below the 250-capacity threshold. However, the lack of meaningful policy commitment to establish a women’s open prison is discouraging. The failure to do so, decades since it was first recommended, raises serious questions about the difference in thinking towards the treatment of men and women in the criminal justice system and whether such attitudes are discriminatory. It warrants particular scrutiny when the Government has committed record amounts of capital expenditure for expansion of the prison estate, yet has not allocated any budget for the construction of an open prison for women.

²⁴⁵ Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

²⁴⁶ Department of the Taoiseach (n 11) 119.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘IPRT Position Paper 10 Women in the Criminal Justice System: Towards a Non-Custodial Approach’ (2013) 15 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6332/iprt_position_paper_on_women_in_the_criminal_justice_system.pdf>.

²⁴⁹ Committee of Inquiry into the Penal System (n 30) para 2.41.

²⁵⁰ Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, ‘Concluding Observations on the Eighth Periodic Report of Ireland’ CEDAW/C/IRL/CO/8 <https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?Lang=en&symbolno=CEDAW%2FC%2FIRL%2FCO%2F8>.

²⁵¹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Inspection Report Unannounced General Inspection of the Dóchas Centre 19 September — 2 October 2023’ (2025) para 2.114, 5.9 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Inspection-Report-Unannounced-General-Inspection-of-the-Dochas-Centre.pdf>>.

²⁵² Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Inspection Report Unannounced General Inspection of the Dóchas Centre 19 September — 2 October 2023’ (n 130).

ASSESSMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Section A: An effective and humane penal system

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
1. Towards progressive penal policy	The progression of legislation that expands the use of community service orders was a welcome development in 2025, signifying a commitment to implementing alternatives to custody. However, the same legislation will enable prison officers to carry incapacitant spray, which IPRT views as having the potential to escalate tensions in prisons, rather than diffuse or deter them. There was also a lack of progress regarding the ratification of OPCAT, establishing the IPS as a statutory body and a Penal Policy Consultative Council. Given the severity of overcrowding in Irish prisons in 2025, swift policy action and measures to ease this were also lacking.	Mixed 	The State prohibit the introduction of incapacitant spray in prisons in line with the cross-party recommendation by the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice to remove the proposed provision from the legislation. The Government should enact the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill as a matter of priority and ratify OPCAT as soon as possible. In the event that the Bill is not enacted by the end of 2026, the State should seek a postponement of their obligations under Article 24 of OPCAT until the legislation is commenced at a national level. The Irish Prison Service (IPS) should be established as a statutory body.
2. Imprisonment as a last resort	In 2025, it cannot be said that the principle of prison as a last resort was given true effect. There were encouraging developments, including the proposed increase in the maximum available hours for Community Service Orders (CSOs) under the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill and the increased budget for the Probation Service. However, these were somewhat undermined by the rise in the rate of imprisonment, the minimal increase in the number of CSOs issued compared to the target for 2025, and the concerning trend of detaining individuals awaiting deportation in already overcrowded prisons.	Regress 	The Department of Justice should include the principle of prison as a last resort in the Criminal Justice (Community Sanctions) Bill 2014 and prioritise the publication of the Bill. The Probation Service should establish a monitoring and evaluation framework for tracking the efficacy and outcomes of Community Service Orders (CSOs). The State should redirect budget earmarked to expand the prison estate to invest in alternatives to custody, including increased funding for the Probation Service.
3. Safe custody limits	For the last two years, the Irish prison system has faced severe and worsening overcrowding. Operating at more than 120 per cent capacity over a sustained period has both safety and human rights implications for those in custody, arguably placing them in more vulnerable and dangerous positions than when they entered prison. Throughout 2025 and into 2026, numbers in prison have only increased, and do not appear to be reducing in any meaningful sense, creating a protracted crisis that undermines Ireland's human rights record.	Regress 	The State should implement the recommendation of the European Committee on the Prevention of Torture (CPT) to introduce an enforceable ceiling on the number of people who may be accommodated in prison in line with actual prison capacity.

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
4. Prison size	The increase in bed capacity of prisons already operating beyond the 250-capacity threshold is a disappointing development. The revived political discussion around the need for a 'super prison', which would be unlikely to have less than 250 spaces, represents a missed opportunity to create more open prison spaces in place of closed spaces. Construction of such a prison would constitute a significant regression in Ireland's penal policy and practice.	Regress 	The State should ensure that any expansion of the prison estate should replace closed prison spaces with ones in an open centre, including the establishment of open spaces for women.
5. Minimum prison security settings & incentivised regimes	To improve transparency and ensure proper oversight, accurate and up-to-date data on risk-assessments and incentivised regimes should be collected, collated and published regularly and routinely. This would ensure that IPRT can assess this standard in future editions of PIPS.	Unable to assess	The IPS should publish data and information regarding the risk assessment procedures it carries out, ensuring that people in prison are assigned the lowest appropriate security classification. The IPS should adjust the Incentivised Regime Policy to ensure that individuals may still progress in their regime assignment, regardless of prison overcrowding. The IPS should increase the levels of the daily gratuity for people in prison in line with inflation.
6. Open prison provision	The increase in spaces available at Loughan House and Shelton Abbey is a welcome addition, particularly as both prisons continue to operate below the 250-capacity threshold. However, the lack of meaningful policy commitment to establish a women's open prison is discouraging. The failure to do so, decades since it was first recommended, raises serious questions about the difference in thinking towards the treatment of men and women in the criminal justice system and whether such attitudes are discriminatory. It warrants particular scrutiny when the Government has committed record amounts of capital expenditure for expansion of the prison estate, yet has not allocated any budget for the construction of an open prison for women.	Mixed 	The State should replace closed prison spaces with more spaces in open centres and prioritise the creation of an open prison for women as part of any expansion of the prison estate.

Section B

Prison conditions

Section B

Prison conditions

Standard 7 Humane prison conditions

All people in prison are treated with respect, dignity and humanity and prison living conditions support their dignity and wellbeing.

Assessment: Regress

When an individual is sentenced to prison, the deprivation of their liberty is the punishment. The conditions they are imprisoned in and the treatment they receive are not part of the punishment, and should not serve as a further punishment. The State has both an obligation to ensure that anyone in its custody is not subject to torture, inhuman or degrading treatment (Article 3, ECHR) and, at a very minimum, has their dignity and humanity respected and protected.²⁵³ This applies to both sentenced and remand prisoners, and forms the basis for the first two European Prison Rules:²⁵⁴

1. All persons deprived of their liberty shall be treated with respect for their human rights.
2. Persons deprived of their liberty retain all rights that are not lawfully taken away by the decision sentencing them or remanding them in custody.

The Irish Constitution also provides the right to a minimum standard of dignity and, as the Supreme Court found in its 2019 judgment, *Simpson v Governor of Mountjoy Prison & Others*, the State is obligated to uphold the dignity and autonomy of an individual in its custody.²⁵⁵

The current overcrowding levels in Irish prisons and the associated living conditions seriously call into question whether this minimum standard of dignity is being met. As stated at the outset of this report, while overcrowding impacts all aspects of prison life, one of its most visceral and concerning impacts has been that hundreds of individuals have to sleep on thin, rubber-lined mattresses on cell floors for what appears to be prolonged periods of time.²⁵⁶ This is despite both the European Prison Rules (Rule 21) and the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules) (Rule 21) making clear that all persons in prison must be provided with their own bed and sufficient and appropriate bedding.

The rate at which the number of mattresses on floors are being used increased at an alarming rate in 2025. On 1 January 2024, the IPS recorded that 83 individuals were sleeping on mattresses on cell floors. By 31 December 2025, the number recorded by the IPS was 596 – this constitutes a staggering increase of 618 per cent.²⁵⁷ At the time of going to print, available data does not indicate any meaningful reversal in this trend.

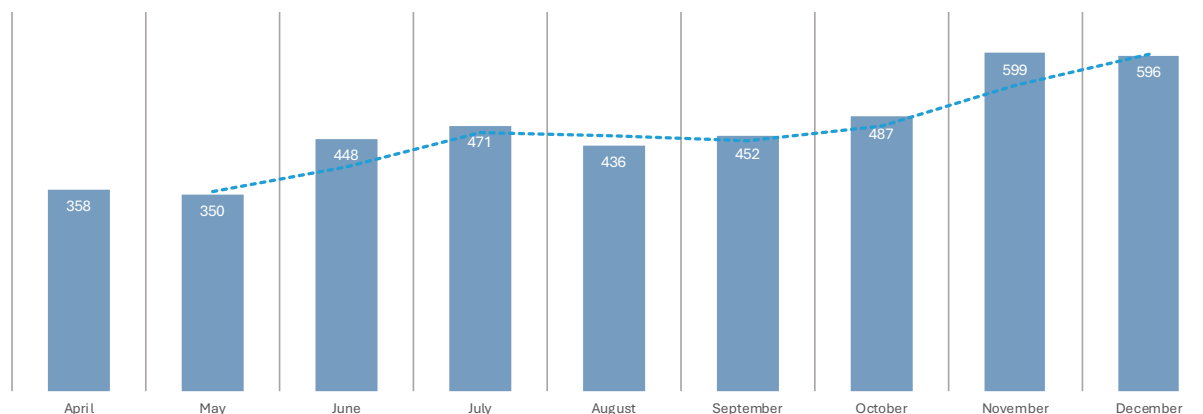
²⁵³ United Nations General Assembly, 'International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights' (1966) Resolution 2200A (XXI) art 10(1) <<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/ccpr.pdf>>; 'The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)' (2005) <https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf>.

²⁵⁴ Council of Europe, 'Recommendation Rec(2006)2 - Rev of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the European Prison Rules' <

²⁵⁵ *Simpson v Governor of Mountjoy Prison* [2019] Irish Supreme Court [S.C. No. 17 of 2017] [129].

²⁵⁶ The Irish Prison Service does not maintain data on the length of time a person spends sleeping on a mattress on the floor.

²⁵⁷ Irish Prison Service, 'Prisoner Population on Wednesday 31st December 2025' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/31-December-2025.pdf>.

Figure 4: Number of mattresses on floors on the last day of each month in 2025^{258*}

*Note: The IPS only began including mattress statistics in the Daily Prison Population statistics on 28 April 2025, owing to the lack of available data for January – March 2025.

Not only are individuals sleeping on roll-up mattresses on cell floors or flimsy camp beds,²⁵⁹ they are also doing so in cells with between one and three other people – which are designed for single or double occupancy. As described by the CPT following its 2024 visit:

During this visit, not only were some cells which had been designed for single-occupancy doubled up with bunk beds, but often a third mattress or camp bed, and sometimes even a fourth mattress were squashed onto cell floors. This necessitated an informal arrangement whereby the mattresses or camp beds were stashed on the floor under the cell's bunkbeds during the day in double, triple or even quadruple-occupancy cells.²⁶⁰

It is worth noting that at the time of the CPT visit, the number of individuals sleeping on mattresses was over 100, with this having increased five-fold by the end of 2025.²⁶¹ During its visit in 2024, the CPT found that the cumulative impact of cell overcrowding and a lack of access to time out of cell could amount to inhuman and degrading treatment.²⁶²

When the CPT returned to Ireland at the end of 2025 following publication of its report, it expressed the view that the inhuman and degrading conditions in Irish prisons could lead the European Court of Human Rights to find Ireland in violation of Article 3 ECHR.²⁶³ The prohibition against torture, inhuman and degrading treatment is absolute, and no derogation from it is permitted, no matter the circumstances or the availability of resources, or lack thereof. The OIP has also asserted that conditions of overcrowding in certain prisons may amount to degrading treatment, not only in 2025 but also in 2024 and 2023.²⁶⁴

A sense of what living in degrading conditions is like has been expressed through the testimonies of those being subjected to them. People in prison told Prison Visiting Committees of the “indignity and humiliation of sleeping on mattresses, having to step over fellow prisoner on floor to use [the] WC”, “feelings of hopelessness, anger and at times despair”, and that “circumstances are unbearable”.²⁶⁵

²⁵⁸ Data taken from IPS Daily Prison Population statistics on the last date of each month where data was available. See here: <https://www.irishprisons.ie/2025-prison-population/>

²⁵⁹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (n 79) 2.

²⁶⁰ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 14) para 25.

²⁶¹ *ibid* 27.

²⁶² *ibid*.

²⁶³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (n 79) 2.

²⁶⁴ *ibid*; Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Office of the Inspector of Prisons Annual Report 2023’ 5, 18, 19, 20, 22 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Office-of-the-Inspector-of-Prisons-Annual-Report-2023.pdf>>; Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Office of the Inspector of Prisons Annual Report 2024’ 14, 19 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/OIP-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>>.

²⁶⁵ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (2026) 18 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/47c4abd8/Mountjoy_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>; Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report of the Visiting Committee 2025’ 4 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/c1d28aa8/Cloverhill_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

These experiences seemingly fall far short of the “focus on humane treatment” included in the IPS mission: “to provide safe and secure custody, dignity of care, and rehabilitation to prisoners for the purpose of creating safer communities, focusing on humane treatment”.²⁶⁶ It is worth highlighting, as the Supreme Court did in *Simpson v Governor*, that the degrading conditions in Irish prisons at present created by overcrowding are not directly intended, or the result of “some purposeful act or omission” by the IPS or the Government.²⁶⁷ Nevertheless, they are the real consequences of a lack of political will to meaningfully address prison overcrowding and represent a failure by the State to uphold its human rights obligations.

Assessment of Standard 7: Regress

Since the CPT concluded that conditions in Irish prisons could amount to degrading treatment, there has been no indication that the conditions observed have improved. Rather, there were more mattresses on floors in 2025 and more people sharing cells than at the time of its visit in 2024. The number of people sleeping on mattresses increased by 618 per cent from the start of January 2024 to the end of December 2025. OIP and Prison Visiting Committees reports also indicate that conditions worsened in 2025, meaning that the CPT’s conclusion in 2024 may still apply to current conditions.

Standard 8 In-cell sanitation

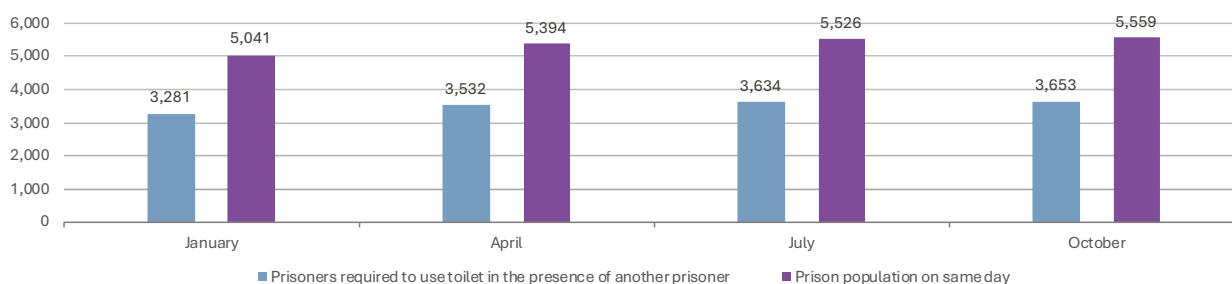
All people in prison can, at any time, access toilet facilities that uphold their dignity and privacy.

Assessment: Regress

All people in prison should have full access to toilet facilities that are clean and hygienic, and that uphold their right to privacy and personal dignity. Having to use the toilet in the presence of others undermines those rights, and raises hygiene and sanitation questions too – for all individuals involved.

Due to the increase in the number of individuals sharing cells – particularly single cells – across the prison estate as a result of overcrowding, the number of people required to use the toilet in the presence of others has increased in line with this. By mid-2025, IPS data indicates that 65.7 per cent of the prison population (3,634 people) were required to use the toilet in the presence of others.²⁶⁸ This is up from 62 per cent in 2024 (3,113 people), and means that only 32.4 per cent of people in prison (1,888 people) could toilet in private. As overcrowding increased throughout the year, so too did the number of people in prison who were therefore obligated to share a toilet with at least one other person.

Figure 5: Number of prisoners who had to use the toilet in the presence of others, in line with the prison population on the same date (2025)²⁶⁹



²⁶⁶ ‘Mission and Values’ (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/about-us/mission-and-values/>> accessed 22 July 2026.

²⁶⁷ *Simpson v Governor of Mountjoy Prison* (n 134) para 102.

²⁶⁸ Irish Prison Service, ‘Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation’ <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents/pdf/JULY-2025-In-Cell.pdf>>.

²⁶⁹ Irish Prison Service, ‘Census Prison Population April 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation’ <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents/pdf/APRIL-2025-In-Cell.pdf>>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Census Prison Population January 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation’ <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents/pdf/JANUARY-2025-Cell-Information.pdf>>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation’ (n 147).

Not only do many people in prison have to use the toilet in front of others in their cell, but many of these toilets are not cordoned or sectioned off within the cell in any way, leaving the toilet fully exposed. Individuals in prison who sleep on mattresses on cell floors due to overcrowding are required to sleep with their head beside the toilet. This not only has implications for people's sense of dignity and privacy, but also creates an unhygienic environment for all those in the cell. The Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee noted in its 2025 report, "it is in that environment that men also have to eat their meals, sleep and live with their anxieties and with those of the other cell occupant".²⁷⁰ The 2025 CPT report detailed how some men described being repelled from eating their meals due to the smell of the toilets.²⁷¹ The Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee recommended that "urgent and immediate steps need to be taken" by the Minister for Justice and the IPS to end the practice of people in prison toileting in the presence of others.²⁷²

Such circumstances are made worse by significant delays in repairs, with an OIP inspection report of Mountjoy detailing that in one shared cell a broken toilet went unfixed for several days, meaning that the men were eating, sleeping and living beside a toilet smeared with excrement.²⁷³ The follow-up inspection by the OIP in 2025 found that in cells in A and B Division, toilets were broken and leaking, without seats or lids on cisterns, meaning that the men had to reach inside the cistern to flush the toilet.²⁷⁴

While a central part of IPS' mission is rehabilitation,²⁷⁵ living in such conditions is not conducive to helping a person's wellbeing and overall progression.

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has found on numerous occasions that unpartitioned toilets in overcrowded cells may be a contributing factor to a finding of a violation of Article 3 ECHR, the prohibition of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment.²⁷⁶ In its 2025 report, the CPT also concluded that open toilets in cells holding multiple people were a contributing factor to its finding of inhuman and degrading treatment.²⁷⁷ The Government's response to these concerns raised by the CPT was inadequate, as it will not introduce partitioned sanitary areas due to the impact on the availability of living space and it has not identified alternative measures to modesty curtains which it states pose operational and safety issues.²⁷⁸ It is worth noting that on this issue, the ECtHR has previously stated that security-related justifications do not suffice in justifying breaches of Article 3.²⁷⁹ Given the clear warning by the CPT that rights violations are likely occurring as a result of these conditions, the State and IPS should continue exploring alternative options to prevent these violations and identify workable solutions.

On this basis, there does not appear to have been progress to rectify these conditions in 2025. Rather, they only continued to worsen as the number of individuals sharing cells increased. As such, the continued use of unpartitioned toilets in cells holding multiple people in several prisons across the country is a contributing factor to a breach of Ireland's human rights obligations.

While the practice of 'slopping out', the use of a bucket or container for toileting which is emptied when cells are unlocked, has largely been eliminated from Irish prisons, 2025 did not see any progress in further reducing this practice from the previous year. PIPS 2024 recorded that in October 2024, four individuals in E Block in Portlaoise prison were required to slop out. According to available data, that number remained the same throughout 2025.²⁸⁰ As in PIPS 2024, IPRT reiterates that slopping out is an inherent breach of an individual's right to dignity and privacy and must be

²⁷⁰ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144) 28.

²⁷¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 14) para 110.

²⁷² Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee (n 144) 10–11.

²⁷³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Inspection Report: Unannounced General Inspections of The Training Unit & Mountjoy Men's Prison, 28 November — 9 December 2022' para 2.24 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Inspection-Report-Unannounced-General-Inspection-of-the-Training-Unit-and-Mountjoy-Mens-Prison.pdf>>.

²⁷⁴ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Inspection Report - Follow-up Inspection: Mountjoy Prison, 28 April 2025 — 2 May 2025' 5 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/OIP-Follow-up-inspection-Mountjoy-Prison.pdf>>.

²⁷⁵ 'Mission and Values' (n 14); 'Mission and Values' (n 145).

²⁷⁶ *Peers v Greece* [2001] ECtHR 59413/17; *Szafrański v Poland* [2015] ECtHR 17249/12; *Bădulescu c Portugal* [2020] ECtHR 33729/18.

²⁷⁷ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 14) para 111.

²⁷⁸ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Response of the Irish Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Its Visit to Ireland from 21 to 31 May 2024' (2025) 18 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60b>>.

²⁷⁹ *R.m c France* [2026] ECtHR 34994/22 [63].

²⁸⁰ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population January 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 148); Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population April 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 148); Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 147).

completely and permanently eliminated without further delay.

Assessment of Standard 8: Regress

In 2025, the number of individuals in prison having to use the toilet in the presence of others gradually increased, whilst the number of those needing to slop out remained unchanged since the previous year. For the second year in a row, as observed by IPRT, no substantive action has been taken or committed to by either the IPS or the Government to rectify this issue. As a result, the dignity and privacy of thousands of people in prisons across Ireland are being undermined on a daily basis.

Standard 9 Single cell accommodation

Every person in prison is accommodated in their own, separate cell. Cell sharing should be an exceptional measure and only occur following a robust risk assessment and with the consent of all individuals concerned.

Assessment: Regress

The importance of each person in prison having their own cell is recognised in both the European Prison Rules (Rule 18.5) and the Nelson Mandela Rules (Rule 12.1). One person per cell enables privacy, dignity and reduces tensions and violence in the prison.

The Irish Prison Rules 1947 included single cell accommodation as an explicit provision, but in 1983 the then Minister for Justice removed the provision as a response to prison overcrowding. The result was an “increasing resort to multiple occupancy cells as a permanent response to pressures on space, something which has never been reversed”.²⁸¹ Not only has this practice continued, but reliance on it has also increased exponentially in recent years.

In 2015, there were 1,450 people in prison who shared a cell with one other person.²⁸² A decade later that figure had increased by 74 per cent to 2,524.²⁸³ The number of people in a cell with two others has risen since then by 250 per cent, from 231 in 2015 to 810 in 2025.²⁸⁴ Most starkly, the number of individuals sharing a cell with at least three others has increased more than seven-fold, going from 54 in 2015 to 416 in 2025, a 670 per cent increase.²⁸⁵

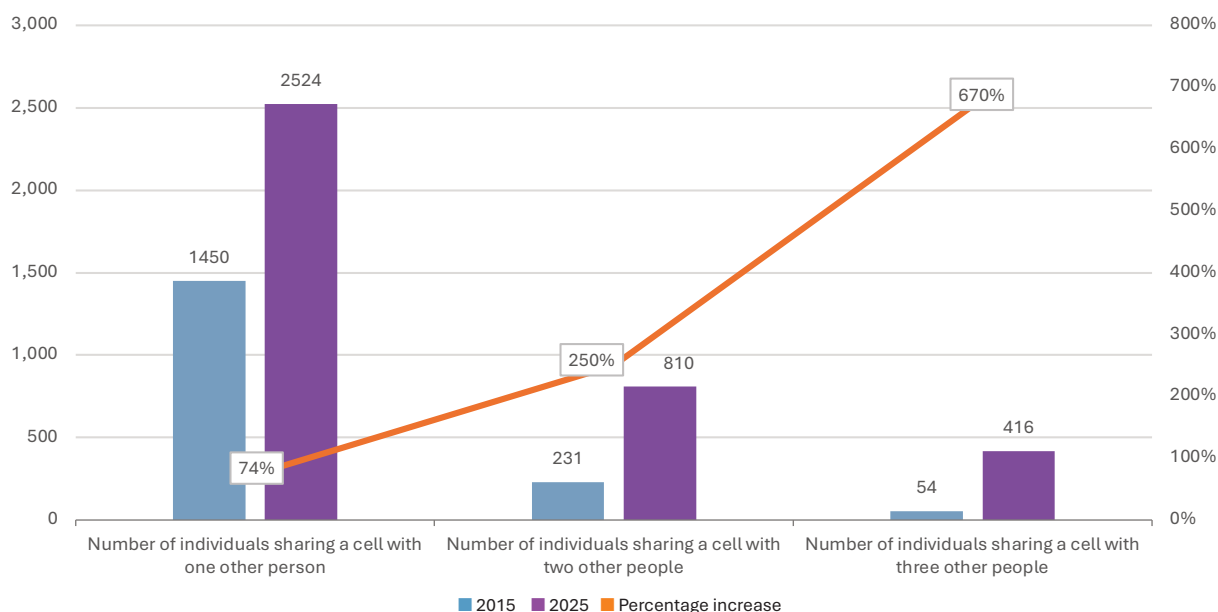
²⁸¹ Mary Rogan, 'Prison Policy in Times of Austerity: Lessons from Ireland' [2013] Prison Service Journal 4–5 <<https://doi.org/10.21427/D7K77J>>.

²⁸² Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2015 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/images/monthlyinfonote/jul15_incell.pdf>.

²⁸³ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 147).

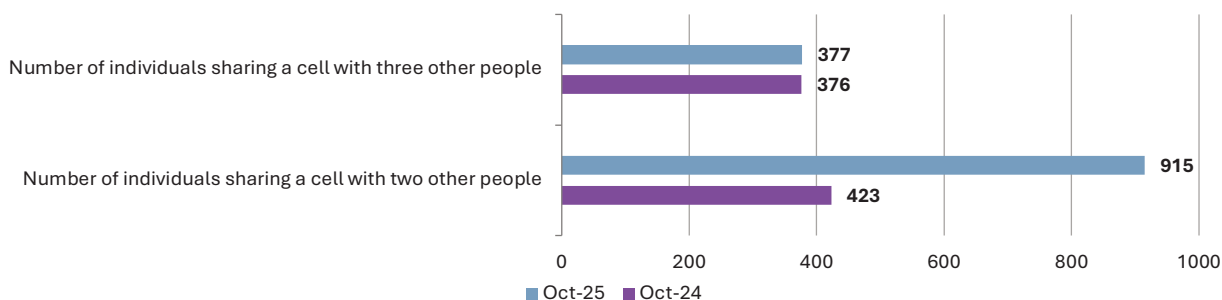
²⁸⁴ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2015 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 161). Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 147).

²⁸⁵ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2015 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 161); Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 147).

Figure 6: Number of individuals in multiple occupancy cells in 2015 and 2025²⁸⁶

These figures point to a clear deterioration over the course of a decade. Between 2024 and 2025, there was significant regression in providing single cell accommodation for individuals in custody, with the number of individuals sharing a cell with three or more people almost doubling from 278 to 416, and the number of those sharing a cell with two others increasing by 67 per cent from 483 to 810.²⁸⁷

This means that in 2025, more people in custody were sharing a cell than those in single cell accommodation. Data indicates that by October 2025, 68 per cent of the prison population shared a cell with at least one other person, with 377 people sharing a cell with three or more other people.²⁸⁸ The last time the majority of the prison population had single cell accommodation, according to available data from the IPS, was early 2022.²⁸⁹ Since then, a diminishing number of people have had a cell to themselves. In January 2025, only 36 per cent of cells accommodated one person compared with January 2022 when this was the case for 54 per cent of cells.

Figure 7: Multiple cell occupancy, October 2024 vs October 2025²⁹⁰

²⁸⁶ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2015 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 161); Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 147).

²⁸⁷ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population July 2024 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JULY-2024-In-Cell.pdf>.

²⁸⁸ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population October 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/October-2025-In-Cell.pdf>.

²⁸⁹ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population January 2022 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/January-2022-In-Cell.pdf>.

²⁹⁰ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population October 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' (n 167); Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population October 2024 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/OCTOBER-2024-In-Cell.pdf>.

These increases across the prison estate mean that Ireland has drifted even further from adhering to the CPT's minimum standard for living space, which is 6 m² per person in single cells and 4 m² per person in multiple-occupancy cells, excluding the sanitary annexe.²⁹¹

In its official response to the CPT report in 2025, the Government did not provide a detailed reply regarding the minimum standard of living space, as raised by the CPT.²⁹² It merely stated that the IPS must accept into custody all those committed to prison by the Courts, and that where maximum capacity is exceeded attempts are made to deal with this situation through temporary release and transfers.²⁹³

Given the severity of overcrowding and the sheer volume of mattresses and camp beds being relied on across the Irish prison system, it is concerning that there is not a more considered and nuanced response that demonstrates a willingness and determination to address the cramped spaces people are being forced to live in. As stressed by the Dóchas Prison Visiting Committee in its 2025 report, "there is a need to do something more creative than adding more mattresses to limited floor space and turning more office space into cells".²⁹⁴

Making three to four people, with varying medical, psychological and addiction needs and often complex trauma, share a room intended for one person, greatly undermines the possibility for humane detention conditions, as discussed in Standard 7 (p. 42). Where cell-sharing does occur, it should only happen with the agreement of all people concerned and only following a thorough risk assessment. The extent to which this was done throughout 2025 is unclear.

In IPRT's consultations, stakeholders raised concerns that individuals serving life sentences now have to share a cell with at least one other person, which was not previously the case.²⁹⁵ Stakeholders also observed the practice of placing two individuals with mental health issues in the same cell, seemingly based on a logic that they had a shared characteristic, rather than a risk and vulnerability assessment.²⁹⁶ Based on what stakeholders had observed in some prisons in 2025, risk assessments were not being thoroughly carried out, and an absence of IPS data or information on this issue makes it difficult to assess the extent to which they were or were not conducted.²⁹⁷ If indeed risk assessments are not being conducted, this creates significant risk, and may be a contributing factor to increasing assault rates between people in custody in Irish prisons (Standard 27, p. 103).

Assessment of Standard 9: Regress

The number of people in single occupancy cells continued to decrease throughout 2025, as the number of individuals in triple and even quadruple occupancy cells only steadily increased. No decisive policy or practical action was forthcoming from the Government or the Irish Prison Service (IPS) to address this crisis.

²⁹¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Living Space per Prisoner in Prison Establishments: CPT Standards' (2015) <<https://rm.coe.int/16806cc449>>.

²⁹² European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Response of the Irish Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Its Visit to Ireland from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 157) 6.

²⁹³ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Response of the Irish Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Its Visit to Ireland from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 157).

²⁹⁴ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 41) 13.

²⁹⁵ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 44).

²⁹⁶ *ibid.*

²⁹⁷ *ibid*; 'Stakeholder Survey' (26 June 2026).

Standard 10 Pre-trial detention as an exceptional measure

Pre-trial detention is used as an exceptional measure. People on remand are accommodated separately from those who have been convicted of an offence and sentenced.

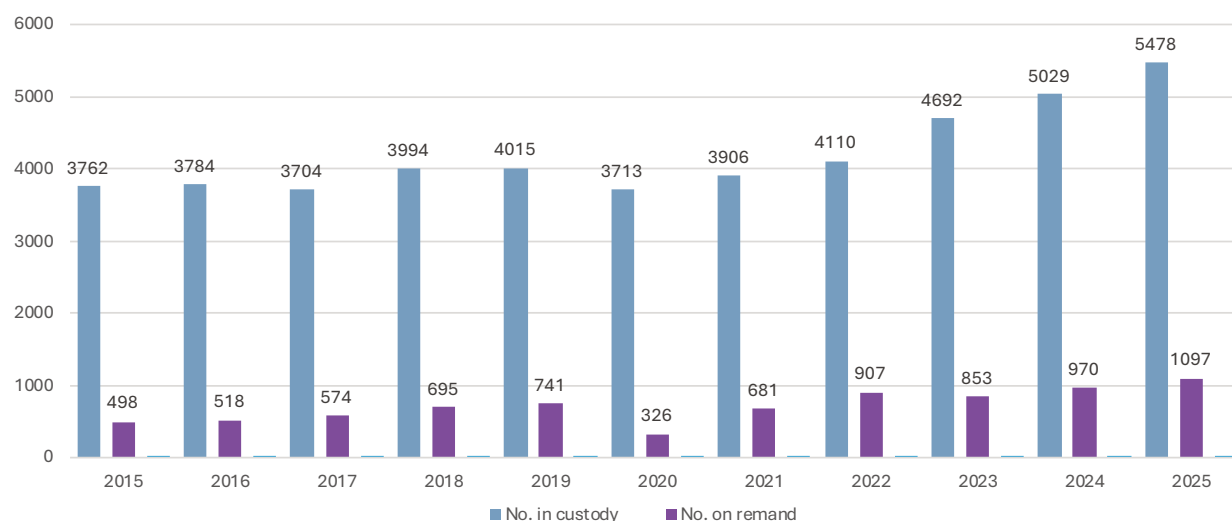
Assessment: Regress

The exceptionality of pre-trial detention as a measure that can be issued by the court is grounded in recognition of the impact it can have on the individual. Not only does it have the potential to undermine an individual's right to the presumption of innocence, but it can have significant psychological impacts on a person and sever the social supports and services they rely on.

This is recognised by international and European human rights law and standards, which hold that any pre-trial detention order must be based on an individualised determination, that is reasonable and necessary, takes into consideration all factors, is in accordance with the law, and is for the shortest possible duration.²⁹⁸ The Irish Constitution (Article 40.4) and subsequent court rulings have established the same.²⁹⁹ Pre-trial detention should be an exceptional rather than a default measure.

Ireland has tended to have low rates of pre-trial detention compared to the European average, owing in part to its status as a common law jurisdiction, differing from the predominantly civil law systems in Europe.³⁰⁰ However, in recent years this tendency has somewhat reversed, with the rates of remand increasing year-on-year since 2021, following the reduced numbers in custody during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the decade since 2015, the proportion of the prison population that is on remand has increased from 13.2 percent to more than 20 per cent.³⁰¹

Figure 8: Daily prison population and rate of remand for 1 July or nearest corresponding date for each year, 2015 - 2025



IPRT's research on the increased use of bail in Ireland indicates that remand custody is being applied by the Court in cases where there is no appropriate alternative, with this lack of an alternative being particularly prevalent in cases involving people experiencing serious mental health conditions, addiction, homelessness and poverty.³⁰² There are

²⁹⁸ Human Rights Committee, 'General Comment No. 35L Article 9 (Liberty and Security of Person)' (2014) CCPR/C/GC/35 paras 37–38 <<https://docs.un.org/en/CCPR/C/GC/35>>. European Court of Human Rights, 'Guide on Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights - Right to Liberty and Security' (2026) 39–40 <https://ks.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr-ks/guide_art_5_eng>.

²⁹⁹ *The People (Attorney General) v. O'Callaghan* [1966] IR 501.

³⁰⁰ Mary Rogan, 'Examining the Role of Legal Culture as a Protective Factor Against High Rates of Pre-trial Detention: The Case of Ireland' 22 *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 425, 425.

³⁰¹ Daily Prison Statistics from the Irish Prison Service for a date in early July for each year from 2015–2025. Daily Prison Statistics for those years available here: <https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/2015-daily-prisoner-population/>

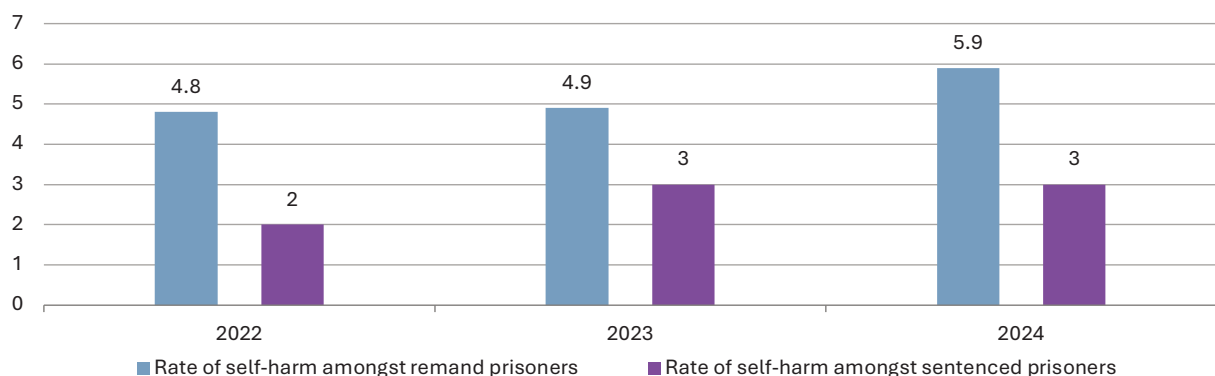
³⁰² Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Rethinking Remand: An Assessment of Pre-Trial Detention in Ireland' 7–8.

intersecting legal and sociological factors that have contributed to this. On the legal aspects, research suggests there is a disproportionate use of objections under section 2 of the Bail Act 1997, that there is a phenomenon of ‘overcharging’, whereby individuals are charged with multiple offences arising from a single incident, and a potential erosion of evidentiary standards in bail applications.³⁰³ Regarding sociological factors, IPRT’s research demonstrated that the current bail framework disproportionately impacts marginalised communities in Irish society. Structural and social factors driving the high rates of remand include cash lodgements for bail that are unaffordable for many living in poverty and precarity, particularly women and members of the Traveller community; the requirement of a fixed address as a bail condition, which penalises individuals experiencing homelessness; and a well-documented structural and systemic bias in bail proceedings against members of the Traveller community.³⁰⁴

IPRT’s research also found that experiences of remand are gendered. Women tend to be remanded to custody for minor offences, including minor theft and public order offences. There is also a growing trend that has been identified as “remands for welfare purposes”, whereby women are remanded to custody based on the level of destitution they are facing in the community, rather than their offending behaviour.³⁰⁵ Women also experience a vicious cycle whereby they are charged with minor offences, such as theft or “survival crime” offences that are linked to poverty, yet this poverty leaves them unable to pay the cash lodgement for bail – even sums as small as €30.³⁰⁶ In essence, the poverty that led them to prison also traps them there. There is also an increase in the average age of women on remand, with the Dóchas Centre Prison Visiting Committee recording that the average age for women on remand in 2025 was 53, with this rising to 60 for the final quarter of the year.³⁰⁷ In its 2025 Annual Report the Committee remarked that despite the IPS’ mission, “there is very little dignity and no rehabilitation in being held on remand in an overcrowded prison”, and given that most women remanded to custody there were charged with non-violent offences “it is not clear that there is any great safety achieved by their incarceration either”.³⁰⁸

Access to rehabilitative services in prison are even more limited than for sentenced individuals.³⁰⁹ This issue compounds the fact that individuals on remand have much higher rates of self-harm than sentenced prisoners and are considered a high-risk group.³¹⁰ The most recent data from the IPS revealed that this rate was in fact twice as high.³¹¹ This both underscores the fact that many individuals remanded to custody are too vulnerable to be there, and that the conditions on remand render them even more vulnerable. IPRT’s research on bail in Ireland found that self-harm incidents among the remand population can be linked to the fear, shame and stigma of being sent to prison, and specifically being unable to pay a bail bond.³¹²

Figure 9: Rate of self-harm per 100 people in prison, 2022-2024. Source: Irish Prison Service, Sixth Report from the Self-Harm Assessment and Data Analysis (SADA) Project (Irish Prison Service 2025)³¹³



³⁰³ *ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Staines (n 8) 204.

³⁰⁶ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Rethinking Remand: An Assessment of Pre-Trial Detention in Ireland’ (n 181) 31.

³⁰⁷ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 41) 15.

³⁰⁸ *ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *ibid.*

³¹⁰ Irish Prison Service, ‘Self-Harm in Irish Prisons: Sixth Report from the Self-Harm Assessment and Data Analysis (SADA) Project’ (2025) 23 <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Self-harm-in-Irish-Prisons-2024-Sixth-report-from-the-SADA-Project-1.pdf>.

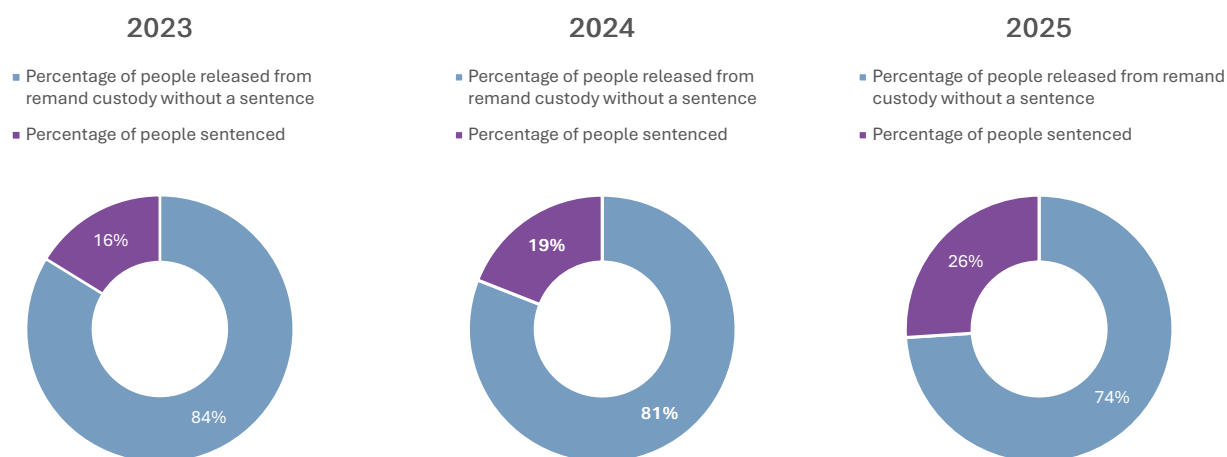
³¹¹ *ibid.*

³¹² Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Rethinking Remand: An Assessment of Pre-Trial Detention in Ireland’ (n 181) 62.

³¹³ Irish Prison Service, ‘Self-Harm in Irish Prisons: Sixth Report from the Self-Harm Assessment and Data Analysis (SADA) Project’ (n 189).

In 2025, 74 per cent of people remanded to custody were released without a sentence.³¹⁴ Whilst this is a slight reduction in the rate in recent years, when in 2024 this was the case for 81 per cent of those remanded to custody, and 84 per cent in 2023, this remains a concerning high proportion.³¹⁵ Release from custody without a sentence may be because the individual was not convicted, did not receive a custodial sentence, or because the Court deemed the time already served to be sufficient. Nonetheless, these rates raise questions as to the types of offences that people are being remanded into custody for, and the reasons they were placed in custody under circumstances where they were either not convicted at all, or were convicted of a minor offence that did not result in a custodial sentence. Such high rates give rise to doubts about the basis of the decisions to remand individuals to custody in the first place. Research suggests that a paucity of essential social services and requisite staffing and funding mean that rather than remand being used exceptionally, it has mutated to become a catch-all for unmet social needs. Such needs – addiction, mental health issues, and related poverty and homelessness – are unlikely to be met in an overcrowded prison, and risk being made worse by such an environment. This then raises questions around the State's obligations under Article 3 ECHR, which not only mean that the State must refrain from subjecting people to inhuman and degrading treatment, but that it must take positive steps to protect people from such treatment.³¹⁶ Where an individual is particularly vulnerable due to their mental illness, addiction or psychosis, the State has a heightened obligation to ensure they are not subjected to treatment that may aggravate these conditions.³¹⁷

Figure 10: Percentage of people released from remand custody without a sentence, 2023-2025³¹⁸



Of further concern, is the fact that the average length of time an individual spends in remand custody has also increased in recent years. In 2025, the average length of time an individual spent on remand was 41 days, up from 39 days in 2024 and 34 days in 2023.³¹⁹ Though incremental, this increase in time spent on remand risks protracting the impact it can have on the individual, particularly those who are vulnerable. It is also concerning, given that due to overcrowding, individuals remanded in custody are being placed in cells with individuals who have been sentenced.

The requirement for individuals remanded to custody to be held separately from the sentenced prison population is clearly outlined in the Nelson Mandela Rules (Rule 11(b)), European Prison Rules (Rule 18.8), and Article 10(2)(a) of the International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). Since ratifying the ICCPR in 1989, Ireland has maintained a reservation to Article 10(2), stating:

Ireland accepts the principles referred to in paragraph 2 of article 10 and implements them as far as practically possible. It reserves the right to regard full implementation of these principles as objectives to be achieved progressively.³²⁰

³¹⁴ Data provided by the Irish Prison Service in June 2026 in response to a data request.

³¹⁵ *ibid.*

³¹⁶ *X and Others v Bulgaria* (App no 22457/16) (GC, ECtHR, 2 February 2021); *O’Keeffe v Ireland* (App no 35810/09) (GC, ECtHR, 28 January 2014)

³¹⁷ *Stawomir Musiał v Poland* (App no 28300/06) (ECtHR, 20 January 2009)

³¹⁸ Data received by IPRT on 6 June 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

³²⁰ Law Reform Commission, ‘Discussion Paper: Domestic Implementation of International Obligations’ (2020) 145

<https://www.lawreform.ie/_fileupload/Reports/LRC%20124%202020%20-%20Domestic%20Implementation%20of%20International%20Obligations.pdf>.

Despite this commitment to progressively implement Article 10(2) and its provision for the separation of remand and sentenced individuals in custody, for yet another year Ireland has moved even further from realising this principle. In September 2025, there were 519 individuals on remand sharing a cell with a sentenced individual – a 12 per cent increase from the previous year.³²¹ This growing number represents a 70.2 per cent increase since 2022, when overcrowding began to proliferate in Irish prisons.

Table 10: Number of individuals on remand cell-sharing with sentenced individuals at year end 2022-2025³²²

Place of detention	2022	2023	2024	2025
Castlereagh	39	37	58	61
Cloverhill	41	96	111	108
Cork	49	68	82	84
Limerick (F)	7	5	8	15
Limerick (M)	34	34	33	23
Midlands	81	67	59	65
Mountjoy (F)	15	37	29	43
Mountjoy (M)	2	7	17	23
Portlaoise	10	9	17	16
Wheatfield	26	54	49	81
Total	304	415	463	519

IPRT reiterates its previous recommendations to the Government to remove its reservation to Article 10(2) of the ICCPR as part of its review of the Irish Prison Rules 2007, and amend Rule 71 to guarantee, without exception, the separation in custody of individuals on remand from those sentenced.³²³ As part of the same review, the Government should enshrine the principle of prison as a last resort in law. The Bail Act 1997 should also be amended to ensure that material conditions and prison capacity are considered as a key factor when deciding whether it is appropriate to remand an individual to custody.

Assessment of Standard 10: Regress

The increase in the number of people held in pre-trial detention, which began in 2022, only continued throughout 2025. By the year's end, more than 20 per cent of the prison population were individuals on remand. Overcrowding is both exacerbated by increased remand figures, and itself exacerbates the experiences of any individual on remand.

³²¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Wednesday, 17 Sep 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (17 September 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-09-17/873>> accessed 23 July 2026.

³²² *ibid.* Note: the figures for 2025 are those from 9 September 2025, whilst the figures for 2022, 2023 and 2024 are taken from the 31 December of that year.

³²³ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Rethinking Remand: An Assessment of Pre-Trial Detention in Ireland' (n 181) 54.

Standard 11 Family contact

Every person in prison is encouraged, supported and facilitated to establish and maintain positive family relationships and other close social connections and friendships.

Assessment: Regress

Maintaining contact and relationships with family, friends and loved ones is not only crucial for encouraging rehabilitation and reintegration but is also the right of any person in prison.³²⁴ Rule 35 of the Irish Prison Rules 2007 provides that all sentenced persons in prison may have family visits for 30 minutes each week, and the frequency and duration of visits may be extended at the discretion of the Governor. During the COVID-19 pandemic, 20-minute video-calls were introduced in Irish prisons. These have been retained and can be opted for rather than in-person visits.³²⁵ However, it is important to ensure that video calls are in addition to and not a replacement of in-person visits.

According to both monitoring bodies and people in prison themselves, current visiting times are too short to facilitate meaningful contact.³²⁶ In-person visits require significant planning and come at a high cost for families with a parent in prison. Visits require family members to take time off work, remove children from school and make arrangements for other caring responsibilities. On the financial side, there is the loss of income for time off work, and the cost of transport – in addition to the fact that the household has already potentially lost one source of income.³²⁷ There is also the issue that visits are not available on weekends or in the evening, creating further difficulties (with the exception of Cork prison, which does facilitate evening visits).³²⁸ A visit of 30 minutes is not commensurate with the effort, cost and travel time that goes into it for those visiting.³²⁹ In its recommendations to the Irish Government in 2025, the CPT recommended that the duration of visits should be increased to one hour per week.³³⁰ However, the Government responded that “due to current levels of overcrowding, the Irish Prison Service is not in a position to increase this”.³³¹

Not only are the allotted times not sufficient, but stakeholders and people in prison have recounted to IPRT that usually they do not get a full 20-minute videocall.³³² This is due to delays in being brought down from their cell, as a result of overcrowding and understaffing.³³³ For videocalls, some people in prison have reported getting only 10 minutes.³³⁴ This is particularly disappointing, given that 20 minutes already falls below the statutory minimum for in-person visits.³³⁵ For non-Irish nationals in Irish prisons, the Council of Europe recommends that visits by their family members travelling from abroad should be arranged flexibly, such as allowing them to combine their visit entitlements.³³⁶ **IPRT reiterates, as it did in PIPS 2024 and previously, that when videocalls are chosen as an alternative to visits, they must meet the statutory minimum duration of in-person visits of 30 minutes. IPRT would also, once again, echo the recommendation of the CPT, that both weekly in-person visits and video calls be increased to one-hour duration.**³³⁷

³²⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (44/25) art 9; European Convention on Human Rights 1950 art 8; ‘The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)’ (n 132); European Prison Rules 2020.

³²⁵ ‘Information Regarding the Justice Sector COVID-19 Plans’ (gov.ie, 13 November 2020) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/publications/information-regarding-the-justice-sector-covid-19-plans/>> accessed 19 August 2026.

³²⁶ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 14) para 269. ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44).

³²⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Paying the Price: The Cost and Impact of Imprisonment on Families in Ireland’ (2025) 31–32 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7711/paying_the_price_-_the_cost_and_impact_of_imprisonment_on_families_in_ireland_-_final_digital.pdf>.

³²⁸ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144) 25–26. Stakeholder Consultation by the Traveller Justice Initiative (TJI) in March 2026.

³²⁹ Cork Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e3b2cf8f/Cork_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

³³⁰ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 14) para 269.

³³¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Response of the Irish Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Its Visit to Ireland from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 157) 34.

³³² ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44).

³³³ *ibid.*

³³⁴ *ibid.*

³³⁵ Irish Prison Rules 2007 r 35.

³³⁶ CM/Rec(2012)12 – Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member States concerning foreign prisoners (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 10 October 2012 at the 1152nd meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies) (CM/Rec(2012)12).

An issue that continued in 2025 was that many of those visiting people in prison were only provided with screened visits.³³⁸ In some cases, this was due to swab tests being triggered. In other cases, as raised by the CPT's report, screened visits were being systematically ordered for individuals on certain restricted regimes.³³⁹ The CPT recommended that all people in prison be able to receive visitors without physical separation, except in individual circumstances where there may be a security concern, stating:

“open” visiting arrangements should be the rule and “closed” ones the exception, for all legal categories of prisoners. Any decision to impose closed visits must always be well-founded and reasoned, and based on an individual assessment of the potential risk posed by the prisoner”.³⁴⁰

Families of people in prison and stakeholders have also reported to IPRT that there are instances of in-person visits being cancelled at short notice, sometimes on the day of the visit, and usually without providing an explanation.³⁴¹ Whilst the IPS has previously stated that overcrowding means that not all visits can be facilitated, for some family members the lack of explanation causes them concern, as they then worry that the individual has done something to have the visit revoked or cancelled it themselves.³⁴² Some family members have contacted IPRT about the cancellation of multiple visits, sometimes consecutively, or have recounted that when they arrive for a visit they are told to return at a different time, only for the visit to ultimately be cancelled.³⁴³ Cancellations also take a toll on the individuals in prison, with some telling Prison Visiting Committees that it has led to feelings of anxiety and depression.³⁴⁴

In 2025, there were 162,823 visits made to people in prison.³⁴⁵ The available data demonstrates an outsized difference in the number of visits paid by women to people in prison compared with men, with 94 per cent of all visits to prison being made by women.³⁴⁶ Notably, women also paid more visits to women's prisons than men did. Although data for Limerick prison was not divided between the men and women's prisons, the data provided for visits to the Dóchas Centre reveal that women made 6,652 visits, compared to 172 visits made by men.

Table 11: Number of visits made to each prison in 2025, disaggregated by gender

Place of detention	Visits made by women	Visits made by men
Arbour Hill	5,940	421
Castlerea	7,087	1,017
Cloverhill	12,332	489
Cork	10,997	353
Limerick	12,127	354
Loughan House	6,185	288
Midlands	32,264	3,386
Dóchas Centre	6,652	172
Mountjoy	25,379	721
Portlaoise	10,940	760
Shelton Abbey	4,812	240
Training Unit	3,619	253
Wheatfield	15,598	437
Total	153,932	8,891

³³⁷ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 14) para 269.

³³⁸ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144) 14.

³³⁹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 14) para 270.

³⁴⁰ *ibid* 270–271.

³⁴¹ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 44).

³⁴² Stakeholder Consultation by the Traveller Justice Initiative (TJI) in March 2026. Queries received by IPRT from family members of people in prison.

³⁴³ *Ibid*.

³⁴⁴ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144) 19.

³⁴⁵ Data provided by the IPS in response to an FOI request.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

A new policy for visits was introduced by the IPS in November 2025, whereby children attending a visit must have a form of identification with them.³⁴⁷ The policy also dictates that visits by people under 18 must be by a son or daughter, step-son or step-daughter or a grandchild of the person in prison.³⁴⁸ This therefore excludes siblings, nieces and nephews who may be under 18, and creates quite a restrictive definition of family. For individuals in prison, the policy has made in-person visits more difficult to arrange, as there is a lack of clarity about the policy.³⁴⁹ In IPRT's consultations with stakeholders it was raised that where a birth certificate is used as a form of identification, prison staff have responded that the father's name must correspond with that on the birth certificate – despite the fact that step-children are included in the categories of permitted visitors under 18.³⁵⁰ **This is an apparent discrepancy between policy and practice, in which case IPRT recommends that clarification is provided to staff across all prisons, to ensure visits are not unduly restricted. IPRT also recommends that the category of persons under 18 permitted to attend visits is expanded to include siblings, nieces and nephews, as the existing categories are unduly restrictive and do not take account of different family circumstances.**

At present, individuals in prison are permitted one six-minute outbound phone call per day. For individuals with larger families, particularly those from the Traveller community, this amount of time is not sufficient for meaningful family contact.³⁵¹ Increasing the permitted call-time was recommended by the CPT, to which the Government responded that due to overcrowding, it is not possible to implement this recommendation due to "ICT infrastructure and security resource requirements".³⁵² However, the Government's response did commit to initiating a pilot project allowing individuals in prison to receive two 10-minute inbound calls a day.³⁵³ By the end of 2025, the project had not yet been rolled out but was due to start in 2026.

An encouraging new initiative in 2025 for facilitating family contact was the Family Day introduced in the Dóchas Centre as part of the Summer School, facilitating a three-hour visit between the women and their children.³⁵⁴ Families could take part in activities or spend time with each other in private spaces in the sports hall, and children could also opt to see where their mothers sleep and live.³⁵⁵ Having this extended period of time with their children was of huge benefit to the women, with one woman reflecting that "having the time to play, talk and listen to my child was incredible. It felt like I was never away from her and we fit right back together".³⁵⁶ In Castlerea prison, the 'Eyes of the Child' project, aimed at making the prison a more accessible environment for children visiting, has also been commended.³⁵⁷

Assessment of Standard 11: Regress

Despite some positive initiatives in specific prisons in 2025, which are to be encouraged, there was a regression with regard to the facilitation of in-person visits. Specifically, the cancellation of visits with little prior notice, and a lack of explanation for the reasoning, had a significant impact on both people in prison and their families. Reduced time for video calls takes a further toll and limits the overall contact individuals can have with their families. At a time when severe overcrowding is impacting the mental well-being of many in prison, facilitating contact with family and loved ones is paramount.

³⁴⁷ 'Prison Visits Information' (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/requesting-a-physical-visit/prison-visits-information/>> accessed 24 July 2026.

³⁴⁸ *ibid.*

³⁴⁹ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144).

³⁵⁰ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 44).

³⁵¹ Stakeholder Consultation by the Traveller Justice Initiative (TJI) in March 2026.

³⁵² European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Response of the Irish Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Its Visit to Ireland from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 157) 14.

³⁵³ *ibid.*

³⁵⁴ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 41) 31.

³⁵⁵ *ibid.*

³⁵⁶ *ibid.*

³⁵⁷ Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e40264dd/Castlerea_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

Standard 12 Access to healthcare services

All people in prison have timely access to healthcare services, including mental health services, which goes beyond the 'equivalence of care'³⁵⁸ principle. People have access to a full range of preventative services, and there is continuity between prison and community services.

Assessment: Mixed

All people in prison have the right to healthcare that is equal to that of the general population. This is clearly outlined in the Mandela Rules (Rule 24(1)), the Bangkok Rules (Rule 10), and the European Prison Rules (Rule 40). The Irish Prison Rules 2007 also provide for “the provision of healthcare of a diagnostic, preventative, curative and rehabilitative nature that is, at least, of the same or a similar standard as that available to persons outside of prison” (Rule 33). The healthcare needs of people in prison are often more acute than those of the general population, owing to a large proportion of people coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, and the high risk of the spread of certain illnesses in prison environments.

Over the course of 2025, the Health Needs Assessment Committee, comprising representatives from the Departments of Justice, Health, the IPS and the Health Service Executive met three times.³⁵⁹ The group is responsible for monitoring progress on the implementation of the recommendations made in the 2022 Health Needs Assessment (HNA) for the IPS. The second progress report on their implementation was released in July 2025 and includes encouraging developments. They range from the development of a policy by the IPS to improve and standardise healthcare committal interviews, and specifically regarding health services for women, the recruitment of locum psychotherapists to support women who have been victim of sexual and gender-based violence, and workshops on the topic of consent.³⁶⁰ Regarding the progress of the Mental Health and Disability Needs Analysis, which is aimed at identifying the prevalence of mental health issues across the prison population and assessing the effectiveness of relevant services, the HNA report detailed that the project was due to begin before the end of 2025.³⁶¹ By the end of the year however, it remained unclear whether the project had begun.

Healthcare staffing resources have been a longstanding issue for many Irish prisons. It was therefore encouraging that a number of positions were filled and the recruitment process for others was initiated in 2025, including the recruitment of GPs, a Chief Pharmacist and a locum staff grade Pharmacist.³⁶² As previously raised by the OIP and Prison Visiting Committees, **IPRT reiterates that the recruitment of locum medical staff does not allow for long-term planning and care, and makes it difficult to manage waiting lists and creates a gap for clinical governance and oversight.**³⁶³

The recruitment of Healthcare Assistants has proven to be of significant benefit, particularly for older individuals in prison who require increased support due to difficulties with mobility and cognitive decline, as well as individuals with additional needs.³⁶⁴ **IPRT recommends the recruitment of Healthcare Assistants across the prison system, to provide necessary support to those that need it and alleviate pressure on medical and non-medical staff members.**

Despite these encouraging recruitments, there is an evident need for increased staffing for night nurses. In Mountjoy this issue has been repeatedly raised by both the Office of the Inspector of Prisons and the Prison Visiting Committee in every annual report since 2022.³⁶⁵ One nurse on duty for a prison population of over 1,000 men across Mountjoy West,

³⁵⁸ The equivalence of care principle asserts that people in prison should enjoy the same standards of care that are available in the community, and should have access to necessary healthcare services free of charge without discrimination on the grounds of their legal status. This principle is provided by the Mandela Rules (Rule 24(1)), the European Prison Rules (Rule 40.1), and the Bangkok Rules (Rule 12).

³⁵⁹ 'Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee - Minutes of Meetings' (gov.ie, 2 August 2024) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/collections/health-needs-assessment-steering-committee-minutes-of-meetings/>> accessed 26 July 2026.

³⁶⁰ Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee, 'IPS Health Needs Assessment - 2nd Progress Report, June 2024 - June 2025' (2025) 5 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/ac1f4cb1/Health_Needs_Assessment_-_2nd_Progress_Report_2024-2025.pdf>.

³⁶¹ 'Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee - Minutes of Meetings' (n 237) 5.

³⁶² Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee, 'Irish Prison Service Health Needs Assessment: 4th Meeting of the Steering Committee, 5 March 2025 - Minutes of Meeting' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/HNA_Steering_Committee_Minutes_of_Meeting_08_March_2025.pdf>; Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee, 'Irish Prison Service Health Needs Assessment: 5th Meeting of the Steering Committee, 7 July 2025 - Minutes of Meeting' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/20250707_FINAL_HNA_SC_Minutes_07_July_2025.pdf>; Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee, 'Irish Prison Service Health Needs Assessment: 6th Meeting of the Steering Committee, 3 November 2025 - Minutes of Meeting' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/5c6c1d78/HNA_Steering_Committee_Minutes_of_Meeting_03_November_2025.pdf>.

³⁶³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 79) 20; Castlereagh Prison Visiting Committee (n 235) 6.

³⁶⁴ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144). Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee, 'Irish Prison Service Health Needs Assessment: 5th Meeting of the Steering Committee, 7 July 2025 - Minutes of Meeting' (n 240).

³⁶⁵ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Inspection Report - Follow-up Inspection: Mountjoy Prison, 28 April 2025 - 2 May 2025' (n 153); Mountjoy

the Main Prison and the Training Unit is a significant risk, particularly in a scenario where two or more medical emergencies may occur in the same night.³⁶⁶ Similarly in Wheatfield Prison, there is only one nurse on duty at night for 600-700 men, creating significant risk, and placing a great deal of pressure for the person on shift.³⁶⁷

Several of the Prison Visiting Committees reported receiving a notable number of complaints from the individuals in prison they engaged with regarding the provision of primary healthcare.³⁶⁸ The OIP also noted 11 letters from people in prison in which concerns were raised regarding their access to healthcare services.³⁶⁹ Recurring topics amongst these complaints and letters were changes in prescriptions or medications they had received in the community or other prisons, a sentiment that health concerns were not adequately addressed or considered by medical staff, and referrals to specialist services and consistency of follow-up appointments.³⁷⁰

Stakeholders also raised the issue of women's difficulty in accessing Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) for menopause in the Dóchas Centre.³⁷¹ The issue of difficulties in receiving HRT had been highlighted throughout the year by women to the Prison Visiting Committee too.³⁷² It is welcome, however, that the Well Woman Clinic in Limerick Women's prison continues to provide on-site cervical screening, contraception and menopause advice to women since it was established in 2023.³⁷³ Cervical screening is a particularly crucial service, given that HPV prevalence in the prison population was found to be double that of the general population.³⁷⁴ The quality and the impact of the service have been recognised, with stigma around screening being reduced and women reporting that it feels safer and less traumatic.³⁷⁵ **On the strengths of the service in Limerick Women's Prison, IPRT recommends that a similar service should be established in the Dóchas Centre, to ensure all women in custody are receiving necessary cervical screening in an environment that feels safe and secure.**

The prison population in Ireland is ageing rapidly, and is projected to continue to do so.³⁷⁶ Whilst there is a lack of recent data, the IPS reported in 2023 that 18.2 per cent of the prison population were aged 50 years or older, and that this figure had doubled over the last decade.³⁷⁷ Recent Annual Reports by the IPS have differentiated age groups by 45-54 and 55+, making it more difficult to assess the size of the 50+ age cohort in 2025.³⁷⁸ However, these reports indicate that six per cent of the prison population was over the age of 55 in 2024, with this increasing to seven per cent in 2025.³⁷⁹ The reasons for an ageing cohort of the prison population are varied, with some ageing in prison due to long sentences, while others are entering prison at an older age due to conviction for historical sexual offences and others having offended as a result of undiagnosed dementia.³⁸⁰

An ageing prison population provides challenges for both those in prison and staff. There is the issue that the current prison infrastructure is not equipped for the needs of older persons, combined with overcrowding and inadequate staff resourcing. Added to this is the issue of a lack of data on the prevalence of dementia or on screening for cognitive impairments by prison medical staff.³⁸¹ There are also ethical considerations regarding cases where there are advanced

Prison Visiting Committee (n 144).

³⁶⁶ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144); Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Inspection Report - Follow-up Inspection: Mountjoy Prison, 28 April 2025 — 2 May 2025' (n 153).

³⁶⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 79) 20.

³⁶⁸ Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee (n 144). Limerick Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/a4fc66ed/Limerick_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144).

³⁶⁹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 79) 42.

³⁷⁰ Limerick Prison Visiting Committee (n 246); Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144); Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee (n 144); Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 79) 42.

³⁷¹ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 44). 'Stakeholder Survey' (n 176).

³⁷² Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 41).

³⁷³ 'CervicalCheck Supports Trauma-Informed Cervical Screening at Limerick Female Prison' (HSE.ie) <<https://www2.healthservice.hse.ie/organisation/nss/news/cervicalcheck-supports-trauma-informed-cervical-screening-at-limerick-female-prison/>> accessed 27 July 2026.

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Limerick Prison Visiting Committee (n 246); 'CervicalCheck Supports Trauma-Informed Cervical Screening at Limerick Female Prison' (n 251).

³⁷⁶ Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Strategy 2023-2027' (n 88) 6.

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

³⁷⁸ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 33). Irish Prison Service, 'Annual Report 2024' (n 97) 62.

³⁷⁹ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 33). Irish Prison Service, 'Annual Report 2024' (n 97) 62.

³⁸⁰ Global Brain Health Institute and Crime and Punishment Research Group, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin, 'Discussion Forum on Ageing, Brain Health and Cognitive Impairment in Irish Prisons June 2026' (Trinity College Dublin 2026) 5 <<https://www.gbhi.org/media/2864/download?inline>>.

³⁸¹ Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Strategy 2023-2027' (n 88) 62; Global Brain Health Institute and Crime and Punishment Research Group, School of

cognitive impairment and the careful balance between protecting an individual's dignity whilst they serve a custodial sentence for an offence.³⁸²

As raised in PIPS 2024, there continue to be significant delays in accessing dental care for people in prison.³⁸³ The issue was highlighted by several Prison Visiting Committees' annual reports, as well as the CPT's 2025 report.³⁸⁴ During its unannounced inspection of Castlerea prison, the OIP found that the dentist came one day a month, resulting in a waiting list of 176 people – or two in every five people in the prison.³⁸⁵ Such delays leave can leave people in significant pain, and contribute to deteriorating dental hygiene over time.

Assessment of Standard 12: **Mixed**

The resourcing of additional healthcare staff is a welcome development, particularly healthcare assistants. Further recruitment is needed across the board however, particularly the recruitment of night nurses, to mitigate risk of a serious health emergency occurring and of there not being enough staff to adequately respond, and to alleviate pressure on all staff working in prisons. The continued work of the Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee is also encouraging, though it is disappointing that the Mental Health Needs Assessment had seemingly not been initiated by the end of 2025.

Standard 13 Mental healthcare

People with serious mental health issues are diverted from the prison system and receive appropriate treatment and supports in an appropriate facility or service in a timely manner.

Assessment: **Regress**

For the reasons outlined in the Spotlight of PIPS 2025 (P.7), this Standard has been categorised as 'regress' for 2025.

Standard 14 Drug and alcohol treatment

People with drug and alcohol addiction challenges are diverted from the criminal justice system to receive appropriate treatment. Where imprisonment is the only appropriate option, treatment must be made available within prison, with a continuum of care upon release.

Assessment: **Regress**

Whilst there is a widespread understanding that drug and alcohol addiction is a prevalent condition amongst the prison population in Ireland, there is a regrettable lack of up-to-date data to capture this issue. Recent estimates, including those by the Irish Prison Service and the Minister of Justice, have indicated that at least 70 per cent of people in prison face addiction issues.³⁸⁶ A snapshot figure indicative of the proportion of individuals in prison experiencing addiction is

Law, Trinity College Dublin (n 258) 5.

³⁸² Global Brain Health Institute and Crime and Punishment Research Group, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin (n 258) 5.

³⁸³ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 44).

³⁸⁴ Limerick Prison Visiting Committee (n 246). Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144). European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 14) para 209.

³⁸⁵ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 79) 22.

³⁸⁶ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Wednesday, 8 Oct 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (8 October 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-10-08/278>> accessed 18 July 2026. Caron McCaffrey, 'Caron McCaffrey, Director General, Irish Prison Service Speaks at the Citizen Assembly on Drug Use' 1

that on 28 April 2025, 12.25 per cent of the prison population were on methadone maintenance therapy.³⁸⁷

Despite the lack of accurate data, a picture can still be pieced together of addiction in Irish prisons and the number of individuals engaging with available services and the availability of such services. In January 2025, there were 953 people in prisons across Ireland on waiting lists to access addiction services – with 27 per cent of those being in Mountjoy men’s prison.³⁸⁸ Based on the average prison population for January 2025, which was 5,030, approximately 19 per cent of people in prison were waiting to access addiction services.³⁸⁹

Whilst it is not clear how long these individuals had spent on waiting lists, given the nature of addiction and the emphasis placed on autonomous decision-making to seek support, it is concerning that hundreds of vulnerable individuals have taken the decision to seek help but are not receiving it. Having to wait potentially extensive periods to access addiction services may jeopardise their decision to seek support and mean they remain in active addiction. Further, given the extensive waiting lists, those serving short sentences are very unlikely to be able to access rehabilitative services, including addiction support. This means that upon their release from prison they are potentially released back into the same precarious circumstances that contributed to their imprisonment and in a more vulnerable condition, continuing the cycle of addiction, offending behaviour and imprisonment.³⁹⁰

The gap between staff-resourcing for addiction services and the evident demand for such services goes some way to explaining these waiting list figures. Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) is engaged by the IPS to provide addiction counselling and support across the Irish prison estate. In January 2025, there were just 18 Addiction Counsellors from MQI covering the entire prison population.³⁹¹ This is below the sanctioned quota of 20 Addiction Counsellors, which is already an insufficient amount, given the estimated rates of addiction.³⁹² Whilst there were indications that more Addiction Counsellors were due to be recruited to fill the quota, **IPRT recommends that the sanctioned quota be increased to reflect the growing prison population and the demand for addiction services.**³⁹³

Table 12: Number of Addiction Counsellors and waiting lists per prison, January 2025³⁹⁴

Place of detention	Total Counsellors	Waiting List
Cork	2	103
Limerick	2	117
Midlands	2	75
Portlaoise	1	67
Mountjoy	2	256
Dóchas	2	33
Loughan House	1	10
Shelton Abbey	1	0
Cloverhill	1	55
Wheatfield	2	160
Castlerea	2	77
Total	18	953

<https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/DG-speech-Citizen-Assembly-Final.docx.pdf>.

³⁸⁷ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 30 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (30 April 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-04-30/127>> accessed 28 July 2026.

³⁸⁸ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 5 Mar 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (5 March 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-03-05/128>> accessed 20 July 2026.

³⁸⁹ Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Monthly Information Note – January 2025’ (n 86).

³⁹⁰ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 44).

³⁹¹ Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 5 Mar 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (n 266).

³⁹² *ibid.*

³⁹³ *ibid.*

³⁹⁴ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 8 Oct 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (8 October 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-10-08/278>> accessed 17 July 2026.

The lack of increase in the number of addiction counsellors in line with the 9.6 per cent increase in the prison population from 2024 to 2025 is reflected in the ratio of addiction counsellor to persons in prison. In 2024, the average ratio of addiction counsellor to person in prison was 1:282, which increased to 1:310 in 2025 (see Table 13).³⁹⁵ The most outsized ratio was recorded in Wheatfield Prison, where there was one addiction counsellor for every 684 people in prison, up from 626 in 2024, with Midlands Prison recording one counsellor for every 513 people and Cloverhill Prison one counsellor for every 498 people.³⁹⁶

Table 13: Average ratio of addiction counsellors per people in prison, 2024-2025³⁹⁷

Prison	2024	2025
Arbour Hill	N/A	N/A
Castlerea	1:195	1:220
Cloverhill	1:492	1:498
Cork	1:167	1:183
Limerick (Women)	1:74	1:86
Limerick (Men)	1:331	1:381
Loughan House	1:123	1:130
Midlands	1:481	1:513
Dóchas Centre	1:88	1:97
Mountjoy Male	1:287	1:333
Portlaoise	0.5:237	0.5:276
Shelton Abbey	1:99	1:104
Training Unit	N/A	N/A
Wheatfield	1:626	1:684
Average across prison estate	1:282	1:310

In 2025, Addiction Counsellors held 15,480 counselling engagements with people in 11 prisons across Ireland, including 1,768 unique individuals.³⁹⁸ This is a steady increase in the number of interventions in recent years, as outlined in the table below (Figure 14). It is also an increase in the number of unique individuals seen by MQI's Addiction Counsellors compared to 2024, when this figure stood at 1,283.³⁹⁹ This is a welcome return to figures recorded by MQI in previous years, with 2,035 and 2,126 unique individuals seen in 2023 and 2022, respectively.⁴⁰⁰ Whilst this is an encouraging figure, it would be particularly encouraging to see the number of individuals increase as well as the number of interventions, as one without the other represents a decrease in the level of intervention and heightens pressure on MQI.

Table 14: Addiction counselling services provided by Merchant's Quay Ireland, 2022 - 2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Total number of interventions	13,241	14,947	15,364	15,480
Number of unique clients seen	2,126	2,035	1,283	1,768

In the medical unit of Mountjoy, MQI operates a bespoke Treatment and Rehabilitation Programme (TARP), which runs in

³⁹⁵ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

³⁹⁶ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

³⁹⁷ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

³⁹⁸ Merchant's Quay Ireland, 'Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year Ended 31 December 2025' 10 <<https://mqi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/06/MQI-CLG-AFS-2025-Final.pdf>>.

³⁹⁹ Merchant's Quay Ireland, 'Merchant's Quay Ireland Annual Review 2024' 14 <<https://mqi.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/MQI-Annual-Review-2024.pdf>>.

⁴⁰⁰ Data taken from Merchant's Quay Ireland Annual Reports for 202 and 2023, available here: <https://mqi.ie/reports/>

eight-week cycles and can support up to nine people in each cycle.⁴⁰¹ In 2025, MQI recorded that over four cycles, 36 individuals in Mountjoy enrolled in TARP and 31 completed the programme – an 86 per cent completion rate.⁴⁰² These completion rates are encouraging, and give insight to the potential reach of TARP if the number of Addiction Counsellors was increased – particularly important given the significant waiting lists recorded in Mountjoy in 2025, as mentioned above. In other prisons however, there were calls for more structured addiction supports similar to TARP. This was raised by the Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee, which whilst recognising the importance of the prison's Methadone Programme, highlighted the need for “more strident support and counselling”.⁴⁰³

The current overcrowding crisis also has a significant impact on access to addiction supports and the effectiveness of such supports. Stakeholders have recounted to IPRT that although an individual may be accessing treatment, in some instances they may have to return to and share a cramped cell with at least one other individual who may be in active addiction.⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, living in unacceptable conditions – mattresses on floors, unscreened toilets, poor ventilation and natural light, limited access to showers and excessive time spent in the cell – are not conducive to recovery.

For those who have been availing of addiction services while in prison, there is a notable lack of planning and coordination to continue these supports and ensure they receive the right prescriptions upon release, particularly for Temporary Release (TR).⁴⁰⁵ Many people are released without their medication, prescriptions or access to a GP, adding to the precarity of their situation.⁴⁰⁶ Stakeholders have told IPRT that in many cases, individuals who are on methadone have been released on a Friday and then do not have access to a methadone clinic until it opens the following week.⁴⁰⁷ This issue has been raised by the OIP, stating that release without sufficient support is “counterproductive to rehabilitation, contributes to recidivism, and undermines the objectives of the Temporary Release scheme”.⁴⁰⁸ On this basis, the OIP recommended that when an individual granted TR is required to engage with community services that are only available on weekdays, that the release should occur between Mondays and Thursdays and with an appointment scheduled with these services.⁴⁰⁹

In its annual report on the National Drug Treatment Reporting System (NDTRS), the Health Research Board (HRB) reported that there were an additional 900 treatment cases recorded within prisons in 2025, compared to 2024.⁴¹⁰ However, the report caveated that this reflected improved reporting practices as opposed to increased treatment provision.⁴¹¹ Nonetheless, accurate reporting can contribute to the adequate resourcing of drug treatment services, and so is a welcome development.

Without the systematic collection and analysis of data on addiction rates in prisons, however, the provision of addiction supports will continue to be inadequate. **IPRT therefore reiterates its recommendation from PIPS 2024, to urge that the Mental Health and Disability Needs Analysis commissioned by the IPS, Probation Service and HSE also considers the needs of those with addiction in Irish prisons from a health-based perspective.**

Assessment of Standard 14: Regress

In 2025, waiting lists for addiction services grew in length, whilst the staffing of such services remained relatively unchanged in terms of resourcing, meaning an increase in the ratio of people in prison to each counsellor. The absence of timely data on addiction rates within the prison population and the nature of the addiction makes the resourcing of a health-based approach to recovery, prevention and education near impossible.

⁴⁰¹ Merchant's Quay Ireland (n 276) 10.

⁴⁰² Merchant's Quay Ireland (n 276).

⁴⁰³ Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/01baf1b4/Wheatfield_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁴⁰⁴ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 44).

⁴⁰⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁰⁸ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 79) 31–32.

⁴⁰⁹ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁰ Health Research Board, '2025 Drug Treatment Demand' 2 <<https://www.hrb.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/05/Drug-treatment-bulletin-2025.pdf>>.

⁴¹¹ *ibid.*

Standard 15 Privacy

The right to privacy of all people in prison, and their families or other next of kin, is respected and protected.

Assessment: **Regress.**

In previous editions of PIPS, this standard has focused on media coverage of individuals in prison, who have recently been in prison, and the privacy of their families or next of kin. However, given the current overcrowding crisis, IPRT has observed that the right to privacy of individuals in prison is being severely undermined. In light of this, PIPS 2025 focuses on the various aspects of the right to privacy relevant to a custodial context and assesses the extent to which the right is being protected and respected in current prison conditions.

Article 8 of the ECHR provides that “everyone has the right to respect for his private and family life, his home and his correspondence”, which includes the protection of an individual’s physical and moral integrity. The European Prison Rules 2020 also provide that “the accommodation provided for prisoners, and in particular all sleeping accommodation, shall respect human dignity and, as far as possible, privacy”.

The current and persistent level of overcrowding in Irish prisons, and the resulting daily living conditions, fundamentally undermine the right to privacy for anyone in prison. The more individuals that are placed in a single or double occupancy cell, the less personal space they have, and their enjoyment of their right to privacy diminishes too. The State has a positive obligation to guarantee an individual a minimum level of privacy, with the very least being the ability to toilet privately without anyone else present. In 2025, the majority of people in prison in Ireland were denied this most basic level of privacy in their everyday life.

As mentioned above in Standard 8, the ECtHR has found violations of Article 3 in cases where unscreened toilets were one aspect of a number of living conditions in overcrowded prisons. In some recent cases, however, the Court has found that the conditions caused by prison overcrowding may not amount to inhumane or degrading treatment prohibited by Article 3, but that Article 8 may be invoked – specifically with regard to toileting in the presence of others without an adequate partition.⁴¹² The Court has ruled that obligating an individual to toilet in the presence of other people in an overcrowded cell, for a prolonged amount of time violates Article 8.⁴¹³ It has further stated that security-based justifications provided by States for not installing partitions or screens are “incompatible with the requirement of protecting detainees’ privacy when they share overcrowded cells”.⁴¹⁴ Given that hundreds of individuals in prisons in Ireland in 2025 were sharing a cell with three to four other people, and that the majority of the prison population had to use the toilet in the presence of others, it is highly likely that Article 8 is routinely violated.

Whilst having to use the toilet in front of other people in an overcrowded cell is one particularly intimate and severe infringement of the right to privacy, it is difficult to overstate the absolute lack of privacy afforded to people in overcrowded prisons in Ireland in 2025. When raising its concerns regarding the overcrowding it observed in its 2024 visit, the CPT added that “the resultant lack of personal space and privacy puts all prisoners at risk, especially the most vulnerable”.⁴¹⁵ This observation was made in 2024 before the number of people in prison exceeded 5,000, so this concern is even more pressing.

To sleep, eat meals and spend most hours of the day in close proximity to two, three or four other people, all of whom have their own individual needs, mental health issues, potential addiction and behaviours, and with little relief from this setting, can be both physically and mentally invasive. This common feeling amongst people in prison in 2025 was repeatedly raised with Prison Visiting Committees – specifically Cloverhill, Wheatfield, Cork and Mountjoy, while stakeholders also emphasised the issue to IPRT, observing that there was “less privacy than ever” and that “privacy is a luxury that most are not afforded in the current system”.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹² R.m. c. France (n 158) para 80; Szafranski v. Poland (n 155) paras 38–41.

⁴¹³ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 14) para 31.

⁴¹⁶ Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee (n 281) 3; Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee (n 144) 4; Cork Prison Visiting Committee (n 207) 4; Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 144) 11, 28. ‘Stakeholder Survey’ (n 176).

Assessment of Standard 14: Regress

IPRT believes that on assessment of a number of contributing factors, it is unlikely that for a sizeable number of individuals in Irish prisons, their right to privacy was not fully upheld in 2025. The European Court of Human Rights is clear, that states cannot use security justifications to avoid their obligations to make accommodations and adjustments to secure a minimum level of privacy for people in overcrowded prisons.

ASSESSMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Section B: An effective and humane penal system

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
7. Humane prison conditions	Since the CPT concluded that conditions in Irish prisons could amount to degrading treatment, there has been no indication that the conditions observed have improved. Rather, there were more mattresses on floors in 2025 and more people sharing cells than at the time of its visit in 2024. The number of people sleeping on mattresses increased by 618 per cent from the start of January 2024 to the end of December 2025. OIP and Prison Visiting Committees reports also indicate that conditions worsened in 2025, meaning that the CPT's conclusion in 2024 may still apply to current conditions.	Regress 	The IPS should decommission prison cells which do not uphold basic standards of living for people in prison.
8. In-cell sanitation	In 2025, the number of individuals in prison having to use the toilet in the presence of others gradually increased, whilst the number of those needing to slop out remain unchanged since the previous year. For the second year in a row, as observed by IPRT, no substantive action has been taken or committed to by either the IPS or the Government to rectify this issue. As a result, the dignity and privacy of thousands of people in prisons across Ireland are being undermined on a daily basis.	Regress 	The IPS should install partition screens in cells with more than one occupant to provide individuals with some degree of privacy when using the toilet.
9. Single cell accommodation	The number of people in single occupancy cells continued to decrease throughout 2025, as the number of individuals in triple and even quadruple occupancy cells only steadily increased. No decisive policy or practical action was forthcoming from the Government or the Irish Prison Service (IPS) to address this crisis.	Regress 	The State should ensure that single-cell accommodation is reinstated as a statutory provision.

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
10. Pre-trial detention as an exceptional measure	The increase in the number of people held in pre-trial detention, which began in 2022, only continued throughout 2025. By the year's end, more than 20 per cent of the prison population were individuals on remand. Overcrowding is both exacerbated by increased remand figures, and itself exacerbates the experiences of any individual on remand.	Regress 	The Government should amend the Bail Act 1997 to provide that prison capacity and material conditions should be considered as a key factor when determining whether it is appropriate to remand a person to custody, given the impact imprisonment would likely have on the accused individual, particularly anyone with vulnerabilities including severe mental illness. The State should remove its reservation to Article 10(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and, as part of its ongoing review of the Irish Prison Rules 2007, should insert language into Rule 71 that guarantees, without exception, the separation of remand from sentenced prisoners in Irish prisons.
11. Family contact	Despite some positive initiatives in specific prisons in 2025, which are to be encouraged, there was a regression with regard to the facilitation of in-person visits. Specifically, the cancellation of visits with little prior notice, and a lack of explanation for the reasoning, had a significant impact on both people in prison and their families. Reduced time for video calls takes a further toll and limits the overall contact individuals can have with their families. At a time when severe overcrowding is impacting the mental well-being of many in prison, facilitating contact with family and loved ones is paramount.	Regress 	The IPS ensure that in-person visits to people in prison are cancelled only as a measure of last resort, and that when there is a cancellation, the reason for such is clearly and promptly communicated to both the person in prison and the visitor. The IPS amend its visiting policy by family members under the age of 18 to include siblings, nieces and nephews to visit their family member in prison. Prison staff should clearly communicate the policy to visitors. The IPS ensure that when videocalls are chosen as an alternative to in-person visits, these meet the statutory minimum duration of in-person visits. The IPS allow for both in-person and video visits to be provided beyond the minimum statutory duration.

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
12. Access to healthcare services	The resourcing of additional healthcare staff is a welcome development, particularly healthcare assistants. Further recruitment is needed across the board however, particularly the recruitment of night nurses, to mitigate risk of a serious health emergency occurring and there being not enough staff to adequately respond, and to alleviate pressure on all staff working in prisons. The continued work of the Health Needs Assessment Steering Committee is also encouraging, though it is disappointing that the Mental Health Needs Assessment had seemingly not been initiated by the end of 2025.	Mixed 	The IPS should continue to hire healthcare assistants, nurses, GPs, psychologists and occupational therapists across the prison estate, prioritising the recruitment of permanent staff as opposed to locum staff where possible. The IPS should establish a Well Woman Clinic in the Dóchas Centre similar to the one available in Limerick Women's Prison.
13. Mental healthcare	See Spotlight (p. 7)	Regress 	See Spotlight (p. 7)
14. Drug and alcohol treatment	In 2025, waiting lists for addiction services grew in length, whilst the staffing of such services remained relatively unchanged in terms of resourcing, meaning an increase in the ratio of people in prison to each counsellor. The absence of timely data on addiction rates within the prison population and the nature of the addiction makes the resourcing of a health-based approach to recovery, prevention and education near impossible.	Regress 	The IPS and the Government to appropriately resource drug and alcohol addiction counselling services in all Irish prisons to ensure anyone in prison who requires access to addiction services receives this in a timely manner and on an equitable basis.
15. Privacy	IPRT believes that on assessment of a number of contributing factors, it is unlikely that for a sizeable number of individuals in Irish prisons, their right to privacy was not fully upheld in 2025. The European Court of Human Rights is clear, that states cannot use security justifications to avoid their obligations to make accommodations and adjustments to secure a minimum level of privacy for people in overcrowded prisons.	Regress 	See recommendation for Standard 8.

Section C

Prison Regimes

Section C

Prison regimes

Standard 16 Time out-of-cell

Every person in prison, including those on remand, can spend a minimum of 12 hours outside of their cell each day, including a minimum of five hours per day engaged in structured, meaningful activity for five days a week. All people in prison have access to appropriate outdoor areas for at least one hour each day.

Assessment: Regress

Spending time out of a cell and engaging in meaningful activity are crucial for the wellbeing of people in prison, their rehabilitation and can facilitate reintegration upon release. IPRT maintains that the amount of time an individual spends out of cell each day should be 12 hours at a minimum, including at least one hour spent outside with access to meaningful activity and human contact.

This is in accordance with the European Prison Rules (Rule 27.1) and the Mandela Rules (Rule 23). Irish legislation provides that individuals in prison be provided with at least five hours of structured activity, as per Section 27(3) of the Irish Prison Rules 2007:

In so far as is practicable, each convicted prisoner should be engaged in authorized structured activity for a period of not less than five hours on each of five days in each week.

In September 2025, according to data provided by each prison, the average amount of time individuals spent out of cell daily in 2022–2025 was 8.5 hours.⁴¹⁷ More precise data on the average number of out of cell hours for 2025 has not been provided by the IPS, as was raised in PIPS 2024.⁴¹⁸ Based on the current levels of overcrowding, the year-on-year increase of the prison population since 2022, reporting of insufficient staffing to manage a larger prison population, OIP and PVC reports, and the insights shared with IPRT by stakeholders who engage with individuals in prison on a regular basis through service provision, the daily average length of time out cell was likely less than 8.5 hours.⁴¹⁹

In response to the OIP's survey with people in prison carried out during its 2025 inspections, 31 per cent (134 out of 436) reported spending less than two hours out of their cell on a typical weekday, whilst 37 per cent reported spending between two and five hours of their cell most days.⁴²⁰ By these measures, more than half of survey respondents detained in Wheatfield and Castlereagh prisons spent less than five hours a day out of their cell. Based on its inspection of Wheatfield prison in June–July 2025, the OIP expressed 'significant concern' regarding the amount of out of cell time for men in custody there.⁴²¹ At the time of the inspection, the prison was operating a staggered unlock system, whereby landings are unlocked in sequence as opposed to a scheduled unlock time that applies across the prison.⁴²² Based on records seen by the OIP from the previous quarter, there had been a staggered unlock 57 times in a period of 91 days.⁴²³ Such a system reduces the overall amount of time out of cell for individuals in the prison.

Further to staggered unlocks, a number of prisons in 2025 continued to operate with overall increased hours of 'lock-back', a term used to describe the period when individuals are locked in their cells. The Mountjoy PVC reported that in 2025 it received 14 complaints from men in prison regarding lock-back hours, with some reporting being subjected to

⁴¹⁷ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Wednesday, 17 Sep 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (17 September 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-09-17/874?highlight%5B0%5D=cells>> accessed 4 August 2026.

⁴¹⁸ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (2025) 48 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7726/iprt_pips_2024_report_final_digital.pdf>.

⁴¹⁹ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (8 June 2026).

⁴²⁰ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' 26 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/OIP-AR-2025.pdf>>.

⁴²¹ *ibid* 19.

⁴²² *ibid* 19–20.

⁴²³ *ibid*.

lock-back for up to 22 hours a day in a cell with another person, and the negative impact this had on them.⁴²⁴ Men also reported that their physical well-being was affected by the limited out of cell time, with gym access restricted and the lack of fresh air being of particular concern for those in damp cells with limited ventilation or where the toilet was broken or leaking.⁴²⁵

Understaffing and overcrowding were provided as the most common explanations for reduced time out of cell.⁴²⁶ The insufficient resourcing of staff numbers in line with the increased prison population further complicates the management of hundreds of people in a physical space that was not designed to accommodate that number of people. Stakeholders told IPRT that based on their observation, the reduction in out of cell time and the lock-back system being the default regime are enduring practices from the COVID-19 pandemic when it was easier to manage people when they were locked in their cells for longer periods.⁴²⁷ In 2025, however, all pandemic-related restrictions should no longer apply.

Some prisons, such as the Dóchas Centre, have operated a practice whereby if an individual was not attending school or work, they were locked back in their cell.⁴²⁸ This was introduced in the Dóchas in 2024 and whilst not an official policy is still reportedly used frequently.⁴²⁹ Imposing such a requirement to encourage engagement will only work if there are enough jobs and school places available, and it means that individuals who do not want to engage in these specific activities are often left with no other option than remaining in their cell.⁴³⁰ Stakeholders shared with IPRT that whilst the lock-back regime no longer seemed to be officially implemented in 2025, it was still used frequently on an ad hoc basis.⁴³¹

Individuals on restricted regimes spend the most amount of time in their cell, compared with the rest of the prison population. A restrictive regime, whereby an individual is removed from the general prison population, can be imposed for a number of reasons, as outlined in the Prison Rules 2007: for their protection and at their request (Rule 63), for their protection and imposed by prison governance (Rule 63), on order, based on their behaviour (Rule 62), for medical or psychiatric needs, “observation” (Rule 64), or for medical quarantine (Rule 103). Generally, individuals on a restricted regime will spend 19 hours or more locked in their cells every day. Throughout 2025, the number of individuals on restricted regimes fluctuated throughout the first half of the year, and remained relatively comparable to the corresponding figures in 2024.⁴³²

⁴²⁴ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (2026) 13
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/47c4abd8/Mountjoy_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁴²⁵ *ibid* 19.

⁴²⁶ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 4) 20.

⁴²⁷ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 3).

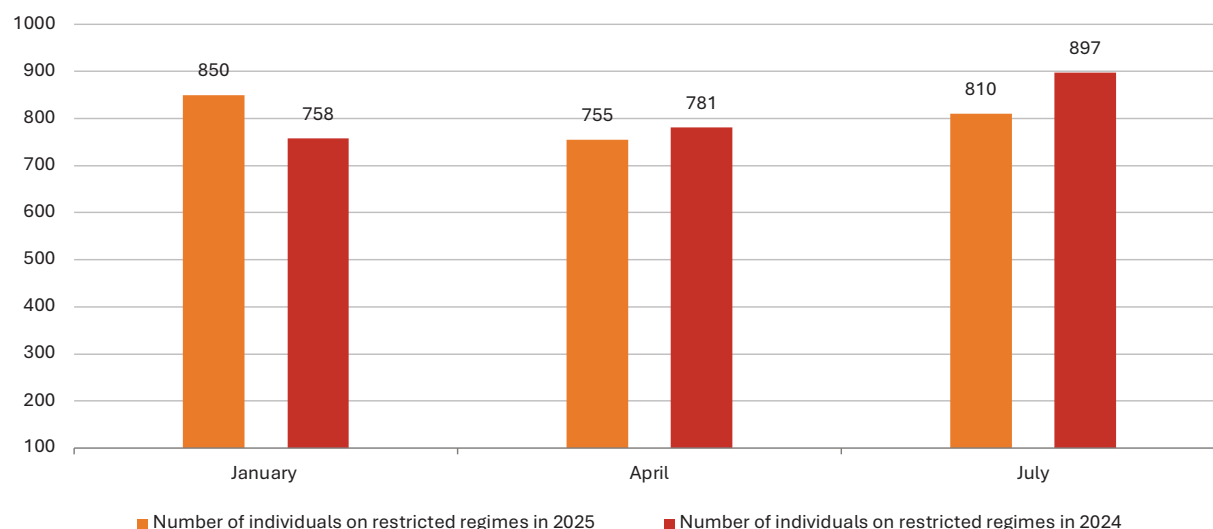
⁴²⁸ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2024’ (2025) 20
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/992350d8/D%C3%B3chas_Centre_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2024.pdf>.

⁴²⁹ *ibid* 19. ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 3). Stakeholder Consultation by the Traveller Justice Initiative (TJI) in March 2026.

⁴³⁰ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 3).

⁴³¹ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 3).

⁴³² Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - January 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JANUARY-2025-Restricted-Regime-Landscape.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - January 2024’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/January-2024-Restriction.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/APRIL-2025-Restriction.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2024’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/April-2024-Restriction.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JULY-2025-Restriction.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2024’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/July-2024-Restriction.pdf>.

Figure 11: Number of individuals on a restricted regime in January, April, July in 2024 and 2025⁴³³

Whilst the data around the number of hours those on restricted regimes spent locked in their cell is discussed in more depth under Standard 26: Solitary Confinement (p. 98), it is worth giving some contextual insight into the 2025 data. During its inspection of Castlerea prison in September 2025, the OIP recorded that men on restricted regimes received between 15 and 75 minutes out of their cell each day.⁴³⁴ On the A1 landing of the prison, out of cell time was limited to an offer of one hour in the yard per day which cannot be considered as meeting the 'structured activity' requirements of Section 27(3) of the Irish Prison Rules 2007.⁴³⁵ In Mountjoy, the PVC similarly noted with concern the limited time out of cell for those on restricted regimes compared to the general population.⁴³⁶ Whilst the Committee did not provide exact data, it highlighted that although the number of individuals spending 22 hours in their cell had reduced significantly compared to the same period in 2024, the number of individuals spending 21 hours in their cell had more than doubled, compared to corresponding figures for the previous year.⁴³⁷

The above analysis is underscored by the fact that the significant time individuals spent in their cells in 2025 was in overcrowded cells. In circumstances where three to four people are cramped together in one a single or double-occupancy cell, in some instances with an un-partitioned or partially partitioned toilet and poor ventilation, time out of cell is more crucial than ever. It can provide fresh air, headspace, time apart from cell mates with whom there might be conflict or personality clashes, a vital opportunity to engage in education, work, exercise and generally stimulate the mind and self-reflect. Yet overcrowding is being cited as a principal reason for reduced out of cell time when it is most crucial for the psychological and physical well-being of people in prison.

Assessment of Standard 16: Regress

The lack of available data on time out of cell for the general prison population makes it difficult to fully assess this standard for a second year in a row. Based on the data that IPRT reviewed however, it would appear that out of cell time is yet another feature of prison conditions in 2025 that was significantly impacted by overcrowding, the very issue that makes out of cell time so crucial.

⁴³³ Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - January 2025' (n 16); Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2025' (n 16); Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025' (n 16); Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2024' (n 16); Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - January 2024' (n 16); Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2024' (n 16).

⁴³⁴ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 4) 21.

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

⁴³⁶ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8) p.27.

⁴³⁷ *ibid* 3.

Standard 17 Sentence management

All people in prison serving a sentence, and their family or next of kin (as appropriate) has the opportunity to be actively involved in their sentence planning, from the beginning of their sentence through to the point of release.

Assessment: Regress

Sentence planning and management is essential for time spent in prison to be rehabilitative and for addressing the causes of offending behaviour. It should provide structure to an individual's sentence and encourage them to set and achieve goals during this time. Both the Council of Europe standards and the CPT have highlighted the importance of sentence plans that are comprehensive, individualised and drawn up with the involvement of the person serving a sentence and their family or next of kin, as appropriate.⁴³⁸

The Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) system was introduced by the IPS in 2008, with the aim of coordinating the planning and management of the sentences of people serving more than 12 months in prison.⁴³⁹ A sentence plan, known as a Personal Integration Plan (PIP) is prepared by an ISM Coordinator within the prison and the individual upon their committal, with the view that it is regularly reviewed by them both throughout the sentence.⁴⁴⁰ ISM Coordinators may also support individuals sentenced to less than one year who are engaged in the Community Support Scheme.⁴⁴¹ On 31 December 2025, there were 24 ISM Coordinators across all Irish prisons, down from 27 on the same date in 2024.⁴⁴²

There was a reduction in 2025 in the number of individuals in prison who had a PIP.⁴⁴³ In 2024, 1,760 people in prison had a PIP, compared to 1,170 in 2025.⁴⁴⁴ However, data was not available for the number of people in 2025 who were eligible for sentence management. Nor was there available data regarding the caseload of each of the 24 ISM Coordinators.

Nonetheless, reporting by monitoring bodies and stakeholders suggests that sentence management was, like many other aspects of life for those in prison in 2025, detrimentally impacted by overcrowding and insufficient staff resourcing.⁴⁴⁵ In its 2025 report, the CPT highlighted that the ISM system “still remained incompletely implemented”, as had been the case during its 2019 visit.⁴⁴⁶ The report went on to state that with the exception of Limerick Prison, it observed that there was “virtually no follow-up on prisoners serving sentences of more than one year” and insufficient support for individuals serving life sentences.⁴⁴⁷ The Mountjoy PVC stressed deficiencies around ISM delivery in its 2025 Annual Report, also noting that it had done so in successive reports.⁴⁴⁸ It received complaints from men in the prison who were nearing their release date and were yet to meet with either of the two ISM Coordinators working in the prison.⁴⁴⁹ The PVC also observed that when there were staff shortages or absences in the prison, ISM Coordinators are often redeployed to posts deemed to be of higher operational priority. **It therefore recommended that in times of staff shortages, ISM Coordinators be given higher priority to remain in post, a recommendation that was echoed by the CPT.**⁴⁵⁰ This is due to the importance of continuity and consistency in sentence management, in order to support

⁴³⁸ Council of Europe, 'Rec(2003)23 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on the Management by Prison Administrations of Life Sentence and Other Long-Term Prisoners (Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 9 October 2003 at the 855th Meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)' <[https://rm.coe.int/16806cc447](https://search.coe.int/cm/#(%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%2209000016805dec7a%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22])>; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Situation of Life-Sentenced Prisoners Extract from the 25th General Report of the CPT, Published in 2016' (2016) CPT/Inf(2016)10-part <.

⁴³⁹ 'Integrated Sentence Management' (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/integrated-sentence-management/>> accessed 6 August 2026.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴⁴¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 23 Jan 2024 – Parliamentary Questions (33rd Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (23 January 2024) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-01-23/456>> accessed 6 August 2026.

⁴⁴² Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁵ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 3); Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8).

⁴⁴⁶ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (2025) CPT/Inf (2025) 22 38 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60a>>.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid 39.

⁴⁴⁸ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8) 6.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid 6,16.

⁴⁵⁰ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8) 6; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or

individuals in their goals, and for some measure of rehabilitation and planning for post-release to be provided during their time in prison.

Assessment of Standard 17: **Regress**

The number of ISM Coordinators across the prison system did not increase in line with the growing prison population in 2025 – in addition to the fact that this number was already insufficient for the prison population in 2024. More ISM Coordinator positions must be established, and priority placed on ensuring that individuals remain in post, to ensure continued support to those serving a sentence of more than 12 months.

Standard 18 Life skills

All people in prison have the opportunity, and are supported, to develop and maintain life skills, and can exercise independence, autonomy, and personal responsibility to the greatest extent possible.

Assessment: **Mixed**

Providing individuals in prison with opportunities to develop and maintain life skills is essential for encouraging rehabilitation and enabling reintegration upon release. It can also prevent institutionalisation while in prison. Life skills may be defined as abilities that help individuals handle everyday demands, challenges and decisions effectively. These include cognitive skills such as problem-solving and basic arithmetic, cooking and self-care, interpersonal skills and emotional regulation skills.

One way of equipping individuals with the necessary skills and confidence for life after prison is through enabling them to live in settings designed to facilitate this. As highlighted in PIPS 2024, the Minister for Justice announced plans to establish 'Independent Living Units' in Castlerea prison, and Shelton Abbey and Loughan House open prisons.⁴⁵¹ These units are intended to "allow individual responsibility to be taken for living spaces and will help improve life skills by enabling individuals to obtain basic skills such as cooking a meal, washing their laundry, cleaning and maintaining a home, while also interacting with others within a residential accommodation type complex".⁴⁵² They are aimed at individuals serving lengthier sentences and preparing for their release.⁴⁵³

In February 2025, the construction of 10 Independent Living Units was completed at Loughan House, with 10 men moving into the units in the same month.⁴⁵⁴ The following month, the 10 Independent Living Units at Shelton Abbey were also completed.⁴⁵⁵ By October 2025, a response to a Parliamentary Question indicated that four units had been constructed at The Grove area of Castlerea prison, as well as two three-bed semi-detached houses, which could each accommodate six people.⁴⁵⁶ The completion of these living units in 2025 is an encouraging development, as IPRT has previously recommended that such units be established across the prison estate.⁴⁵⁷ **IPRT does not advocate for an expansion of the prison estate but recommends that any construction of new accommodation as part of the estate be modelled on small-scale detention with appropriate security regimes and independent living units.**

Punishment (CPT) (n 27) 39.

⁴⁵¹ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Monday, 9 Sep 2024 – Parliamentary Questions (33rd Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (9 September 2024) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-09-09/1086>> accessed 6 August 2026.

⁴⁵² *ibid.*

⁴⁵³ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 7 Oct 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (7 October 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-10-07/469>> accessed 6 August 2026.

⁴⁵⁴ Loughan House Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/03e12951/Loughan_House_PVC_2025_Report.pdf>.

⁴⁵⁵ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Thursday, 14 May 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (14 May 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-05-14/37>> accessed 6 August 2026.

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁵⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (n 2) 51; Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2018' 74 <<https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6470/pips2018.pdf>>; Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2019' 74 <<https://pips.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/Progress-in-the-Penal-System-2019.pdf>>.

As raised in PIPS 2024, the low security 'Progression Unit' in Mountjoy Prison was repurposed to accommodate individuals convicted of a sexual offence and renamed Mountjoy West, due to the pressures caused by overcrowding.⁴⁵⁸ The Progression Unit had previously housed individuals on enhanced regimes and those near the end of their sentences, with the aim of preparing people for their release and reintegration through focusing on personal autonomy and rehabilitation. The loss of such a facility was felt in 2025, with stakeholders reporting to IPRT that without it, individuals in Mountjoy had little opportunity to progress and prepare for the end of their sentence.⁴⁵⁹ The same sentiment was echoed by the Mountjoy PVC in its Annual Report:

The abandonment of the Progression Unit (PU) concept and the repurposing of Mountjoy West to accommodate a different category of prisoner has removed a visible incentivised path for prisoners in the Main Prison whereby they could be rewarded for positive behaviour by achieving a place in an area with a less restrictive regime.⁴⁶⁰

This encapsulates the pivotal role that facilities and services that encourage independent living, responsibility and autonomy can play in the course of someone's sentence – not only to prepare them for release and mitigate the risk of reoffending, but also as a goal to work towards during their sentence.

There are some encouraging examples of people in prison being provided with the opportunity to develop skills that will help with their adjustment to life upon release. Some examples include the cookery school at Cloverhill Prison, with Castlerea Prison also offering cookery, budgeting and soft skills courses, and some other prisons offering landings that offer cooking, washing facilities and communal areas.⁴⁶¹ The provision of opportunities such as these are encouraged for implementation across the prison estate, to better equip individuals for their release and reduce the risk of institutionalisation.

Assessment of Standard 18: **Mixed**

While the completion of the Independent Living Units in Castlerea prison, Shelton Abbey and Loughan House was a welcome development, and the construction of further units of a similar model is encouraged, their construction is somewhat undermined by the removal of existing spaces that facilitated the autonomous living that they have been established to encourage, such as the Progression Unit at Mountjoy Prison.

⁴⁵⁸ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (n 2) 51.

⁴⁵⁹ 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 3).

⁴⁶⁰ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8) 17.

⁴⁶¹ Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e40264dd/Castlerea_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>; Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report of the Visiting Committee 2025' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/c1d28aa8/Cloverhill_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

Standard 19 Education and training

All people in prison have access to a range of regular educational and training activities that meet their individual needs and take into account their personal aspirations and rehabilitation and reintegration requirements.

Assessment: Mixed

Education is a fundamental human right. For people in prison, it can help to humanise their experience of prison, positively add to the conditions of their detention and facilitate their return to their community upon release. The provision of education and training in prison is provided by Rules 110 and 111 of the Prison Rules 2007, and the Council of Europe's Recommendation on Education in Prison – originally adopted in 1989 and updated in 2026 – emphasises that education in prison should be comparable to that available in the community.⁴⁶²

Available data indicates that the majority of people in prison in Ireland have low educational attainment. On 31 December 2025, 62.7 per cent of the prison population had left school early, with 12.2 per cent of that cohort having completed their primary school education only, and the average age for leaving school early being 14.3 years old – almost identical figures to 2024.⁴⁶³ Relatedly, the majority of people in prison on that date – 75.6 per cent – reported being 'unemployed upon committal, a figure fractionally lower than the 76.1 per cent who did so in 2024.⁴⁶⁴ Such low rates of educational attainment demonstrate not only the potential benefits of structured, well-designed education for those in prison, but also its necessity, particularly for desistance.

Service delivery of education in prison was previously guided by the joint IPS and Education and Training Boards Ireland (ETBI) *Prison Education Strategy 2019–2022*, which was due to be updated and implemented from 2023 onwards. No new strategy has yet been published despite this being highlighted in PIPS 2024.⁴⁶⁵ In its Annual Report for 2025, the IPS stated that its *Strategic Plan 2023–2027* “follows on from the previous education strategy”.⁴⁶⁶ **IPRT reiterates its recommendation that the IPS, in conjunction with the ETBI, develops an updated Prison Education Strategy to provide a more detailed vision and roadmap for the provision of education in Irish prisons for the coming years.**

The Prison Education Taskforce, established in 2023 to “ensure close alignment and integration of education, work and training opportunities for people involved in the criminal justice system as well as their families”, continued to meet in 2025, following its inclusion in the Programme for Government.⁴⁶⁷ A lack of publicly available information regarding its work or the contents of its meetings, makes assessment of its progress difficult.

In 2025, as part of the *Building Pathways Together: Criminal Justice Reintegration Through Employment Strategy 2025–2027*, the Government established the Criminal Justice Employment Advisory Committee (CJEAC) to oversee the implementation of the Strategy.⁴⁶⁸ Encouragingly, two people with lived experience of prison were included in the CJEAC. To complement its work, a Criminal Justice Employer Network (CJEN) was also established to “promote the hiring of people with criminal convictions, discuss any barriers impacting hiring or retaining individuals”.⁴⁶⁹ The establishment of such a Committee is an encouraging and necessary step, as IPRT's 2024 research on employer attitudes around hiring people with convictions revealed that there was broad willingness amongst employers, but a lack of guidance,

⁴⁶² Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 'Council of Europe Recommendation (89) 12 on Education in Prison' (1989) <https://www.right-to-education.org/sites/right-to-education.org/files/resource-attachments/Council_of_Europe_recR%2889%2912_Education_in_Prison_1989.pdf>; Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 'CM/Rec(2026)5 - Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to Member States on Education in Prison' (2026) <[https://search.coe.int/cm/#/%22CoEIdentifier%22:\[%2209125948802b43da%22\],%22sort%22:\[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22\]>](https://search.coe.int/cm/#/%22CoEIdentifier%22:[%2209125948802b43da%22],%22sort%22:[%22CoEValidationDate%20Descending%22]>)>.

⁴⁶³ Irish Prison Service, 'Annual Report 2024' 26 <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' 35 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e243cb1e/IPS_Annual_Report_2025_English.pdf>.

⁴⁶⁴ Irish Prison Service, 'Annual Report 2024' (n 48); Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 48) 35.

⁴⁶⁵ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (n 2) 52.

⁴⁶⁶ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 48) 34.

⁴⁶⁷ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Wednesday, 18 Jun 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (18 June 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-06-18/121>> accessed 10 August 2026.

Department of the Taoiseach, 'Programme for Government - Securing Ireland's Future' (2025) 119 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/programme-for-government-securing-irelands-future.pdf>>.

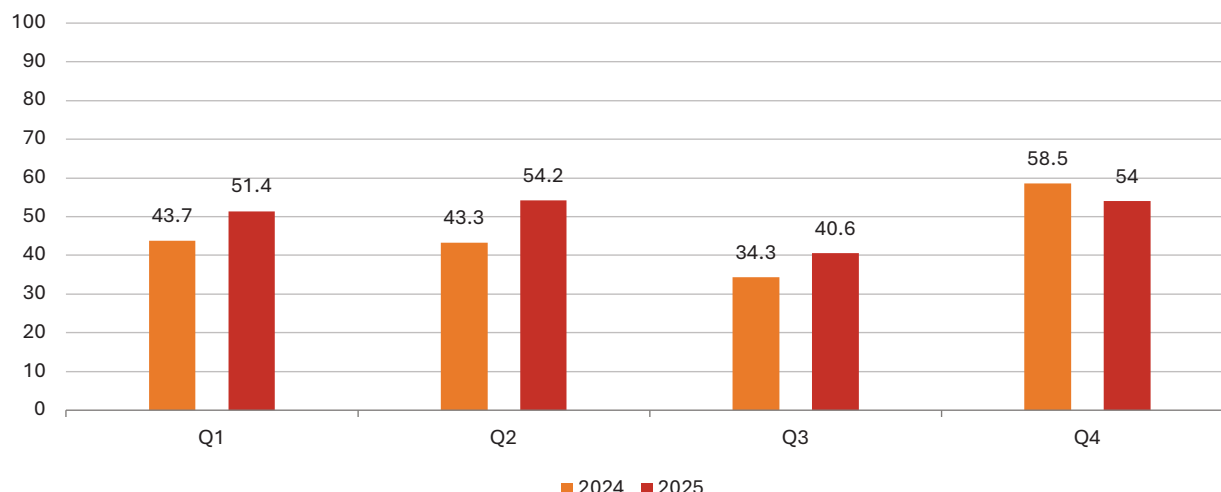
⁴⁶⁸ Department of Justice, 'Building Pathways Together Criminal Justice Reintegration Through Employment Strategy 2025 – 2027: Annual Report 2025' <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e6d98523/Building_Pathways_Together_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.*

information and support to do so.⁴⁷⁰ IPRT hopes that the work of the CJEAC and the CJEN can meaningfully promote the hiring of people with convictions in Ireland, as stable and fairly paid employment can be a key factor in desistance.

The overall average rate of participation in education across the prison estate increased in 2025 compared to 2024, rising from 44.9 per cent to 50.5 per cent (see Figure 12).⁴⁷¹ Only in the last quarter of 2025 did the participation rate fall below the corresponding period for 2024. Six prisons recorded participation rates above 50 per cent, up from four the previous year (see Table X).⁴⁷² This is a welcome year-on-year increase since 2022, and while it represents an improvement on the 42 per cent participation rate when PIPS was first launched in 2017,⁴⁷³ a significant proportion of the prison population is not engaged in education.

Figure 12: Average rate of participation by quarter across the prison estate, 2024-2025⁴⁷⁴



Across the prison estate, most prisons recorded an increase in their education participation rates, with some reporting notable improvements (see Table 16). In 2025, the rates for participation in education at Mountjoy Prison rose to 47 per cent from 30.7 per cent in 2024, whilst participation at Shelton Abbey increased from 48.9 per cent to 60.7 per cent, and the Training Unit at Mountjoy recorded an increase from 48.6 per cent to 60.8 per cent.⁴⁷⁵ In three prisons – Cloverhill, Cork and the Dóchas Centre – there was a decrease in the education participation rates, compared to the previous year.⁴⁷⁶ The Dóchas Centre had previously recorded one of the highest rates in 2024 with an average of 73 per cent, but in 2025 this fell to 57.8 per cent.⁴⁷⁷ Nonetheless, this is still one of the higher rates of education participation recorded in 2025 across the prison estate.

⁴⁷⁰ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'The Secondary Punishment: A Scoping Study on Employer Attitudes to Hiring People with Criminal Convictions' 6 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7336/the_secondary_punishment_a_scoping_study_on_employer_attitudes_to_hiring_people_with_criminal_convictions_report_web.pdf>.

⁴⁷¹ Irish Prison Service, 'Annual Report 2024' (n 48) 25; Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 48) 35.

⁴⁷² Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁷³ Data taken from IPS Annual Reports for 2022 – 2025.

⁴⁷⁴ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁷⁵ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁷⁶ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁷⁷ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

Table 15: Education participation rates per prison, 2024-2025⁴⁷⁸

Prison	2024					2025				
	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	Average	Jan	Apr	Jul	Oct	
Arbour Hill	80.7%	80.9%	79.1%	90.0%	82.7%	87.6%	88.4%	70.7%	88.0%	83.7%
Castlereagh	23.7%	34.0%	0.0%	44.1%	25.5%	36.7%	36.1%	0.0%	37.0%	27.5%
Cloverhill	19.6%	18.8%	24.5%	22.1%	21.3%	21.4%	19.4%	10.1%	16.0%	16.7%
Cork	25.8%	35.1%	18.7%	63.6%	35.8%	40.6%	40.8%	16.7%	39.0%	34.3%
Limerick Male	41.2%	43.8%	0.0%	54.2%	34.8%	50.0%	43.9%	0.0%	54.0%	37.0%
Loughan House	45.5%	65.6%	23.5%	83.8%	54.6%	68.0%	71.9%	36.7%	63.0%	59.9%
Midlands	35.0%	46.6%	17.8%	58.1%	39.4%	54.7%	46.0%	12.2%	49.0%	40.5%
Dóchas Centre	64.0%	66.9%	73.8%	87.4%	73.0%	62.5%	66.6%	44.9%	57.0%	57.8%
Mountjoy Male	26.6%	26.7%	29.7%	39.9%	30.7%	49.8%	46.8%	37.4%	54.0%	47.0%
Portlaoise	37.9%	56.3%	41.3%	69.9%	51.4%	57.1%	57.9%	36.1%	61.0%	53.0%
Shelton Abbey	31.4%	40.8%	56.4%	67.0%	48.9%	60.2%	69.7%	50.0%	63.0%	60.7%
Training Unit	39.4%	54.1%	52.0%	49.0%	48.6%	64.7%	63.0%	50.4%	65.0%	60.8%
Wheatfield	20.4%	23.5%	7.3%	45.4%	24.2%	36.4%	28.1%	14.7%	38.0%	29.3%
Average	38.3%	46.7%	32.6%	59.6%		53.0%	52.3%	31.0%	52.7%	

IPRT was also encouraged that there was a 17.8 per cent increase in the number of people in prison completing the Junior and Leaving Certificate, and other Further Education or external learning programmes.⁴⁷⁹ One practical recommendation made by the Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee was to introduce certain modules to the prison Education Centres, to cover topics such as social studies, philosophy and communication skills.⁴⁸⁰ It made this recommendation on the basis that there was a low uptake in the Junior and Leaving Certificate, and that modules might be a more accessible way of encouraging participation in education, given that many people in prison – as evidenced by the high rate of early school leavers mentioned above – may have had negative experiences of education.⁴⁸¹

Table 16: Numbers of people in prison participating in further education, 2024-2025⁴⁸²

	2024	2025	% Increase/decrease
Junior Certificate	10	20	+100%
Leaving Certificate	77	86	+14.2%
Gaisce Open University	109	74	-32.1%
Open University	35	64	+82.8%
Total	1,601	1,887	

The number of full-time equivalent teacher positions allocated to the Irish Prison Service by the Department of Education remained at 220 in 2025,⁴⁸³ remaining unchanged from 2024 and 2023, despite the significant year-on-year increase in the prison population – increasing by 23 per cent from the end of 2023 to the end of 2025.⁴⁸⁴ This is despite

⁴⁷⁸ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁷⁹ Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁸⁰ Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' 4
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/01baf1b4/Wheatfield_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁴⁸¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁸² Data obtained by IPRT through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁸³ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' (n 48) 34.

Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 26 May 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (26 May 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-05-26/853>> accessed 9 August 2026.

an increased budget for education in prison in recent years, particularly from 2024 to 2025, where there was a 24 per cent budget increase (see Table 17).⁴⁸⁵ It is concerning that such a significant increase in 2025 did not result in the hiring of more full-time equivalent teachers, particularly given the high number of people on waiting lists in some prisons to attend school (see Table 18).⁴⁸⁶ The number of people on waiting lists was consistently higher per quarter compared to the same period in 2024, in some cases nearly double. In both 2025 and 2024, the longest waiting lists were recorded in Mountjoy Prison, Midlands Prison and the Dóchas Centre.⁴⁸⁷ The lack of year-on-year progress in these prisons is disappointing, particularly as waiting lists indicate a willingness of people in prison to engage in meaningful activity that can contribute to their rehabilitation. Across the rest of the prison estate, however, waiting lists were encouragingly low, with some prisons not having any.⁴⁸⁸

Table 17: Budget allocated for education in prisons, 2021-2025⁴⁸⁹

Year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Budget allocated for Education	€1,265,000	€1,265,000	€1,559,000	€1,709,000	€2,129,000

Table 18: Number of people on waiting lists for school, per prison⁴⁹⁰

	2024				2025			
Prison	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT
Arbour Hill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlerea	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	59
Cloverhill	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cork	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick Female	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick Male	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0
Loughan House	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Midlands	79	101	0	96	166	111	0	205
Dóchas Centre	50	51	14	55	53	94	4	77
Mountjoy Male	107	73	7	220	180	188	60	138
Portlaoise	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shelton Abbey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Training Unit	0	0	0	9	13	14	10	4
Wheatfield	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2
Total	240	226	21	381	413	407	75	485

Many of the Prison Visiting Committees and the OIP remarked on school and workshop closures in several prisons in

⁴⁸⁴ Irish Prison Service, 'Prisoner Population on Friday 29th December 2023' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/29-December-2023.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Prisoner Population on Wednesday 31st December 2025' (2025) <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/31-December-2025.pdf>.

⁴⁸⁵ Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 26 May 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (n 68).

⁴⁸⁶ Data obtained by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁸⁷ Data obtained by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁸⁸ Data obtained by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁴⁸⁹ Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 26 May 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (n 68).

⁴⁹⁰ Data obtained by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

2025, due to the intersecting issues of overcrowding and understaffing.⁴⁹¹ In Mountjoy Prison, individuals frequently made complaints to the PVC regarding school closures, with the OIP recommending that education and gym officer positions be ringfenced on the regime management plan, to prevent their redeployment when there are staff shortages.⁴⁹² In Castlerea prison, the PVC reported that the Equine Centre had been closed for the year due to staff shortages, commenting that it had been “such an asset for prisoner’s development and mental health and gave them an opportunity to gain certification in Equine Welfare”.⁴⁹³ A similar sentiment was echoed by the Wheatfield PVC, stating that school and workshop closures are “a frustrating and disappointing situation for prisoners who are anxious to engage in education and learning or keep up their skills in the workshops”.⁴⁹⁴ Those with lived experience of prison in 2025 also expressed frustration to IPRT regarding the closure of workshops.⁴⁹⁵ Additionally, despite having completed various trainings and obtained relevant qualifications, they did not feel supported to then put these to practical use and seek employment.⁴⁹⁶ **Hopefully, initiatives like the CJEN and CJEC mentioned above can contribute to filling this gap in support.**

Stakeholders reported to IPRT that whilst some schools were recording higher numbers of classes taking place in 2025, the length of these classes was much shorter than usual.⁴⁹⁷ This was believed to be an attempt to accommodate more students, due to overcrowding and higher numbers wishing to attend school.⁴⁹⁸ Classes were further shortened by delays in officers bringing groups to and from the school, due to insufficient staffing to manage the higher numbers of people in prison, meaning some classes lasted merely 20 minutes.⁴⁹⁹ Shorter class duration means that less material can be covered. In this context, stakeholders suggested that better use could be made of online learning, or even prison TV, to ensure that some form of education can still be provided.⁵⁰⁰

Stakeholders also told IPRT that school closures are not officially recorded, as the school is technically open and the teacher is present, but no individuals are escorted there, due to a shortage of officers.⁵⁰¹ This lack of data has also been confirmed by the Minister for Justice.⁵⁰² **IPRT has repeatedly called for this data to be recorded and made publicly available, and reiterates this recommendation that the frequency of classes, attendance and rates of school closures are accurately recorded and published.**⁵⁰³

Available information indicates, however, that some groups in prison have even less access to education than others, such as women on remand in the Dóchas Centre and men on protection regimes in Castlerea prison.⁵⁰⁴ Both groups would potentially benefit immensely from access to education and training activities, as a means of providing some focus and direction during their time in pre-trial detention, and some crucial time out of cell for those on protection.

An encouraging development in 2025 was the completion of the first Inside Out prison-university education initiative in Cork Prison. The 12-week programme is run jointly by University College Cork, the Cork ETB Prison Education Unit and Cork Prison, and brings together university students studying criminology at UCC (“outside students”) and people in prison (“inside students”) to debate university-level academic texts on issues such as social justice, desistance, transformative justice, masculinity, labelling and stigma.⁵⁰⁵ **IPRT hopes that the success of the Inside Out programme can be built on in years to come, and expanded to other prisons across Ireland.**

⁴⁹¹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 4) 18; Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee (n 65) 2; Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee (n 45) 3; Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8) 17.

⁴⁹² Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8) 17; Office of the Inspector of Prisons (n 4) 19.

⁴⁹³ Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee (n 45) 2.

⁴⁹⁴ Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee (n 65) 2.

⁴⁹⁵ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (13 July 2026).

⁴⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁷ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 3).

⁴⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹⁹ *ibid.*; ‘Stakeholder Survey’ (26 June 2026).

⁵⁰⁰ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 3).

⁵⁰¹ ‘Stakeholder Survey’ (n 84).

⁵⁰² Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 30 Apr 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (30 April 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-04-30/127>> accessed 30 August 2026.

⁵⁰³ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2018’ (n 41); Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2024’ (n 2).

⁵⁰⁴ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (2026) <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/41ae0e7a/D%C3%B3chas_Centre_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>; Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee (n 45).

⁵⁰⁵ ‘Students Graduate from Ireland’s “Inside Out” Prison-University Programme’ (University College Cork) <<https://www.ucc.ie/en/news/2025/students-graduate-from-irelands-inside-out-prison-university-programme.html>> accessed 10 August 2026; Cork Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e3b2cf8f/Cork_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

Assessment of Standard 19: Mixed

In 2025, there were a number of positive policy developments aimed at the provision of education and training in Irish prisons, such as the establishment of the CJEAC and the CJEN, a reported increase in funding for education in prisons, and increased rates of participation in education and further education opportunities. However, these were somewhat undermined by the practical delivery of education and training in prison, including school closures and shortened class times, owing to staff shortages, overcrowding, and no change in the number of equivalent teachers, despite both the increase in the prison population and the increased budget.

Standard 20 Community engagement and involvement

People in prison have opportunities to participate and engage in the wider community through structured forms of temporary release. Civil society and community groups are encouraged and supported to engage with those in custody and to run programmes and activities within prisons.

Assessment: Mixed

The use of structured temporary release of those serving a prison sentence can be an important tool to help them engage in the wider community and reconnect with family, and reduce the abruptness of being released from prison.

As discussed in Standard 2, the increased budget allocated to the Probation Service in Budget 2026 provided for the expansion of a national supervised temporary release scheme.⁵⁰⁶ At present, there are two forms of structured temporary release which are jointly overseen by the Probation Service and the IPS: the Community Return Scheme (CRS) for individuals serving a sentence between one and eight years and the Community Support Scheme (CSS) for individuals with sentences of less than 18 months.⁵⁰⁷

The increased emphasis on structured temporary release is a welcome one, as it follows from the recommendations for its increased use made by the Prison Overcrowding Response Group (PORG) in its 2024 report.⁵⁰⁸ In April 2025, however, according to documents obtained through an FOI request, the Department of Justice considered further increasing the use of structured temporary release under the Probation Service, but noted that “there are constraints in supply of social workers” and that “existing recruitment processes will not be sufficient to build the required capacity within the necessary timeframe”.⁵⁰⁹

In July 2024, a two-year pilot programme for supervised temporary release of women in Limerick Prison commenced.⁵¹⁰ The programme was initiated in response to a recommendation in the PORG report, which recognised that many women in prison were technically eligible for the CSS based on their sentence length, but were ineligible “due to complex reasons [that] required forms of support and structure that extend beyond that of the Community Support Scheme”.⁵¹¹ By March 2025, eligibility had been expanded to women serving sentences of 18 months or less, to align with the CSS.⁵¹² It noted that the key difference between the two schemes is that the CSS “is geared towards individuals with more stable circumstances” whereas the pilot “can cater to individuals with more precarious backgrounds”.⁵¹³ The document also indicated that the IPS and Probation Service were “well advanced” in developing a proposal to broaden the eligibility criteria for the programme, in recognition of “the benefits of the scheme for the women, its capacity to supervise up to

⁵⁰⁶ ‘Record €6.17 Billion for Justice Sector in Budget 2026’ (gov.ie, 8 October 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/news/record-6-17-billion-for-justice-sector-in-budget-2026/>> accessed 7 August 2026.

⁵⁰⁷ Department of Justice, ‘Prison Overcrowding Response Group Report’ (2024) <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7498/prison_overcrowding_response_group_report_web.pdf>.

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid* 40–42.

⁵⁰⁹ Information obtained through an FOI request to the Department of Justice.

⁵¹⁰ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Sentencing Policy – Tuesday, 15 Jul 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (15 July 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-07-15/739/>> accessed 10 August 2026.

⁵¹¹ Department of Justice (n 92) 22.

⁵¹² Information obtained through an FOI request to the Department of Justice.

⁵¹³ Information obtained through an FOI request to the Department of Justice.

40 women, and the low numbers currently eligible for the scheme".⁵¹⁴ According to information provided in response to a Parliamentary Question, by July 2025 the pilot had supported 30 women to access structured temporary release.⁵¹⁵ **Such initiatives are welcome, and IPRT hopes that on the basis of this pilot, and a review of any barriers that currently exist for women, the programme can be formalised and extended to the Dóchas Centre.**

As discussed in Standard 2 (p. 25), the IPS also oversees unstructured temporary release, whereby individuals serving a sentence of less than 12 months and on the basis of a risk assessment and subject to public safety criteria, may be granted temporary release.⁵¹⁶ However, IPRT has previously recommended against the use of unstructured temporary release as a 'release valve' measure to manage overcrowding.⁵¹⁷ IPRT therefore reiterates that unstructured temporary release should be granted in a way that is focused on the needs of the individual.

There are a considerable number of community-based organisations (CBOs) that regularly engage with people in Irish prisons. However, as reported in 2024, overcrowding and its associated impacts on staffing capacities meant that in 2025 some community-based organisations reported being denied entry to prisons or having their access restricted.⁵¹⁸ IPRT stakeholders have reported that in 2025 they faced increased difficulty in gaining access to some prisons, usually on arrival at the prison, and without being provided with an explanation.⁵¹⁹ One stakeholder described facing "immense difficulties", whilst others assessed that pre-pandemic access has still not been restored.⁵²⁰ Such restrictions and denials of access underscore the far-reaching impacts of overcrowding on the conditions of detention for people in prison, as opportunities to engage with the community are limited and made more infrequent.

Additionally, many CBOs usually provide their services in prisons in line with the school's timetable, which means their access is restricted during non-term time when they are even more necessary, as they fill an important gap, providing meaningful activity during the day. **IPRT encourages the IPS to guarantee these organisations year-round access, not only during term time.**

There were positive instances of prison management in some prisons encouraging greater community engagement. Following Storm Éowyn in January 2025 and in response to the resulting power outages, Loughan House open prison provided approximately 250 meals and hot drinks to people in the local community who had been affected by the storm.⁵²¹ Loughan House also ran a programme focused on securing employment for the men in its custody, with a number of those who engaged in the programme securing paid positions with local businesses, such as car repair shops, barber shops, retail establishments and restaurants.⁵²² Similarly, initiatives like the Progression Park Run operated at Mountjoy Prison and the significant waiting list to participate in it for members of the public indicate the importance of and interest in engagement between people in prison and the wider community.⁵²³

Assessment of Standard 20: Mixed

In 2025, a welcome emphasis was placed on structured temporary release programmes, including the allocation of a dedicated budget to the Probation Service to implement these initiatives. However, the inability of community-based organisations to access prisons on a consistent, scheduled basis for the second year in a row is concerning.

⁵¹⁴ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁵ Oireachtas, 'Sentencing Policy – Tuesday, 15 Jul 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (n 95).

⁵¹⁶ Department of Justice (n 92).

⁵¹⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (n 2) 54.

⁵¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁵¹⁹ 'Stakeholder Consultation 2' (n 80).

'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (n 3).

⁵²⁰ 'Stakeholder Survey' (n 84).

⁵²¹ Loughan House Prison Visiting Committee (n 38) 5.

⁵²² *ibid.* 8.

⁵²³ 'Behind the Walls of Mountjoy Prison for The Mountjoy Prison Park Run' (RTE Radio, 13 January 2025) <<https://www.rte.ie/radio/radio1/clips/22480134/>> accessed 10 August 2026.

Standard 21 Political and civic participation

People in prison have opportunities to, and are encouraged and supported to, exercise their political and civic rights.

Assessment: Mixed

An individual in prison, whether serving a sentence or on remand, retains their civil and political rights and should be supported in exercising them while they are in custody. This can include voting in elections and being engaged in organised groups in prison, amongst others.

An encouraging development in 2025 was the reactivation of the Women's Council in the Dóchas Centre.⁵²⁴ The Council is composed of women who volunteer to represent each of the houses on the campus and are responsible for gathering input from the women across the prison.⁵²⁵ Meetings occur every four to six weeks and are attended by members of the PVC, during which the Council members identify three issues of collective interest to raise with the prison management.⁵²⁶ The Chief Officer then joins the meeting to hear the key issues, provide a response and, where possible, commit to further action.⁵²⁷ Since mid-2024, the Council had been dormant, before being re-established in November 2025 – which the PVC credited to the proactive support of one of the Chief Officers.⁵²⁸ Initiatives like this are crucial for encouraging and empowering people in prison to exercise their civil and political rights, both whilst in custody and in their community, and can also help foster positive, mutually respectful relationships between prison management and those in custody. **IPRT welcomes the reactivation of the Women's Council in the Dóchas Centre and encourages similar representative initiatives to be implemented across the Irish prison estate, where not already in existence.**

Stakeholders have told IPRT that in other prisons, management have not supported attempts by community-based organisations to establish initiatives that would encourage the exercising of civil and political rights.⁵²⁹ One stakeholder observed that “emphasis is entirely put on individual rehabilitation, but no collective organising, which would be so important – and would not be contrary to rehabilitative goals”.⁵³⁰

The Mountjoy PVC also raised concern in its Annual Report regarding the provision of information to and communication with individuals in prison who do not have English as a first language.⁵³¹ It reported that “this is an issue we are coming across regularly and is one that makes not only day to day existence for those men very frustrating but also undermines their ability to assert their rights”.⁵³² **IPRT recommends that increased efforts be made across Irish prisons to ensure that individuals in custody who have English as a second language are provided with necessary information in a language they can understand, and are supported in understanding and asserting their rights.**

The ability to vote while in prison is an important way in which individuals can continue to exercise their political and civic rights. The Electoral (Amendment) Act 2006 provides the legal basis for the enfranchisement of individuals in prison, subject to other voter registration criteria.⁵³³ Voting can take place by postal vote within the prison, and while no home address is needed for registration, constituency registration is required. People on remand have the same right to vote as people who have been sentenced. On 24 October 2025, the Irish presidential election took place but data on the participation of people in Irish prisons in this election was not publicly available.

⁵²⁴ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 89) 28.

⁵²⁵ *ibid.*

⁵²⁶ *ibid.*

⁵²⁷ *ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *ibid.*

⁵²⁹ ‘Stakeholder Survey’ (n 84).

⁵³⁰ *ibid.*

⁵³¹ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee (n 8) 4.

⁵³² *ibid.*

⁵³³ Electoral (Amendment) Act 2006.

Assessment of Standard 21: Mixed

The reactivation of the Women's Council in the Dóchas Centre is an encouraging development, and the establishment or reactivation of similar initiatives are strongly encouraged across the prison system. However, the experiences of some community-based organisations and stakeholders in trying to establish similar bodies indicates that they are not broadly facilitated by prison management. Greater efforts must be taken to ensure that individuals with English as a second language are adequately informed of their rights in a language they understand.

ASSESSMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Section C: Prison regimes

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
16. Time out-of-cell	The lack of available data on time out of cell for the general prison population makes it difficult to fully assess this standard for a second year in a row. Based on the data that IPRT reviewed however, it would appear that out of cell time is yet another feature of prison conditions in 2025 that was significantly impacted by overcrowding, the very issue that makes out of cell time so crucial.	Regress 	The IPS ensures that the length of time that each individual spends on a restricted regime is recorded and that anonymised data is regularly published as a matter of priority. The IPS take immediate steps to ensure that people on restricted regimes can spend an increased amount of time out-of-cell, particularly those on 22+ hour restricted regimes.
17. Sentence management	The number of ISM Coordinators across the prison system did not increase in line with the growing prison population in 2025 – in addition to the fact that this number was already insufficient for the prison population in 2024. More ISM Coordinator positions must be established, and priority placed on ensuring the individuals remain in post, to ensure continued support to those serving a sentence of more than 12 months.	Regress 	The IPS establish additional ISM Coordinator positions provided with specific, protected time to undertake these functions. The IPS should consider expanding sentence management to all people in prison, and resource the ISM system adequately and appropriately.
18. Life skills	While the completion of the Independent Living Units in Castlerea prison, Shelton Abbey and Loughan House was a welcome development, and the construction of further units of a similar model is encouraged, their construction is somewhat undercut by the removal of existing spaces that facilitated the autonomous living that they have been established to encourage, such as the Progression Unit at Mountjoy Prison.	Mixed 	The IPS reopen the Progression Unit at Mountjoy Prison. The IPS provide and make available practical life-skill courses to prepare individuals for release.
19. Education & training	In 2025 there were a number of positive policy developments aimed at the provision of education and training in Irish prisons, such as the establishment of the CJEAC and the CJEN, a reported increase in funding for education in prisons, increased rates of participation in education and further education opportunities. However, these were somewhat undermined by the practical delivery of education and training in prison, such as school closures and the length of class times, owing to staff shortages, overcrowding and no change in the number of equivalent teachers, despite both the increase in the prison population and increased budget.	Mixed 	The IPS collect and regularly publish data on the number of school closures each year. The IPS ensure that individuals attending school are guaranteed the full class time, with sufficient prison staff allocated to escort individuals to and from the school. The Department of Education increase the number of teachers allocated to the IPS, to help reduce waiting lists for school.

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
20. Community engagement & involvement	In 2025, a welcome emphasis was placed on structured temporary release programmes, including dedicated budget allocated to the Probation Service to implement these initiatives. However, the inability of community-based organisations to access prisons on a consistent, scheduled basis for the second year in a row is concerning.	Mixed 	The IPS formalise the pilot supervised temporary release scheme in Limerick Women's Prison and expands it to the Dóchas Centre with necessary support services put in place. The IPS should ensure that community-based organisations and services are guaranteed access to prisons all year round, and not only during the school term time.
21. Political and civic participation	The reactivation of the Women's Council in the Dóchas Centre is an encouraging development, and the establishment or reactivation of similar initiatives are strongly encouraged across the prison system. However, the experiences of some community-based organisations and stakeholders in trying to establish similar bodies indicates that they are not broadly facilitated by prison management. Greater efforts must be taken to ensure individuals with English as a second language are adequately informed of their rights in a language they understand.	Mixed 	The IPS should support the establishment or reactivation of representative councils like the Women's Council in the Dóchas Centre in all Irish prisons.

Section D

Complaints, accountability, and inspection mechanisms

Section D

Complaints, accountability, and inspection mechanisms

Standard 22 Complaints system

All people in prison, and their families or next of kin, have access to a robust and effective complaints mechanism that is accessible and trusted. All complaints are investigated in a timely manner and the outcome clearly communicated to the individual, with a satisfactory resolution if the complaint is upheld.

Assessment: Regress

An effective and trusted internal prison complaints system is a critical safeguard against ill-treatment and abuse in any place of detention. The importance of complaints systems is highlighted in both the Mandela Rules (Rules 56 and 57) and the European Prison Rules (Rule 70), and has been emphasised by the CPT.⁵³⁴

Under the current Prisoner Complaints Policy, an individual may submit a complaint in writing by placing it in a complaints box in the prison, which is then reviewed by the Prisoner Complaints Unit within the IPS, and categorised based on the seriousness of the complaint, ranging from Categories A–F. The review procedure varies depending on the Category assigned to the complaint, with the involvement of “external independent investigators” for Category A complaints.⁵³⁵

The current complaints system in Irish prisons is full of deficiencies, which are widely recognised and have been for a long time. In recognition of these deficiencies, a process has been ongoing since at least 2020 to review the complaints system.⁵³⁶ The Government has previously said that this will include statutory amendments to the Prison Rules 2007 which establish the complaints system, and a legislative amendment to provide a dedicated role for the Ombudsman.⁵³⁷ As reported in PIPS 2024, previous government statements in 2023 claimed that the process was at an “advanced stage”, yet no progress was reported in 2024 nor 2025. In mid-2025, the Minister of Justice stated that “multilateral engagement is progressing between my Department, the Irish Prison Service, the Ombudsman, and the Inspector of Prisons” to deliver a new system.⁵³⁸ In contrast to this, the OIP reported that it had been working constructively with the Ombudsman and the IPS Director General as part of this process, but described the Department of Justice’s work on this issue in 2025 as “characterised by inertia”.⁵³⁹

A robust complaints system can crucially act as a preventative safeguard against ill-treatment, which the current system does not provide for. In its 2025 Annual Report, the OIP stated:

The ongoing absence of an effective complaints system, including in relation to the most serious complaints of assaults by prison staff can only encourage officers minded to ill treat prisoners to believe that they can do so with impunity. Urgent action is needed, at the very top level of the Department, to breathe new life into these long-overdue reforms.⁵⁴⁰

⁵³⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Complaints Mechanisms’ - Extract from the 27th General Report of the CPT, Published in 2018’ CPT/Inf(2018)4-part <<https://rm.coe.int/16807bc668>>.

⁵³⁵ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 19 Apr 2023 – Parliamentary Questions (33rd Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (19 April 2023) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2023-04-19/88>> accessed 28 July 2026.

⁵³⁶ Sophie van der Valk, Eva Aizpurua and Mary Rogan, “[Y]Ou Are Better off Talking to a F***** Wall”: The Perceptions and Experiences of Grievance Procedures among Incarcerated People in Ireland’ (2022) 56 Law & Society Review 261 <<https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12603>>.

⁵³⁷ *ibid.*

⁵³⁸ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Tuesday, 29 Jul 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (29 July 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-07-29/2102>> accessed 24 July 2026.

⁵³⁹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ 40 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/OIP-AR-2025.pdf>>.

⁵⁴⁰ *ibid.*

Under the IPS' Prisoner Complaints Policy, complaints range in severity from A-F, with Category A complaints being the most serious. The Irish Prison Rules 2007 define a Category A complaint as one that may involve allegations of "assault or use of excessive force against a prisoner or ill treatment, racial abuse, discrimination, intimidation, threats or other conduct against a prisoner of a nature and gravity likely to bring discredit on the Irish Prison Service" (Rule 57B). Regarding the review of Category A complaints, there is a lack of clarity regarding the "independent external investigators", particularly their appointment, remuneration and the criteria for the role. In addition to expressing concern that the quality of the investigations carried out by the external investigators was "sufficiently robust", it also found that many of these investigators had "professional and institutional links to the IPS".⁵⁴¹ **IPRT urges greater transparency around the appointment and independence of external investigators, and their role and responsibilities.**

In 2025, there was a slight increase in the number of Category A complaints made, increasing to 62, up from 55 in 2024.⁵⁴² Across most prisons, the number of complaints fluctuated only slightly, save for a few exceptions. There were four complaints from individuals in Shelton Abbey, with the last single Category A complaint coming from that prison in 2021.⁵⁴³ In continuation of the trend in recent years, the highest number of complaints came from Cloverhill, with 16 in 2025 – a significantly higher number than from other prisons, with the second highest being eight from Wheatfield.⁵⁴⁴ There was a notable reduction in the number of complaints from the Midlands Prison compared to recent years, with just one recorded in 2025.⁵⁴⁵

Table 19: Notifications of Category A complaints made each year by prison, 2021 – 2025⁵⁴⁶

Place of detention	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
Arbour Hill	0	0	0	0	3
Castlerea	5	3	6	3	5
Cloverhill	16	15	12	3	32
Cork	7	2	3	5	5
Limerick*	4	4	7	7	1
Loughan House	0	0	0	0	0
Midlands	1	10	19	24	17
Mountjoy (F)	4	5	4	3	3
Mountjoy (M)	5	6	6	10	8
Portlaoise	3	4	1	12	9
Prison Service Escort Corps (PSEC)	5	1	-	-	-
Shelton Abbey	4	0	0	0	1
Wheatfield	8	5	6	3	5
Total	62	55	64	70	89

*Includes Limerick Men's and Women's Prisons

It is important to note that individuals are less likely to engage with ineffective complaints systems, as reflected in the responses of both individuals in custody and staff to the OIP's annual survey. In 2025, the OIP conducted surveys in two prisons, with 63 per cent of individuals stating that they did not feel safe making a complaint (271 of 430).⁵⁴⁷ This rate stood at 54 per cent in 2024, and importantly, was a similar sample size, therefore denoting an almost 10 per cent

⁵⁴¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (2025) CPT/Inf (2025) 22 21 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60a>>.

⁵⁴² Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 5) 35.

⁵⁴³ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁴⁷ *ibid.* 25.

increase in distrust towards the complaints system (236 of 438).⁵⁴⁸ Only 21 per cent of people in prison who responded to the survey in 2025 believed the complaints system was effective (89 of 430), down from 27 per cent the previous year (118 of 438).⁵⁴⁹ Such feelings of distrust were also recorded by the CPT, with the delegation to Ireland finding that “most prisoners interviewed, across all prisons visited, had no faith in the complaints system. Many also feared reprisals for complaining”.⁵⁵⁰ In addition to this, while complaint boxes were available on prison wings, individuals usually had to request a complaint form from a prison officer, which itself acted as a deterrent.⁵⁵¹

This hesitation to use the complaints system was echoed in IPRT’s consultations with stakeholders and individuals with recent experience of prison. They shared with IPRT that there is a very low level of trust in the complaints system amongst individuals in prison, and that some do not make complaints for fear of potential repercussions, or that, if they do make a complaint, they don’t receive a response or see any outcome from it.⁵⁵² The CPT also noted that individuals who submitted complaints generally did not systematically receive feedback, meaning they are not informed of the outcome of their complaint.⁵⁵³ Some people in prison have experienced a situation where, if they request to meet with the Governor, as is provided for by Rule 55 of the 2007 Prison Rules, prison officers question them about the reason for seeking the meeting and what they intend to raise, which dissuades them from proceeding with the meeting request.⁵⁵⁴ IPRT recommends the urgent completion of the long-promised reforms regarding the complaints system, ensuring the independent investigation of serious complaints, with accessible and confidential communication of outcomes. **IPRT also recommends that a system be put in place to allow individuals to formally request to meet with the Governor during allotted time slots on a periodic basis, to ensure Rule 55 is given meaningful effect.**

According to the IPS website, visitors to prison may also submit a complaint, which states that “a visitor can make a complaint in writing on the complaint form. Complaint forms are also available in the Prison Visitors Area”.⁵⁵⁵ The complaint form for visitors is the same as the form for an individual in prison.⁵⁵⁶ It provides scant information on the review process and what the individual can reasonably expect by way of a response. Based on both feedback from stakeholders and queries received by IPRT from families of individuals in prison throughout 2025, there is an evident lack of knowledge about the existence of a complaints system and how to engage with it, coupled with a fear that their family member in prison will face repercussions as a result of the complaint.⁵⁵⁷

Assessment of Standard 22: Regress

The combined lack of progress regarding the review of the complaints system, and the recorded increase in distrust in the complaints system conveyed by OIP survey respondents, not only indicate a lack of change in this standard, but also demonstrate a failure to deliver commitments dating back to at least 2020 to overhaul the complaints process and put in place a process that is fit for purpose.

⁵⁴⁸ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Office of the Inspector of Prisons Annual Report 2024’ 20 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/OIP-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>>.

⁵⁴⁹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (n 5) 25; Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Office of the Inspector of Prisons Annual Report 2024’ (n 14) 20.

⁵⁵⁰ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) (n 7) 21.

⁵⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵⁵² ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (8 June 2026); ‘Stakeholder Consultation 2’ (13 July 2026); ‘Stakeholder Survey’ (26 June 2026). Stakeholder Consultation by the Traveller Justice Initiative (TJI) in June 2026.

⁵⁵³ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) (n 7) 21.

⁵⁵⁴ Stakeholder Consultation by the Traveller Justice Initiative (TJI) in June 2026.

⁵⁵⁵ ‘Prisoner Complaints’ (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/prisoner-services/prisoner-complaints/>> accessed 31 July 2026.

⁵⁵⁶ Irish Prison Service, ‘Irish Prison Service Complaint Form’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Complaint-Form-26-Nov-Final.pdf>.

⁵⁵⁷ ‘Stakeholder Survey’ (n 18).

Standard 23 Independent complaints review and appeals mechanisms

All people in prison, and their families or next of kin, have access to an effective and independent external complaints review and appeals mechanism.

Assessment: No change

Access to an independent external review and appeals mechanism for prison complaints is an integral part of an effective complaints system to build trust and promote transparency. Currently, there is no independent complaints procedure available to people in prison or their families, only the internal complaints mechanism of the IPS, outlined in Standard 22.

In its 2023 report following pre-legislative scrutiny of the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022, the Joint Committee on Justice made two recommendations related to prison complaints systems:

10. The Committee recommends the establishment of an Ombudsman for Prisons and Places of Detention with responsibility for handling and investigating complaints made in relation to prisons and places of detention; and
11. The Committee recommends that a separate and independent body should be tasked with deciding on the categorisation of a prisoner's complaint rather than the Irish Prison Service.⁵⁵⁸

In July 2025, however, the Minister for Justice indicated that the Government does not intend to implement recommendation 10 (to establish a separate Ombudsman for prisons).⁵⁵⁹ The Office of the Ombudsman has participated in the ongoing review of the complaints system, discussed in Standard 22 (p. 86).⁵⁶⁰ In his 2016 report, Judge Michael O'Reilly, then Inspector of Prisons, recommended that the Ombudsman is:

[...] well positioned to provide the 'external element' in the prisoner complaints investigative process and would meet the definition of 'other authority' set out in Rule 57(1) of the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)⁵⁶¹

He noted that this could be done through a Statutory Instrument brought before the Oireachtas.⁵⁶² The Office of the Ombudsman has long expressed its commitment to expand its remit to receive complaints from prisons.⁵⁶³ As noted above however, no meaningful progress in this review was reported on or evident in 2025. Regardless of whether the Office of the Ombudsman or a separate Ombudsman for prisons would oversee this function, the issue remains that in 2025, people in prison and their families still had no recourse to a body, independent of the IPS, that can review complaints and outcomes and provide a remedy. IPRT recommends that such a mechanism be urgently established, and that it is independent, accessible, adequately resourced to ensure timely reviews, and is given sufficient powers to provide or recommend remedies.

Assessment of Standard 23: No change

For more than a decade, there has not been any progress in the establishment of an independent and effective external complaints review and appeal mechanism. This lack of progress is particularly concerning, given the evident distrust in the existing complaints mechanism and the apparent stagnation in the process of reviewing and overhauling it.

⁵⁵⁸ Joint Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, 'Report on Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022' (2023) 33/JC/36 8 <https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/committee/dail/33/joint_committee_on_justice/reports/2023/2023-03-08_report-on-pre-legislative-scrutiny-of-the-general-scheme-of-the-inspection-of-places-of-detention-bill-2022_en.pdf>.

⁵⁵⁹ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 29 Jul 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (29 July 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-07-29/2077>> accessed 31 July 2026.

⁵⁶⁰ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 5) 40.

⁵⁶¹ Department of Justice, 'An Assessment of the Irish Prison System by the Inspector of Prisons Judge Michael Reilly' (2013) 51–52 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/An-Assessment-of-the-Irish-Prison-System.pdf>>.

⁵⁶² *ibid.*

⁵⁶³ 'Prison Service: 15 Feb 2023: Written Answers (KildareStreet.Com)' <<https://www.kildarestreet.com/wrans/?id=2023-02-15a.280>> accessed 11 September 2026; 'Round-up: "The Ombudsman Behind Bars"' <<https://www.iprt.ie/iprt-in-the-news/round-up-the-ombudsman-behind-bars/>> accessed 11 September 2026.

Standard 24 Inspections and monitoring

There is independent, external scrutiny of prisons, including through ongoing monitoring and regular physical inspections. Inspection reports are made publicly available within reasonable timeframes, and any recommendations for improvement are implemented promptly and transparently.

Assessment: Mixed

Independent external oversight of prisons and other settings where a person may be deprived of their liberty plays a crucial role in preventing human rights abuses and highlighting the risk of abuse. It increases transparency around the prison system and contributes to accountability measures. The importance of regular inspections and monitoring of prisons is emphasised in the Mandela Rules (Rule 83-85) and the European Prison Rules (Rules 92 and 93), as well as the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

Prison inspections in Ireland are conducted by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP), a statutory body established under Part 5 of the Prisons Act 2007. The OIP can carry out both announced and unannounced inspections, as well as thematic inspections. It also conducts Death in Custody investigations, discussed in Standard 25.

Throughout 2025, the OIP carried out four inspections: a follow-up inspection of Mountjoy Prison in late April and early May, in response to its unannounced inspection of the prison in late 2022, unannounced General Inspections of Wheatfield and Castlereagh prisons in July and September, respectively, and commenced a thematic inspection on the topic of ageing in prison in November.⁵⁶⁴ This number and variety of inspections carried out by the OIP in 2025 indicate good progress in its inspection programme. Of concern, however, the OIP reported that its thematic inspection was suspended in November, due to “attempts to interfere with the operational autonomy of the Inspection Team” during inspections of the Midlands Prison and subsequently the Dóchas Centre.⁵⁶⁵ In response, the OIP issued a Statutory Notice of Concern to the IPS Director General, with subsequent exchanges between both bodies, but with the issue ultimately unresolved by the end of the year.⁵⁶⁶ **IPRT encourages the swift resolution of the issue, ensuring that the OIP is provided with full, unfettered access when carrying out its inspections, upholding its operational autonomy and enabling it to fulfil its inspection programme.**

The OIP does not have the authority to publish its own inspection reports. Under section 31 of the Prisons Act 2007, all inspection reports by the OIP are submitted to the Minister for Justice, with the decision to publish the report ultimately lying with the Minister. Even though subsection 31(3) of the Act states that the Minister should publish the report “as soon as practicable” after receiving it, there have tended to be significant delays in the publication of reports by the OIP after their submission to the Minister – as was highlighted in detail in PIPS 2024.⁵⁶⁷ Subsection (4) of the Act further provides that the Minister may omit any matter in a report that prejudices prison or state security, infringes on the rights of any person or would be contrary to the public interest, meaning that where there are potential concerns about the publication of certain contents of a report, such contents may be redacted, so as not to delay its publication.⁵⁶⁸

Throughout the course of 2025, the OIP submitted six reports to the Minister of Justice.⁵⁶⁹ Four of these were submitted in March and concerned visits to Mountjoy Prison (29 November 9 December 2022), the Dóchas Centre (19 September – 2 October 2023), Cork Prison (27 March – 5 April 2023) and Cloverhill Prison (15 – 25 May 2023). These reports related to inspections carried out several years ago, meaning the findings may not be as relevant and the conditions in the prison may have changed in the interim – for better or worse. The OIP must endeavour to submit its reports as soon as possible after the inspection has been carried out. None of the four reports were published by the Department of Justice until 15 January 2026, 10 months after their submission. However, there was an improvement in the time between submission and publication for two follow-up inspection reports on Cloverhill and Mountjoy, both of which were submitted by the OIP to the Minister on 23 December 2025 and published on 2 February 2026. Significant delays in publishing inspection reports not only significantly undermine the findings and recommendations of the report itself but

⁵⁶⁴ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (n 5).

⁵⁶⁵ *ibid* 24.

⁵⁶⁶ *ibid* 2.

⁵⁶⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2024’ (2025) 10 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7726/iprt_pips_2024_report_final_digital.pdf>.

⁵⁶⁸ Prisons Act 2007 s 31(4).

⁵⁶⁹ ‘General Inspection Reports’ (*Inspector of Prisons*) <<https://www.oip.ie/publications/inspection-reports/general-inspection-reports/>> accessed 31 July 2026.

seriously undercut the transparency and accountability that monitoring and inspection bodies are aimed at upholding. **IPRT welcomes the swifter publication of OIP reports by the Minister for Justice towards the end of 2025, and emphasises the importance of maintaining this rate of publication as the standard until new legislation is enacted to allow the Inspectorate to publish its reports directly.**

Prison Visiting Committees (PVCs) also contribute to consistent, independent monitoring of all prisons in Ireland. Established by the Prisons (Visiting Committees) Act 1925 and the Prisons (Visiting Committees) Order 1925, PVCs are aimed at complementing existing oversight bodies, such as the OIP, and are differentiated by the fact that they represent civil society.⁵⁷⁰ As described by one PVC in its annual report, PVCs are “the representatives of the community behind the walls”.⁵⁷¹ The ability of PVCs to visit their assigned prison once a month enables regular monitoring and documentation of emerging issues and concerns, and their ability to meet with individuals in prison and hear their complaints is, in theory, a valuable feature of their mandate. However, these and other functions of PVCs limit their potential effectiveness, namely due to the inability of PVCs to officially resolve complaints and make recommendations directly to prison governance. This limitation, combined with the deficiencies of the prison complaints system (Standard 22, p. 86) ultimately leaves people in prison with no effective avenue for making a complaint.

Similar to the OIP, publication of the PVC reports is at the discretion of the Minister for Justice.⁵⁷² This causes significant publication delays and dilutes the report’s content, with the Dóchas Visiting Committee stating that such delays in publicising reports “suggests an intent that the reports fulfil the legal responsibility of being made public, whilst attracting as little actual attention or scrutiny as possible”.⁵⁷³ Further to this, the format, content and detail of PVC reports vary greatly from one to another, whilst there is also a lack of awareness and trust in the roles of PVCs among people in prison.⁵⁷⁴

These issues were the subject of a review into the work and role of PVCs by the Department of Justice, the *Report on a Review of Prison Visiting Committees in 2023*. PVCs themselves reported in 2025 that they deemed there was a continued lack of implementation of the review’s recommendations.⁵⁷⁵ However, seven PVC Annual Reports for 2025 were made public on the Department of Justice’s website in March 2026, signalling a positive change in report publication delays, as the 2024 Annual Reports took more than nine months to be published.⁵⁷⁶ However, no information was provided by the Department as to why the PVC Annual Reports for Shelton Abbey, Portlaoise and Midlands prisons were not published. Discrepancies in the quality of PVC Annual Reports also persisted in 2025, with reports ranging from five to 37 pages in length. Some reports appeared to be merely perfunctory, consisting of a brief description of the services and facilities available in the prison and with no recommendations, whilst others included detailed scrutiny of persistent trends, considered recommendations, spotlighted a specific issue, and meaningfully conveyed the voices and experiences of individuals in prison.

The year 2025 marked 100 years of the activities of PVCs, with the Department holding a centennial event for the occasion. The Dóchas PVC notably reflected that it “proved a token event to mark the passage of time rather than a timely reflection and recommitment to implementing the recommendations of the *Report on a Review of Prison Visiting Committees 2023*”.⁵⁷⁷ A positive development in 2025, however, was the introduction of a transparent application process for the PVCs, as well as terms for members.⁵⁷⁸

Regarding international monitoring bodies, 2025 marked another year in which Ireland failed to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) signed in 2007, as covered in Standard 1 (p. 22). The ratification of OPCAT will not only provide for the establishment of a National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), but will also allow the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT) to conduct visits to places of detention in Ireland. Such visits would increase scrutiny of Ireland’s fulfilment of its human

⁵⁷⁰ Department of Justice, ‘Report on a Review of Prison Visiting Committees - March 2023’ (2023) 3 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/report-on-a-review-of-prison-visiting-committees-2023.pdf>>.

⁵⁷¹ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (2026) 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/41ae0e7a/D%C3%B3chas_Centre_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁵⁷² Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘IPRT Submission to the Department of Justice on the Review of the Prison Visiting Committees’ 3 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7118/iprt_submission_to_the_department_of_justice_on_the_review_of_the_pvcs_220822.pdf>.

⁵⁷³ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 37) 8.

⁵⁷⁴ Irish Penal Reform Trust (n 38) 6,10.

⁵⁷⁵ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 37) 8.

⁵⁷⁶ ‘Prison Visiting Committee Annual Reports 2025’ (gov.ie, 19 March 2026) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/collections/prison-visiting-committee-annual-reports-2025/>> accessed 3 August 2026.

⁵⁷⁷ Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee (n 37) 8.

⁵⁷⁸ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Wednesday, 18 Mar 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (18 March 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-03-18/1347>> accessed 11 September 2026.

rights obligations at the international level, adding to the crucial monitoring already carried out by the CPT.

Assessment of Standard 24: **Mixed**

In 2025, the publication of OIP and PVC reports at a swifter rate was welcome, given the significant delays surrounding their publication in recent years. There was, however, continued stagnation surrounding the implementation of recommendations from the 2023 review of PVCs, and the ratification of OPCAT did not occur. The suspension of the OIP's thematic inspection at the end of 2025 on the grounds of restrictions on its operational autonomy raises serious concerns.

Standard 25 Investigations into deaths in custody

The death of, or serious incident involving, any person in prison is immediately investigated by an appropriate independent, external body. Investigation reports are made publicly available within reasonable timeframes, and any recommendations for improvement are implemented promptly and transparently.

Assessment: **Progress**

In addition to conducting general inspections of prisons, the OIP is also charged with investigating any deaths that occur in Irish prisons, or any death of an individual on temporary release that occurs within one month of their release from prison. This is provided for in section 31(2) of the Prisons Act 2007, and required by several international human rights instruments.⁵⁷⁹

Once the OIP has concluded its investigation, it submits its report to the IPS and the Minister for Justice, along with any recommendations. As with other OIP reports, the power to publish the report resides with the Minister for Justice.

In 2025, there were 14 deaths in custody in Ireland; four occurred in prison custody, six in hospital and four within one month of temporary release.⁵⁸⁰ Of the deceased, 13 were male and one was female. By the end of the year, none of the Death in Custody (DiC) investigation reports for the deaths that occurred in 2025 had been published.⁵⁸¹ One investigation report relating to a person who died in January 2025 was published on 26 January 2026, 390 days after the death occurred.⁵⁸²

The number of deaths in 2025 represents a significant reduction compared to deaths in custody recorded in recent years, with 31 in 2024 – the highest number on record, 20 in 2023 and 23 in 2022.⁵⁸³ The reduction from 2024 to 2025 constitutes a 55 per cent reduction, which may be due in part to the implementation by the IPS of recommendations made by the OIP in previous Death in Custody (DiC) reports.⁵⁸⁴ These recommendations included improving processes for monitoring individuals who may be suspected of having ingested drugs.⁵⁸⁵ One recommendation in DiC investigations that was specifically highlighted by the OIP as not having been implemented by the IPS, was the provision of basic life support training to all prison staff.⁵⁸⁶ This would not only provide those working in prisons with crucial skills that could ensure the safety and protection of individuals in prison in emergency situations, but may also provide them with

⁵⁷⁹ See: Article 2 of the European Convention on Human Rights, Rule 71 of the Nelson Mandela Rules, and the Minnesota Protocol on the Investigation of Potentially Unlawful Death (2016).

⁵⁸⁰ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 5) 28.

⁵⁸¹ 'Death in Custody - Report by Year of Death' (Inspector of Prisons) <<https://www.oip.ie/publications/investigation-reports/death-in-custody-investigation-reports/death-in-custody-report-by-year-of-death/>> accessed 31 July 2026.

⁵⁸² *ibid.*

⁵⁸³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Office of the Inspector of Prisons Annual Report 2023' 34 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Office-of-the-Inspector-of-Prisons-Annual-Report-2023.pdf>>; Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Office of the Inspector of Prisons Annual Report 2024' (n 13) 26; Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 5) 2.

⁵⁸⁴ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 5) 28.

⁵⁸⁵ *ibid.* 2.

⁵⁸⁶ *ibid.*

increased confidence and assurance in performing their duties.

IPRT is encouraged that there was a reduction in deaths in custody in 2025, and recommends the full and swift implementation of all OIP recommendations to the IPS in its death in custody investigation reports, to ensure adequate prevention and response processes are applied and necessary training is carried out and refreshed.

Recommendations made by the OIP in 2025 focused on several prevalent issues that were deemed to contribute to deaths in custody and the operational processes surrounding a death. These recurring issues included temporary release procedures for individuals with addiction issues, the provision of healthcare, the falsification of or inaccuracies in record-keeping, the committal of individuals with significant mental health illnesses to prison and the placement of individuals with mental health issues in Close Supervision Cells, Next of Kin (NoK) issues, contraband and the secretion of drugs, and the functionality of cell call systems.⁵⁸⁷

Of the 43 recommendations made by the OIP for consideration by the IPS Director General, 11 were not accepted.⁵⁸⁸ The IPS accepted 26 of these recommendations and six were partially accepted.⁵⁸⁹ A number of issues that informed OIP recommendations made in 2024 were repeated in 2025, specifically regarding record keeping, updating next of kin contact details, contraband and the secretion of drugs, and the prevalence of mental health issues.⁵⁹⁰ It is concerning that a number of issues continue to arise in death in custody investigations, indicating the importance of full and prompt implementation of the recommendations made by the OIP.

The Death in Custody investigation reports for 17 individuals were published in 2025, with the majority of these reports dealing with deaths that occurred in 2022 and 2023.⁵⁹¹ Of the reports published, the lengthiest took 1,762 days to be published following the death, with the shortest taking 412 days (see Table 20). Whilst each DIC investigation will vary in the amount of time and resources required to complete it, due to the unique circumstances of each death that occurs in custody, a former Chief Inspector of Prisons envisaged that a DIC investigation should be concluded within six months – a timeline that was not met by any of the reports published in 2025.⁵⁹² Notably, when that recommendation was made in 2013, there were 14 deaths in custody recorded – indicating that this estimate was given for a similar volume of investigations as those that occurred in 2025, and is therefore a potentially achievable timeframe.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid* 33.

⁵⁸⁸ *ibid* 31.

⁵⁸⁹ *ibid*.

⁵⁹⁰ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Office of the Inspector of Prisons Annual Report 2024' (n 14) 30–31.

⁵⁹¹ 'Death in Custody - Report by Year of Publication' (Inspector of Prisons) <<https://www.oip.ie/publications/investigation-reports/death-in-custody-investigation-reports/death-in-custody-report-by-year-of-publication/>> accessed 31 July 2026.

⁵⁹² Department of Justice (n 27) 42.

⁵⁹³ 'Death in Custody - Report by Year of Publication' (n 57).

Table 20: Death in custody reports published in 2025, and the number of days between the death occurring and publication⁵⁹⁴

Report	Death occurred	Date of publication of report	Number of days between death occurring and publication of report
Report into the death of Mr. L 2020	15-Nov-20	12-Sep-25	1,762 days
Report into the death of Mr. M 2020	16-Dec-20	14-Aug-25	1,702 days
Report into the death of Mr. E 2022	08-Feb-22	10-Oct-25	1,340 days
Report into the death of Mr. H 2022	03-May-22	23-Apr-25	1,086 days
Report into the death of Mr. M 2022	27-Jun-22	04-Feb-25	953 days
Report into the death of Mr. O 2022	10-Aug-22	31-Jul-25	1,086 days
Report into the death of Mr. P 2022	09-Oct-22	23-Apr-25	1,040 days
Report into the death of Mr. Q 2022	23-Oct-22	19-Feb-25	850 days
Report into the death of Mr. V 2022	31-Dec-22	31-Oct-25	1,035 days
Report into the death of Mr. L 2023	17-Jul-23	09-Oct-25	815 days
Report into the death of Mr. A 2023	05-Jan-23	24-Feb-25	781 days
Report into the death of Mr. B 2023	08-Jan-23	29-Jul-25	1,702 days
Report into the death of Mr. D 2023	26-Jan-23	30-Jul-25	916 days
Report into the death of Mr. G 2023	08-Apr-23	31-Oct-25	664 days
Report into the death of Mr. C 2023	12-Oct-23	30-Oct-25	749 days
Report into the death of Mr. S 2024	24-Aug-24	13-Oct-25	415 days
Report into the death of Mr. T 2024	28-Aug-24	14-Oct-25	412 days

Based on OIP data, it is estimated that of the reports published in 2025, the lengthiest period in the process for most investigations was the time between the death occurring and the time that the OIP submitted its investigation report to the IPS (see Table 21). Whilst some reports for deaths that occurred in 2020 and 2022 took a significant amount of time to be sent to the IPS, totalling 1,579 days in one case, the time between the death occurring and the OIP's report being sent to the IPS for comment and review has substantially reduced for deaths in recent years, particularly those in 2024. This may be the result of concerted efforts made by the OIP to clear a backlog of DIC reports in recent years.⁵⁹⁵ However, even in the more recent cases where this period was reduced, it is still a considerable amount of time. Whilst it is understandable that such investigations require considerable time, resources and engagement with a number of individuals, including the next of kin, the IPS, An Garda Síochána and other stakeholders, it is essential that investigations are conducted as swiftly as possible after a death has occurred, to ensure the availability of information and that recommendations can take effect.

Similarly, the length of time between the DIC report being submitted to the Minister for Justice and the report's publication varies significantly, with some periods being as short as 21 days, whilst others remain unpublished for 295 days (see Table 21). As in previous years, the delay in publishing DIC reports was attributed to the Department of Justice awaiting legal advice on their publication.⁵⁹⁶ IPRT reiterates the importance of the Department seeking legal advice as swiftly as possible when necessary, acting upon it in just as swift a manner, with summaries of reports being published in cases where not all information included is deemed to be publishable.

⁵⁹⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁵ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2021' (2022) 22 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Office-of-the-Inspector-of-Prisons-Annual-Report-English.pdf>>.

⁵⁹⁶ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Departmental Reports – Thursday, 26 Mar 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (26 March 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-03-26/367>> accessed 31 July 2026.

Table 21: Days between DIC occurring, DIC Report being sent to the IPS and days between report being sent to the MOJ and publication of the report⁵⁹⁷

Report	Days between the death occurring and report being sent by OIP to IPS	Days between report being submitted to IPS and IPS sending to MOJ	Days between report being submitted to MOJ and date report was published
Report into the death of Mr. L 2020	1,579	117	66
Report into the death of Mr. M 2020	1,386	21	295
Report into the death of Mr. E 2022	1,238	18	84
Report into the death of Mr. H 2022	883	22	181
Report into the death of Mr. M 2022	N/A	N/A	103
Report into the death of Mr. O 2022	936	127	23
Report into the death of Mr. P 2022	724	21	295
Report into the death of Mr. Q 2022	710	22	118
Report into the death of Mr. V 2022	912	18	105
Report into the death of Mr. L 2023	595	127	93
Report into the death of Mr. A 2023	658	0	123
Report into the death of Mr. B 2023	785	127	21
Report into the death of Mr. D 2023	767	127	22
Report into the death of Mr. G 2023	N/A	N/A	100
Report into the death of Mr. C 2023	627	18	104
Report into the death of Mr. S 2024	310	18	87
Report into the death of Mr. T 2024	306	18	88

Assessment of Standard 25: Progress

In 2025, there was a significant reduction in the number of deaths in custody. This is an important reduction, given the record number of deaths in custody recorded in 2024. It speaks to the importance of implementing recommendations that arise in death in custody investigations highlighted by the OIP. While the period between a death occurring and the publication of the investigation report continued to take a substantial length of time, it is welcome that this period appeared to reduce gradually in 2025.

⁵⁹⁷ 'Death in Custody - Report by Year of Publication' (n 57).

ASSESSMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Section D: Complaints, accountability, and inspection mechanisms

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
22. Complaints system	The combined lack of progress regarding the review of the complaints system, and the recorded increase in distrust in the complaints system conveyed by OIP survey respondents, not only indicate a lack of change in this standard, but demonstrates failure to deliver commitments dating back to at least 2020 to overhaul the complaints process and put in place a process that is fit for purpose.	Regress 	The IPS overhaul its complaints system for people in prison and their families, and ensure it is fit-for-purpose and accessible and provides adequate remedies.
23. Independent complaints review & appeals mechanisms	For more than a decade there has not been any progress in the establishment of an independent and effective external complaints review and appeal mechanism. This lack of progress is particularly concerning, given the evident distrust in the existing complaints mechanism and the apparent stagnation in the process reviewing and overhauling it.	No change 	The State urgently establish an independent complaints mechanism separate to the IPS to receive and review complaints by individuals in prison and their families.
24. Inspections and monitoring	In 2025, the publication of OIP and PVC reports at a swifter rate was welcome, given the significant delays surrounding their publication in recent years. There was however continued stagnation surrounding the implementation of recommendations from the 2023 review of PVCs, and the ratification of OPCAT did not occur. Most concerning, was the suspension of the OIP's thematic inspection at the end of 2025, citing restrictions on its operational autonomy, and that the dispute remained unresolved by the year's end.	Mixed 	The IPS must ensure that the OIP is provided with full, unfettered access when carrying out its inspections, upholding its operational autonomy and enabling it to fulfil its inspection programme.
25. Investigations into deaths in custody	In 2025, there was a significant reduction in the number of deaths in custody. This is an important reduction, given the record number of deaths in custody recorded in 2024. It speaks to the importance of implementing recommendations that arise in death in custody investigations highlighted by the OIP. While the period between a death occurring and the publication of the investigation report continued to take a substantial length of time, it is welcome that this period appeared to reduce gradually in 2025.	Progress 	The Minister for Justice publish Death in Custody investigations in a timely manner following their submission by the OIP. The Department of Justice fully resource the OIP to continue undertaking and completing investigations into deaths in custody in a timely manner.

Section E

Safety and protection in Irish prisons

Section E

Safety and protection in Irish prisons

Standard 26 Solitary confinement

No person in prison is subjected to solitary confinement. Any measure that amounts to solitary confinement (i.e. where an individual is confined to their cell for 22 hours or more without the opportunity for meaningful human contact) is recorded and reported, including the reasons for restrictions and the length of time spent under such conditions. Any measure amounting to indefinite or prolonged solitary confinement, including back-to-back solitary confinement for longer than 15 days, is recognised as inhuman or degrading treatment.

Assessment: Unable to assess

Solitary confinement is generally understood to be the “physical isolation of individuals who are confined to their cells 22 to 24 hours a day”.⁵⁹⁸ Its defining features are the denial of meaningful social contact with other people and being confined to a limited space or area. Even if a person is permitted to leave their cell, if the social contact is not meaningful, it may still be considered solitary confinement. As stated in the 2007 Istanbul Statement on the use and effects of solitary confinement (“the Istanbul Statement”), the scarce social contacts provided to someone in solitary confinement are “seldom freely chosen, are generally monotonous, and are often not empathetic” – therefore rendering them meaningless.⁵⁹⁹

In Ireland, neither the 2007 Prison Rules nor primary legislation explicitly refers to or defines ‘solitary confinement’. However, the IPS’s policy document *Elimination of solitary confinement* defines solitary confinement as: “[t]he confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact”.⁶⁰⁰ This definition is used throughout this report, with ‘meaningful human contact’ being an essential factor in determining whether solitary confinement, prolonged lock-up or segregation is taking place. As discussed below, solitary confinement may include instances where one or more people are held in a cell without meaningful human contact or social engagement, with international human rights standards incorporated by the CPT and the Nelson Mandela Rules indicating that being confined in a cell with another person does not in itself qualify as meaningful human or social contact.

During its visit to Cloverhill Prison, the CPT recorded that the eight men on Rule 62 regimes shared an 11m² cell with three others and were offered between one and one and a half hours out of their cell a day to access an outdoor yard, shower, clean the cell and collect their food.⁶⁰¹ This is significant, as the CPT has held that solitary confinement can also occur when an individual is segregated from the general prison population but is still held in a cell for 22 hours or more with one or more other people.⁶⁰² The Istanbul Statement asserts that “group isolation in some circumstances may have a similar effect to solitary confinement and such regimes should not be considered an appropriate alternative”.⁶⁰³ Rule 44 of the Mandela Rules does not specify that an individual must be held alone, defining solitary confinement as “the confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact”.⁶⁰⁴ The OIP has also made a

⁵⁹⁸ Irish Penal Reform Trust, “Behind the Door”: Solitary Confinement in the Irish Penal System’ (2018) 14 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6439/solitary_confinement_web.pdf>.

⁵⁹⁹ ‘The Istanbul Statement on the Use and Effects of Solitary Confinement’ 1 <https://www.solitaryconfinement.org/_files/ugd/Istanbul_expert_statement_on_sc.pdf>.

⁶⁰⁰ Irish Prison Service, ‘Elimination of Solitary Confinement’ (2017) <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Elimination-of-solitary-confinement-Policy.pdf>.

⁶⁰¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (2025) CPT/Inf (2025) 22 30 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60a>>.

⁶⁰² European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Solitary Confinement of Prisoners – Extract from the 21st General Report of the CPT, Published in 2011’ (2011) CPT/Inf(2011)28-part2 para 54.

⁶⁰³ ‘The Istanbul Statement on the Use and Effects of Solitary Confinement’ (n 2).

⁶⁰⁴ ‘The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)’ (2005) <https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Nelson_Mandela_Rules-E-ebook.pdf>.

similar point, stating that:

In situations where prisoners spent a minimum of 22 hours in their cell each day, despite being accommodated with other prisoners, they may also experience similar effects to that of solitary confinement.⁶⁰⁵

This potentially means that individuals on restricted regimes spending 22 hours in a cell with others on such regimes may be being held in conditions that equate to or resemble solitary confinement, or at least have similar effects on the individual. It also has broader potential implications, given the available data on the amount of time that people in Irish prisons are being locked in their cell for each day, as discussed in Standard 16 (p. 68), and the number of people that share cells with more than one other person, as discussed in Standard 9 (p. 46). It is therefore possible that individuals who are not on restricted regimes but spend 22 hours in their cells each day are also being held in conditions that could be considered solitary confinement. This is significant due to the impacts of solitary confinement on an individual, and crucially, because these circumstances would not be periodically assessed and monitored to the same extent as those on restricted regimes should be, therefore enabling them to continue without a clearly defined timeframe.

In 2017, the IPS introduced the solitary confinement policy, and the Prison Rules were amended to guarantee all people in prison a “minimum period of 2 hours out of his or her cell or room with an opportunity during that time for meaningful human contact”.⁶⁰⁶

Both measures were introduced to bring Irish penal policy in line with Rules 44 and 45 of the Nelson Mandela Rules. Despite these adjustments, however, data has consistently shown that practices that may amount to solitary confinement are being used in Irish prisons, as was also the case in 2025. Solitary confinement tends to occur when a person is placed in a ‘restricted regime’, which occurs for five main reasons and is provided for under the Prison Rules 2007. As discussed under Standard 16 (p.68), these circumstances may be for someone’s protection and at their request (Rule 63), for their protection and imposed by prison management (Rule 63), by order and based on their behaviour (Rule 62), for medical or psychiatric needs or “observation” (Rule 64), or for medical quarantine (Rule 103). Being placed on one of these restricted regimes may include being confined to a cell and/or restrictions on associating with others in prison. If an individual on a restricted regime spends 22 hours or more a day in their cell and is not provided with meaningful social contact, regardless of the reason for the isolation, this would amount to solitary confinement.

The harms caused by solitary confinement are well documented and can be psychological and physical.⁶⁰⁷ Psychologically, it can have both acute effects during the period of isolation, and latent effects that continue even after the period of isolation and upon release – including impacts on mortality post release.⁶⁰⁸ It can induce feelings of anxiety, depression, anger, paranoia, psychosis and self-harm, with a higher rate of suicide amongst individuals held in solitary confinement.⁶⁰⁹ Whilst each individual will experience and be impacted by solitary confinement differently, it has been found to acutely aggravate existing psychotic disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder and personality disorders.⁶¹⁰ **IPRT maintains that such harms cannot be justified and should not be used in Irish prisons, meaning that no person should ever be confined to a cell for 22 hours or more without meaningful human contact.**

The IPS does not publish specific data on the practice of solitary confinement in Irish prisons. Information on the general use of restricted regimes is published in its quarterly *Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners* reports, which include the number of individuals who were spending 22 hours, 23 hours and 24 hours in their cell each day.⁶¹¹ As the data is provided for a given day in the quarter, it only provides a snapshot of that specific day and does not give any indication of the amount of time that those individuals have spent on these regimes. This is significant, as prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement, meaning a period of solitary confinement that lasts for more than 15 days, can amount to torture, or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.⁶¹² The unavailability of specific, regular data on the amount of time

⁶⁰⁵ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Inspection Report - Unannounced General Inspection of Cloverhill Prison, 15-25 May 2023’ 100 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Inspection-Report-Unannounced-General-Inspection-of-Cloverhill-Prison.pdf>>.

⁶⁰⁶ Prison (Amendment) Rules 2017 [S.I. No. 276/2017].

⁶⁰⁷ JD Strong and others, ‘The Body in Isolation: The Physical Health Impacts of Incarceration in Solitary Confinement’ (2020) 15 <<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7546459/>>.

⁶⁰⁸ United Nations General Assembly, ‘Interim Report of the Special Rapporteur of the Human Rights Council on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment’ (2011) A/66/268 18 <<https://docs.un.org/en/A/66/268>>. Strong and others (n 10).

⁶⁰⁹ United Nations General Assembly (n 11) 18; ‘Risk Factors for Self-Harm in Prison: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis’ (2020) 7 682 <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366\(20\)30190-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2215-0366(20)30190-5)>; ‘The Istanbul Statement on the Use and Effects of Solitary Confinement’ (n 2); European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Solitary Confinement of Prisoners - Extract from the 21st General Report of the CPT, Published in 2011’ (n 5) para 53.

⁶¹⁰ ‘WMA - The World Medical Association-WMA Statement on Solitary Confinement’ <<https://www.wma.net/policies-post/wma-statement-on-solitary-confinement/>> accessed 17 August 2026.

⁶¹¹ ‘Census Reports’ (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/census-reports/>> accessed 13 August 2026.

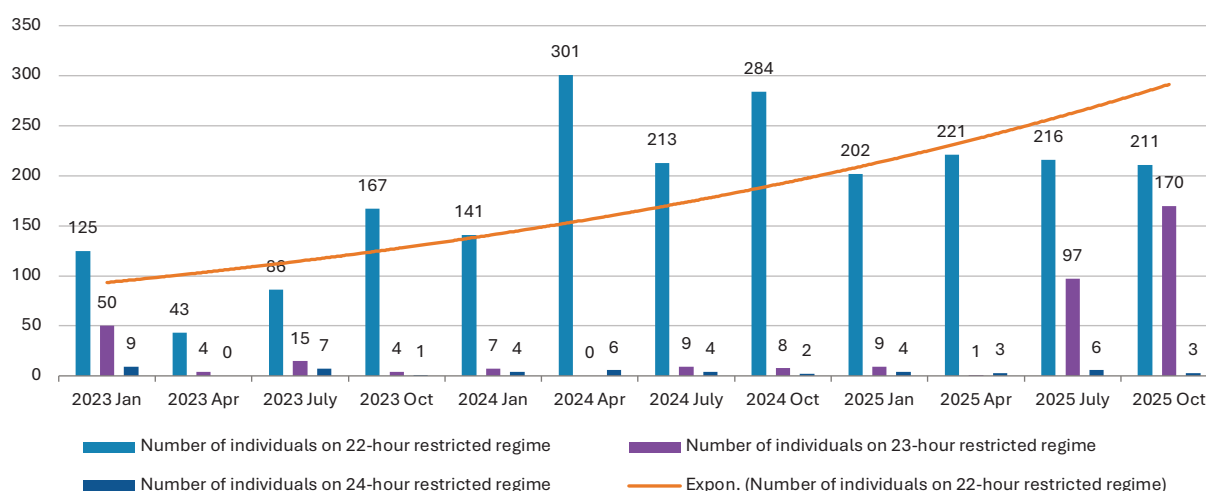
individuals are being held in solitary confinement is a significant concern, as it means that potential human rights violations are not being monitored. **As was recommended in PIPS 2024, IPRT reiterates that data collection and collection related to solitary confinement requires immediate improvement. This should include the central recording and public reporting, at a minimum on an annual basis, of the number of people subjected to solitary confinement, the number of instances of solitary confinement, and the length of each instance.**

Table 22: Number of individuals on 22-24 hour restricted regimes in January, April, July and October 2025

	Number of individuals on 22-hour restricted regime	Number of individuals on 23-hour restricted regime	Number of individuals on 24-hour restricted regime
January	202	1	0
April	221	1	3
July	216	97	6
October	211	170	3

Given the absence of official data that explicitly monitors solitary confinement, it is worth examining the available data on individuals spending more than 22 hours in their cell and analysing this alongside public reporting and information. In 2025, the IPS released *Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners* reports for January, April and July – but the report for October was not published until September 2026.⁶¹³ The number of individuals on a 22-hour regime remained relatively stable throughout the year, with 202, 221, 216 and 211 people being recorded as on this regime in January, April, July and October, respectively.⁶¹⁴ This figure is in keeping with the increase in the number of people on 22-hour regimes in mid-2024 (see Figure 13).⁶¹⁵

Figure 13: Number of individuals on 22-24 hour regimes in January, April, July and October in 2023, 2024 and 2025⁶¹⁶



⁶¹² 'The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules)' (n 7). United Nations General Assembly (n 11) para 81.

⁶¹³ 'Census Reports' (n 14).

⁶¹⁴ Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - January 2025' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JANUARY-2025-Restricted-Regime-Landscape.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JULY-2025-Restriction.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2025' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/APRIL-2025-Restriction.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners October 2025' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/October-2025-Restriction.pdf>.

⁶¹⁵ Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2024' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/July-2024-Restriction.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2024' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/April-2024-Restriction.pdf>.

⁶¹⁶ Data taken from IPS Census of Restricted Regimes for the years 2023, 2024 and 2025. Available here: <https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/census-reports/>

Whilst the number of people on 22-hour regimes in July 2025 (216) and July 2024 (213) does not differ substantially, there is a notable difference compared with just two years previously, when in July 2023 there were 86 people recorded as being on this regime (see Figure 13). This means that the number of people on a 22-hour regime almost tripled from 2023 to 2024 and remained at a similar level in 2025, representing a concerning and sustained trend.

The highest number of individuals on a 22-hour regime has consistently been recorded at Cloverhill Prison, the country's main remand prison (see Table 23).⁶¹⁷ There was a concerning increase in the number of people being held on 22-hour regimes in Castlereagh, where no instances of such a regime were previously recorded.⁶¹⁸ In Wheatfield Prison, 51 people were recorded as being on a 22-hour regime in October 2025, the first time since April 2024 that anyone in Wheatfield had been recorded as being on this regime.⁶¹⁹ Similarly, Portlaoise Prison recorded that 10 individuals were being held on this regime in July and 7 in October, with very low figures or none being recorded in previous years.⁶²⁰

There was a welcome decrease in the number of individuals being held on a 22-hour regime in Mountjoy Prison in July 2025, compared to 2024 and previous years; however, this number increased to almost previous levels by October 2025.⁶²¹ However, the PVC for Mountjoy Prison recorded that while the number of people spending 22 hours in their cell decreased at times in 2025, the numbers spending up to 21 hours in a cell more than doubled compared to the previous year.⁶²² Although 21 hours in a cell does not officially qualify as solitary confinement, it is still a substantial amount of time to be confined to a cell with limited, meaningful social contact. This is particularly important, given that the number of hours spent in a cell is only one component of solitary confinement, with the social isolation and deprivation being central to its definition and qualification.⁶²³ Therefore, if an individual is spending 21 hours in a cell each day and the social contact they are exposed to cannot be considered meaningful, they are still being held in conditions that very closely resemble solitary confinement, with a high risk of adverse impacts arising from such isolation.

Table 23: The number of individuals on a 22-hour regime by prison, according to IPS census reports from 2023-2025⁶²⁴

Prison	2023				2024				2025			
	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT	JAN	APR	JUL	OCT
Arbour Hill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlereagh	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	49	50	50	0
Cloverhill	68	25	34	79	80	147	133	153	144	96	154	143
Cork	0	0	1	0	0	0	58	0	0	64	0	0
Limerick (F)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Limerick (M)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Loughan House	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Midlands	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dóchas Centre	0	0	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mountjoy	28	12	16	78	58	45	22	131	9	11	2	10
Portlaoise	0	0	0	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	10	7
Shelton Abbey	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Training Unit	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Wheatfield	29	6	30	7	2	108	0	0	0	0	0	51
Total	125	43	86	167	141	301	213	284	202	221	216	211

⁶¹⁷ Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025' (n 17).

⁶¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁶¹⁹ Irish Prison Service, 'Census Prison Population October 2025 – Cell Occupancy – In-Cell Sanitation' <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/October-2025-In-Cell.pdf>.

⁶²⁰ Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025' (n 17).

⁶²¹ *ibid.* 5.

⁶²² Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' (2026) 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/47c4abd8/Mountjoy_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁶²³ 'WMA - The World Medical Association-WMA Statement on Solitary Confinement' (n 13).

⁶²⁴ Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025' (n 17) 5.

Concerningly, in October 2025, the number of individuals recorded as being on a 23-hour regime increased significantly to 170, up from 97 in July and just one person recorded in the April census report.⁶²⁵ It is worth noting that of these 170 individuals, 86 were recorded as being in Cork prison and 78 in Castlerea which had not recorded any individuals being held on a 23-hour regime since July 2023 and the majority of these individuals were held under Rule 63 (voluntary, for protection).⁶²⁶ The sharp increase in the number of people on 23-hour restricted regimes is concerning and requires a thorough analysis of records to ascertain the reasons for this spike.

The CPT has asserted that the type of restrictive regime covered by Rule 62, “an administrative decision to place into solitary confinement prisoners who have caused or are likely to cause, serious harm to others or who present a very serious risk to the safety or security of the prison”, is potentially the longest lasting type of solitary confinement and the one with the least procedural safeguards.⁶²⁷ The long-term and indeterminate aspects of this type of solitary confinement aggravate the negative impacts of what is already a harmful measure.⁶²⁸ As the CPT found during its most recent visit to Ireland, the eight people on a Rule 62 regime in Cloverhill Prison had been on it for over 20 days and “did not know for how much longer they would be kept on such a restricted regime”.⁶²⁹

The continuous monitoring of all cases in real time where a Rule 62 regime is imposed is crucial, and the person should be released from this regime as soon as the reason for it being imposed has been resolved.⁶³⁰ In its 2025 report on its visit to Ireland, the CPT noted that whilst some of its previous recommendations around the governance of Rule 62 regimes had been implemented, concerns regarding inconsistencies in recording remained and that “checks were not systematically thorough, with sometimes disastrous consequences”.⁶³¹ This is in reference to the deaths in custody of four individuals on restricted regimes from 2020 to 2023 that were undetected for a number of hours and where records about checks on their well-being were falsified in some of these cases.⁶³²

In Limerick prison, most people on a Rule 62 regime told the CPT they were permitted around one and a half hours outside of their cell, with the CPT observing that decisions for the imposition of this regime “could be based upon information which was not fully and accurately documented”.⁶³³ As the IPS does not publicise data on the amount of time that individuals spend on Rule 62 or other restricted regimes, it is not clear how long those individuals who spent 23 hours in their cell under Rule 62 in April, July and October 2025 had been on these regimes.⁶³⁴ This creates a concerning gap in monitoring and accountability for the use of solitary confinement in Irish prisons, and thereby a gap in monitoring potential human rights violations. This concern is compounded by the inadequacies in checks and record keeping that the CPT has consistently raised, particularly relating to restricted regimes.⁶³⁵

Ultimately, the available data on the numbers of people on restricted regimes, particularly the significant increase in the number of people on 23-hour restricted regimes from 8 in October 2024 to 170 in October 2025 is a considerable cause for concern and raises serious questions about the purpose and effects of these regimes, and whether there are people within those figures that are being subjected to conditions that amount to, or have similar health outcomes to, solitary confinement. In the absence of accurate record-keeping and data, it is not possible to produce conclusive analysis on this issue.

⁶²⁵ Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners October 2025’ (n 17).

⁶²⁶ *ibid.*

⁶²⁷ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Solitary Confinement of Prisoners - Extract from the 21st General Report of the CPT, Published in 2011’ (n 5) 4.

⁶²⁸ *ibid.* 5.

⁶²⁹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 4) 30.

⁶³⁰ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Solitary Confinement of Prisoners - Extract from the 21st General Report of the CPT, Published in 2011’ (n 5) 5.

⁶³¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 4) 31.

⁶³² *ibid.* 25.

⁶³³ *ibid.* 31.

⁶³⁴ Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2025’ (n 17); Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025’ (n 17); Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners October 2025’ (n 17).

⁶³⁵ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 4) 30–31; European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Government of Ireland on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 23 September to 4 October 2019’ (2020) CPT/Inf (2020) 37 26 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680a078cf>>.

Assessment of Standard 26: Unable to assess

For another year, data on the use of solitary confinement was not available, deepening longstanding concern regarding the use of this practice, its frequency and duration. The absence of public information on this issue gives rise to questions about Ireland's adherence to its obligations under international human rights law regarding the protection of those in state custody against exposure to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, and data must be published to ensure transparency and allow adequate oversight. There was a notable and concerning increase in the number of individuals spending 23 hours in their cell over the course of the year, particularly in the second half of the year. Overall, IPRT maintains that the IPS and the Department of Justice must take immediate steps to prohibit the use of prolonged solitary confinement in both statute and practice, and ensure measures are in place to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of solitary confinement in Irish prisons.

Standard 27 Safety and security in Irish prisons

Every person in prison, including prison staff, feels safe and does not experience violence or abuse of any kind.

Assessment: **Regress**

All people in prison should feel safe and protected from abuse, violence and harm. This applies to those in prison, regardless of whether they are serving a custodial sentence or are on remand, as well as to staff working in prisons. A number of factors contribute to creating a safe and secure environment in a prison, including safe custody limits, single-cell accommodation, the provision of meaningful activities, enabling social connections and connections with the community, and fostering positive relationships between staff and people in custody.

As mentioned in Standards 16 and 26, Rule 63 of the 2007 Prison Rules provides that if an individual in prison feels unsafe, they can request to be held separately from other people “who are reasonably likely to cause significant harm to him or her” – often referred to as being placed ‘on protection’.⁶³⁶ The number of people in prison requesting to be placed on protection under Rule 63 can indicate general feelings of safety in prison and the level of trust in the ability of prison management to guarantee that someone will be protected from harm whilst detained. The number of people being held on protection is similarly publicised by the IPS in its quarterly *Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners* reports, as mentioned in Standard 26 (p.98).

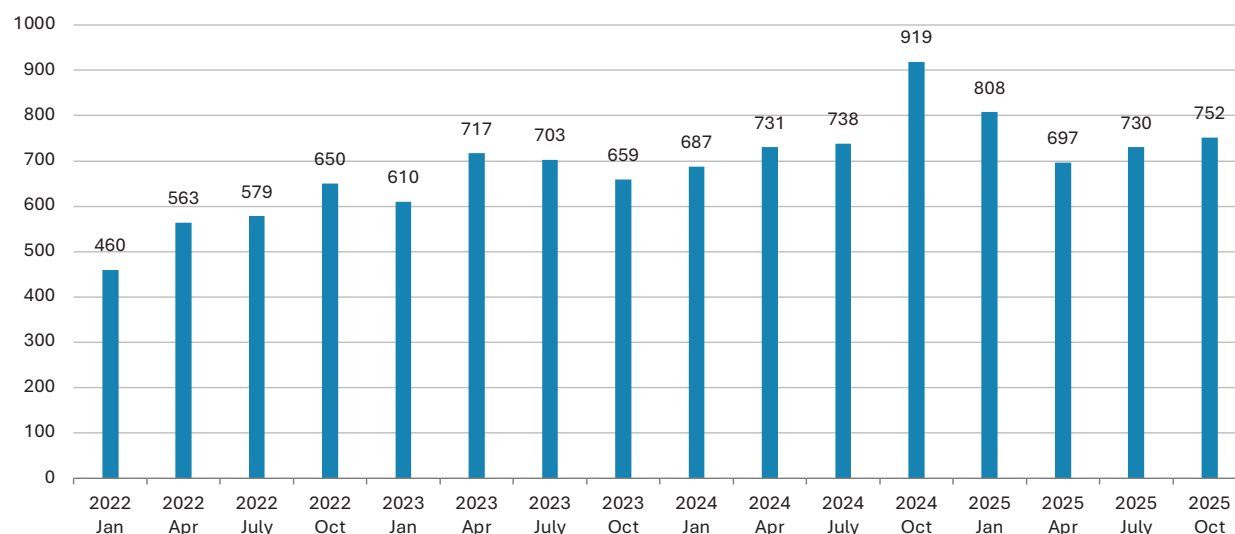
According to publicly available data for 2025, the number of individuals on voluntary protection (Rule 63) fluctuated. In January, April, July and October, there were 808, 697, 730 and 752 people in Irish prisons on a voluntary protection regime for their safety in those respective months.⁶³⁷ This represents 16 per cent, 13 per cent, 13 per cent and 13.5 per cent of the average prison population for those months.⁶³⁸ These figures are comparable to those in 2024 and 2023, with the highest number being recorded in October 2024.⁶³⁹ The number of individuals requesting to be held on protection for their safety has, for the most part, risen incrementally in line with the increase in the prison population and overcrowding since 2022, as mentioned in Standard 2 (p. 25).

⁶³⁶ Irish Prison Rules 2007 s 63(1).

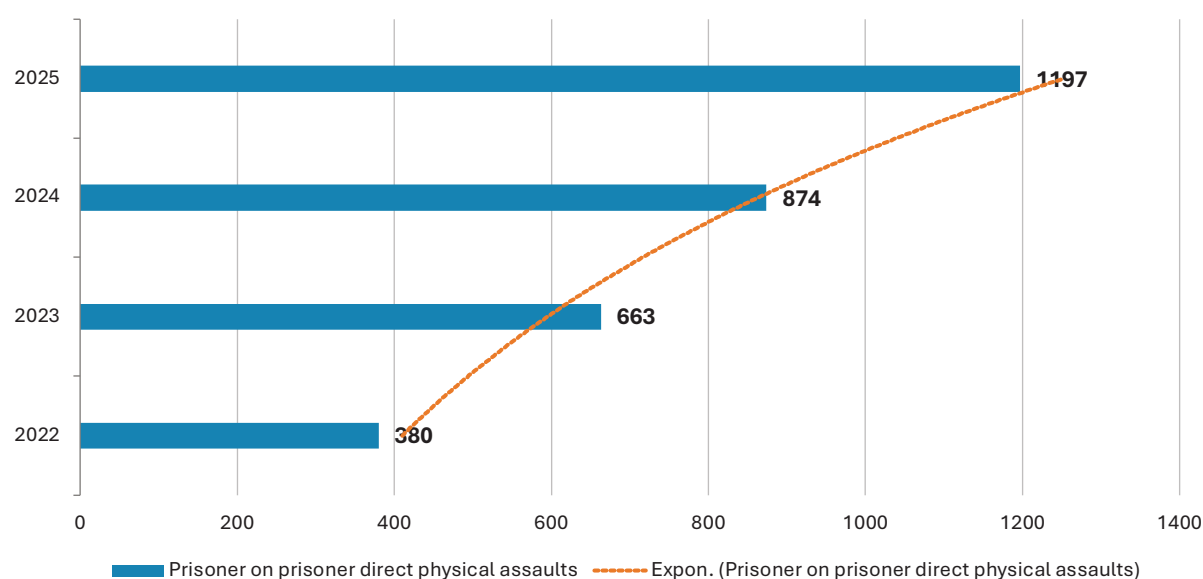
⁶³⁷ Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners – January 2025’ (n 17); Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners – April 2025’ (n 17); Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners – July 2025’ (n 17).

⁶³⁸ Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Monthly Information Note – January 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JANUARY-2025.pdf>; Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Monthly Information Note – April 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/APRIL-2025.pdf>; Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Monthly Information Note – July 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/JULY-2025.pdf>; Irish Prison Service (IPS), ‘Monthly Information Note – October 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/OCTOBER-2025.pdf>.

⁶³⁹ ‘Census Reports’ (n 14).

Figure 14: Number of individuals on a voluntary protective regime (Rule 63), 2022-2025⁶⁴⁰

In 2025, there was also a reported increase in violence in Irish prisons. There was a 37 per cent increase in the number of “prisoner on prisoner direct physical assaults”, up from 874 in 2024 to 1197 in 2025 (see Figure 15).⁶⁴¹ Since 2022, the number of prisoner on prisoner direct physical assaults has increased by 215 per cent, indicating that the number of these assaults has grown in line with overcrowding and specifically, the number of people in prison sharing a cell with at least one other person, as discussed in Standard 9 (p. 46).

Figure 15: Number of prisoner on prisoner direct physical assaults, 2022-2025⁶⁴²

This increase in assaults amongst people in prison is unsurprising as a growing number are required to share a single or double occupancy cell with one to three other people, as discussed in Standard 9 (p. 46). The impact of these conditions

⁶⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁶⁴¹ Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Table-of-assaults-on-prison-staff-and-prisoners-2024-2025.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2023 – 2024’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Table-of-assaults-on-prison-staff-and-prisoners-2023-2024.pdf>; Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2012 – 2023’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Table-of-assaults-on-prison-staff-and-prisoners-2012-%E2%80%93-2023.pdf>.

⁶⁴² Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025’ (n 44); Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2023 – 2024’ (n 44); Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2012 – 2023’ (n 44).

is evident in the data for 2025, with some of the country's most overcrowded prisons recording the highest number of assaults, namely Cork, Mountjoy, Portlaoise and Castlerea prisons (see Table 24).⁶⁴³ The IPS data on prisoner on prisoner physical assaults is not disaggregated for the Limerick men's and Limerick women's prisons,⁶⁴⁴ yet Limerick women's prison was the most overcrowded prison in the country, operating at an estimated average capacity of 147 per cent throughout 2025. For the Dóchas Centre, however, which operated at an estimated average capacity of 133 per cent, the number of recorded prisoner on prisoner direct physical assaults doubled from 2024 – increasing from 44 to 88 in 2025.⁶⁴⁵

Table 24: Number of prisoner on prisoner direct physical assaults in 2025 in the most overcrowded prisons⁶⁴⁶

	Average operating capacity in 2025	Number of assaults	Increase in number of assaults since 2024
Dóchas	133 per cent	88	44
Cork	124 per cent	227	92
Mountjoy	124 per cent	183	108
Portlaoise	123 per cent	35	21
Castlerea	121 per cent	132	60
Cloverhill	115 per cent	206	-56

More specifically, a correlation can be drawn between the increase in prisoner on prisoner physical assaults and the increase in the number of individuals sharing a cell with at least one other person.⁶⁴⁷ Both figures have risen in parallel since 2022 (see Figure 16). Living in prolonged proximity with up to three other individuals who may each be struggling with their own complex mental health and addiction issues, including psychosis, and with limited time outside of the cell, can easily create a sustained atmosphere of high tension that can lead to violence if not sufficiently monitored and managed.

⁶⁴³ Average operating capacity calculated from IPS Daily Prison Population Stats for the last day in each month in 2025: '2025 Prison Population' (Irish Prison Service) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/2025-prison-population/>> accessed 18 August 2026.

⁶⁴⁴ Irish Prison Service, 'Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025' (n 44).

⁶⁴⁵ *ibid.*

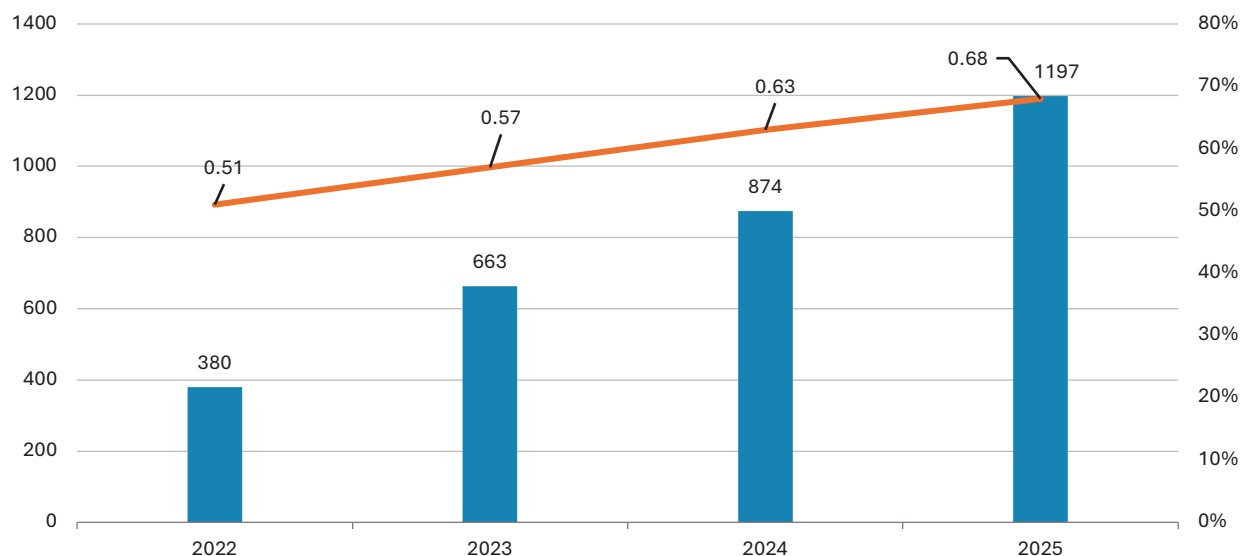
⁶⁴⁶ *ibid.*

Average operating capacity calculated from IPS Daily Prison Population Stats for the last day in each month in 2025: '2025 Prison Population' (n 46).

⁶⁴⁷ Irish Prison Service, 'Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025' (n 44).

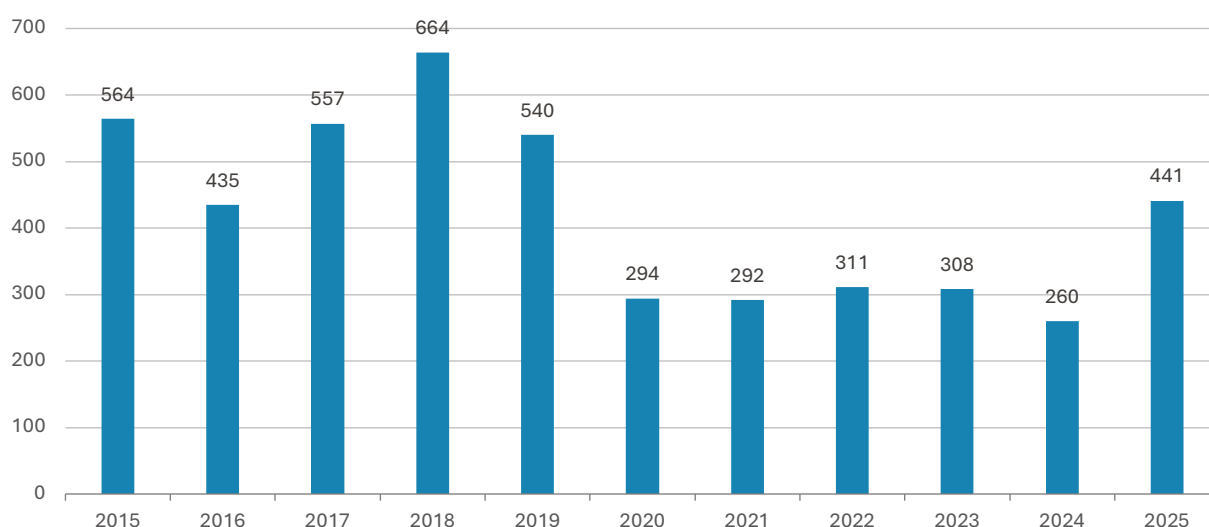
Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners – January 2025' (n 17); Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners – July 2025' (n 17); Irish Prison Service, 'Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners – April 2025' (n 17).

Figure 16: Number of prisoner on prisoner direct physical assaults against the increase in the percentage of the prison population sharing a cell with at least one other person, July 2022-2025⁶⁴⁸



There was an almost 70 per cent increase in the number of weapons seized by the IPS in 2025, rising from 260 in 2024 to 441.⁶⁴⁹ While these figures are still not as high as those recorded a decade ago, the significant year-on-year increase is concerning, as the presence of weapons compromises safety and security in prisons for both staff and those in custody. The number of weapons may also serve as an indicator of the level of safety people in prison feel.

Figure 17: Number of weapons seized in Irish prisons, 2015-2025⁶⁵⁰



In its 2025 report on its visit to Ireland, the CPT recorded that “frequent low-level, and some severe, inter-prisoner violence and bullying was noted at all prisons visited” and that “the rising number of violent incidents underscores insufficient measures taken to prevent such occurrences”.⁶⁵¹ The CPT reported that since its previous visit in 2019, “some

⁶⁴⁸ Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - January 2025’ (n 17); Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - April 2025’ (n 17); Irish Prison Service, ‘Census of Restricted Regime Prisoners - July 2025’ (n 17); Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025’ (n 44).

⁶⁴⁹ Irish Prison Service, ‘Contraband Seized by the Operational Support Group 2015 – 2025’ <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Contraband-Figures-2015-%E2%80%93-2025.pdf>.

⁶⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁶⁵¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 4) 4, 19.

core aspects of safety for prisoners had deteriorated”.⁶⁵²

In response to the CPT’s concerns regarding the levels of violence in Irish prisons, the Government’s establishment of the Violence Management Steering Group in 2025 is welcome.⁶⁵³ According to the Minister for Justice, the group aims to “reduce violence in all its forms across the Irish Prison Service, and ensure that effective response mechanisms are in place”.⁶⁵⁴ No further information was made publicly available regarding the structure or operations of the group, but its creation is encouraging.

The presence of drugs and contraband in an overcrowded prison only serves to further undermine the safety of both individuals in prison and staff working there. It does so in three main ways: violence can occur because of drug-related conflicts and smuggling into the prison, while the presence of individuals actively using drugs smuggled into the prison in overcrowded cells, can create an environment in which violence can easily erupt.⁶⁵⁵

The smuggling of drugs into prison through concealing them internally through either ingestion or secretion, known as “body packing”, has also had fatal consequences, with a number of individuals dying in custody as a result of this, as there is a high risk that the receptacle holding the drugs may burst.⁶⁵⁶ The CPT raised significant concern about this issue in its 2025 report, particularly regarding the management by prison authorities of cases where an individual was suspected of having ingested drugs and the insufficiency of review processes and the implementation of conclusions from reviews of previous cases, noting that some of these deaths “might have been prevented had lessons been learnt sooner”.⁶⁵⁷ On review of the cases where deaths in custody had occurred due to this issue, the CPT recommended that any individual suspected of ingesting drugs should be placed under supervision by a medical team, not prison officers, and that diagnostic imaging such as X-ray machines are the most effective way of assessing whether drugs have been ingested.

In 2025, there was an increase in the number of drug seizures compared to 2024, increasing from 1,035 to 1,325.⁶⁵⁸ It is encouraging that more drugs were seized in 2025, and while the issue continues to be a challenge, certain responses by prison management have undoubtedly led to this improvement. In Wheatfield Prison, where the highest number of drug seizures among all prisons was recorded in 2025, increasing from 371 to 473, the installation of new nets over the yard had been effective in preventing drugs being thrown over the perimeter walls.⁶⁵⁹ At Castlerea Prison, the PVC observed an increase in drone activity, noting the harmful impact of the influx of drugs and other contraband on the overall prison environment, but commended the prison management for its handling of this situation.⁶⁶⁰

⁶⁵² *ibid* 14.

⁶⁵³ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Prison Service – Tuesday, 9 Jun 2026 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (9 June 2026) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2026-06-09/1459>> accessed 14 August 2026.

⁶⁵⁴ *ibid*.

⁶⁵⁵ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 4) 4.

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid*.

⁶⁵⁷ *ibid*.

⁶⁵⁸ Irish Prison Service, ‘Contraband Seized by the Operational Support Group 2015 – 2025’ (n 52).

⁶⁵⁹ Wheatfield Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ 3 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/01baf1b4/Wheatfield_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁶⁶⁰ Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ 4 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e40264dd/Castlerea_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

Table 25: Irish Prison Service Data on Drug Seizures per year, 2017-2025⁶⁶¹

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Arbour Hill	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Castlerea	85	70	59	36	29	48	38	47	67
Cloverhill	93	155	186	207	313	283	410	235	208
Cork	21	55	65	46	69	42	36	40	55
Dóchas Centre*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	54
Limerick	84	94	81	116	145	152	38	66	68
Loughan House	5	4	1	0	0	0	0	7	0
Midlands	124	97	97	33	61	74	58	69	78
Mountjoy	386	230	252	322	439	240	233	178	289
Portlaoise	35	30	19	11	9	29	48	22	33
Shelton Abbey	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0
Wheatfield	183	403	490	479	453	510	433	371	473
Total	1,018	1,138	1,251	1,251	1,518	1,378	1,294	1,035	1,325

*Prior to 2025, figures for drug seizures at the Dóchas Centre were included in figures for Mountjoy Prison

The overall deterioration in safety in Irish prisons in 2025, due in significant part to overcrowding and related staff resourcing constraints, also greatly impacted those working in prisons. According to available IPS data, the number of recorded assaults by people in prison against staff increased from 107 in 2024 to 132 in 2025.⁶⁶² One incident early in the year “led to the slashing of a Prison Officer’s face, leaving the Officer with life changing injuries”.⁶⁶³ It is also important to note that the CPT’s 2025 report detailed that it received several allegations of “severe and deliberate abuse” by prison officers in some prisons, including “slaps, kicks and punches to the face, head and torso, including while prisoners were prone on the floor”.⁶⁶⁴ In March 2025, the IPS communicated to the Department of Justice that the level of prison overcrowding is “untenable, unacceptable and potentially unsafe for both prisoners and staff”, and has “the real potential to result in violent disorder within our prisons, threatening the safety and wellbeing of both our staff and those in our care”.⁶⁶⁵ In its own internal communication, the Department of Justice itself recognised that “the level of overcrowding across the prison estate is now dangerously high and represents a significant risk to staff and prisoners”.⁶⁶⁶

As discussed in Standard 1 (p. 22), the General Scheme of the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025, which underwent pre-legislative scrutiny in 2025, it provides for prison officers to carry incapacitant (pepper) spray. All staff working in Irish prisons have the right to work in a safe environment and return home unharmed each day; however, this measure will not meaningfully address safety concerns in Irish prisons.⁶⁶⁷ IPRT is concerned about the potential misuse of incapacitant spray, including in situations where it may be neither necessary nor proportionate – which is required for any use of force in prisons, in accordance with the State’s obligations under the ECHR.⁶⁶⁸ Reviews of a six-month pilot programme to use PAVA spray in four prisons in the UK in 2018 found that in one third of instances it was used without justification, and that some staff were developing an over-reliance on its use rather than using de-escalation and safety techniques.⁶⁶⁹ IPRT maintains that the use of incapacitant spray is unlikely to diffuse situations,

⁶⁶¹ Irish Prison Service, ‘Contraband Seized by the Operational Support Group 2015 – 2025’ (n 52).

⁶⁶² Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025’ (n 44).

⁶⁶³ Information obtained through an FOI request by IPRT to the Department of Justice.

⁶⁶⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 4) 14.

⁶⁶⁵ Information obtained through an FOI request by IPRT to the Department of Justice.

⁶⁶⁶ Information obtained through an FOI request by IPRT to the Department of Justice.

⁶⁶⁷ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Submission by the Irish Penal Reform Trust on the General Scheme...’ (Irish Penal Reform Trust, 23 June 2025) 2–5 <<https://www.iprt.ie/iprt-submissions/submission-by-the-irish-penal-reform-trust-on-the-general-scheme-of-the-criminal-law-and-civil-law-miscellaneous-provisions/>> accessed 6 June 2026.

⁶⁶⁸ European Convention on Human Rights 1950 art 2,3,8.

⁶⁶⁹ Prison Reform Trust, ‘PAVA Spray – A Prison Reform Trust Position Paper’ (2018) <https://prisonreformtrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/old_files/Documents/PAVA%20PRT%20position%20paper.pdf>.

and conversely runs the risk of escalating tensions between staff and people in their care.⁶⁷⁰ The ECtHR has previously held that the cumulative effects of incapacitant spray and restraint can amount to inhuman and degrading treatment, in violation of Article 3 of the ECHR.⁶⁷¹ While the swift and meaningful reduction in the number of people in custody and the return to safe operating capacity levels are the most effective ways of addressing the current levels of violence in Irish prisons, emphasis on mediation and de-escalation may also contribute to a reduction in violence and tension – particularly in the longer term.

Mediation and alternative to violence programmes have been proven to de-escalate tension and violence in the prison setting. In 2025, one positive example of this type of intervention is the Traveller Mediation Service's Mediation in Prisons Programme (TMS-PMIP). Despite a positive evaluation in 2025,⁶⁷² its funding status remained unclear by the end of the year.

Assessment of Standard 27: Regress

In 2025, there were some positive measures taken by prison management to improve safety and security, such as enhanced drug seizures and increased efforts to prevent drugs from entering the prison. The establishment of the Violence Management Steering Group is also encouraging, though it remains to be seen what role the group will play. Overall, however, violence increased across the prison estate, with a rise in assaults against both people in prison and staff. The introduction of incapacitant spray in prisons also risks escalating tensions between people in prison and prison staff, rather than quelling them. The use of such spray also makes any hope for relationship and trust building between people in prison and staff unlikely, creating a more tense environment for both.

Standard 28 Prison escorts

The health and welfare of people in custody consistently monitored and upheld while they are under escort.

Assessment: Regress

When an individual is being escorted from prison to court, a medical or other appointment, they are still in the custody of the State, which therefore has the same obligation to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of that individual.

The Prison Service Escort Corps (PSEC) is the unit within the IPS that is responsible for securely transporting people in custody to and from courts, inter-prison transfers and medical appointments.⁶⁷³ Limited data is made available by the IPS on prison escorts, their frequency and the monitoring of the health and welfare of individuals while under escort. However, data published by the IPS regarding physical assaults does include the number of assaults recorded in the PSEC, which covers prisoner-on-staff physical assaults, prisoner-on-prisoner assaults and 'physical interventions', which are defined by the IPS as 'where inadvertent or unintentional striking of a staff member or injury to a prisoner occurs in the course of a planned physical intervention or spontaneous physical intervention'.⁶⁷⁴ This definition is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is no distinction between instances where a staff member or a person in custody has been hit, but as it is not disaggregated, there is no way of knowing how many instances can be attributed to staff and how many to people in custody. Secondly, different language is used for both groups of people, with staff members being subjected to 'striking' and people in custody being subjected to 'injury'. In 2025, there were six physical interventions recorded in the PSEC, up from five the previous year.⁶⁷⁵

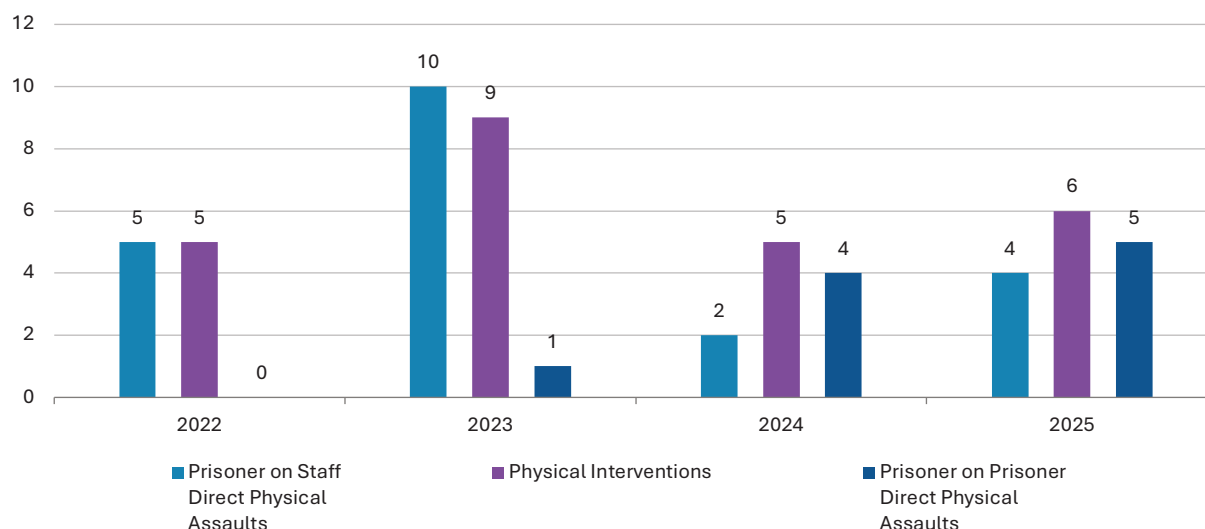
⁶⁷⁰ Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Submission by the Irish Penal Reform Trust on the General Scheme...' (n 70).

⁶⁷¹ *Tali v Estonia* [2014] European Court of Human Rights Application No 66393/10.

⁶⁷² Traveller Mediation Service, 'Transforming Conflict - A Review of the Traveller Mediation Service' (2025) 32–28 <<https://travellermediation.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/04/TMS-main-report-A-reveiw-of-the-TMS-2025.pdf>>.

⁶⁷³ 'Prison Service Escort Corp' (*Irish Prison Service*) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/prison-support-units/prison-service-escort-corp/>> accessed 22 August 2026.

⁶⁷⁴ Irish Prison Service, 'Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025' (n 44).

Figure 18: Number of physical assaults and interventions recorded in the Prison Service Escort Corps, 2022-2025⁶⁷⁶

The OIP recorded in its 2025 Annual Report that it had received five Category A complaints related to the PSEC, a notable increase from the single complaint received in 2024.⁶⁷⁷ However, Category A complaints for the PSEC do not seem to have been recorded by the OIP prior to 2024.⁶⁷⁸ Nonetheless, the increase in 2025 is concerning, particularly given that the CPT's 2025 report noted that allegations of ill-treatment by prison staff in escort vans had been made by some individuals in Cloverhill Prison.⁶⁷⁹ Such allegations were compounded by the fact that escort vans were not covered by CCTV, raising serious concerns regarding oversight and accountability.⁶⁸⁰ The CPT reported that the management of Cloverhill Prison had informed the delegation that CCTV had recently been installed in all escort vans, to ensure transparency.⁶⁸¹ During the visit, the CPT was made aware of an incident where CCTV in an escort van had captured a violent assault of a prisoner by a prison officer, resulting in the individual sustaining a brain injury. The installation of CCTV in escort vans should hopefully facilitate the comprehensive investigation of all complaints made in relation to the PSEC.

IPRT notes that there is no publicly available information regarding the IPS' own policies and guidelines relating to escorts and the provision of food, water, toilet breaks, the use of handcuffs and the monitoring of the health and welfare of individuals under escort. It is important that this information is clear, as in some instances committal prisons are a journey of several hours away from the court where a person in custody might appear. For example, the Midlands Prison is the committal prison for Monaghan and Castlerea Prison is the committal prison for Donegal. Given that court sittings may take a number of hours, at times an individual may be in transit for most of the day. This can be particularly difficult for women who are menstruating, as well as older people, people with mental health or intellectual disabilities, and non-Irish nationals, particularly if they do not have a strong command of English. In its consultations with stakeholders, IPRT was told that the number of breaks and the provision of food or water are dependent on the member of staff overseeing the escort and decisions in this regard are at their discretion.⁶⁸²

⁶⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁶ Irish Prison Service, 'Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2012 - 2023' (n 44); Irish Prison Service, 'Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2023 - 2024' (n 44); Irish Prison Service, 'Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 - 2025' (n 44).

⁶⁷⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' 35 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/OIP-AR-2025.pdf>>.

⁶⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁷⁹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 4) 14.

⁶⁸⁰ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 80) 4,14.

⁶⁸¹ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 'Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024' (n 4) 15.

⁶⁸² 'Stakeholder Consultation 1' (8 June 2026).

Assessment of Standard 28: Regress

The increase in the number of Category A complaints regarding the PSEC, and the concerns highlighted by the CPT around violent incidents during court escorts, combined with the lack of transparency regarding the policies and guidelines in relation to the health and welfare of individuals under escort are cause for concern. It highlights the need for systematic monitoring and accountability of escorts to and from prison. The installation of CCTV in prison escort vans should facilitate investigations into complaints made against the PSEC.

Standard 29 Staff training

All staff receive relevant, regular training and support to effectively carry out their duties to a high standard.

Assessment: No change

The provision of up-to-date and tailored training to prison staff, and regularly refreshing such training, is crucial to ensure staff are equipped to perform their duties. This is both in their best interests and the best interests of the individuals in custody under their care. It is also important that the need for training on specific and emerging issues is regularly reviewed and responded to.

In its 2025 Annual Report, the OIP recorded the number of responses by staff who completed a survey issued to them during two OIP inspections (Wheatfield, Castlereagh). They indicated varying levels of satisfaction with the training they received on control and restraint (58 per cent, 123 out of 219), human rights (37 per cent, 85 out of 227) and the use of personal protective equipment (41 per cent, 91 out of 221).⁶⁸³ The areas where staff indicated less confidence regarding their training included working with individuals in prison with mental health issues, CPR/First Aid and gender-based violence, with only 14 per cent (31 out of 218), 23 per cent (52 out of 222) and 14 per cent (31 out of 225) feeling confident in their training on these topics, respectively.⁶⁸⁴ Starkly, 70 per cent of survey respondents (155 out of 223) did not feel satisfied with their training, or lack thereof, in combating human trafficking.⁶⁸⁵ It should be noted that, as these surveys took place with staff in two prisons, responses may vary for staff in different settings.

The staff's low confidence in their training in dealing with individuals with mental health issues is particularly concerning given the potential implications of inadequate training in this area for both staff and people in prison. In its 2023 thematic report on the provision of psychiatric care in Irish prisons, the OIP found that some prison staff said they were "screaming" for more training on this issue, with one stating that in 23 years in the job they had only received training on mental health twice.⁶⁸⁶ It is disappointing that staff do not feel equipped to work on an issue as critical as mental health and that the IPS has not taken further steps to address this clear training need.

In its 2025 Annual Report, the OIP also noted with concern that its previous recommendations for all staff in Irish prisons to be provided with life support training had yet to be implemented.⁶⁸⁷ This is particularly concerning given the potential tragic consequences for individuals in prison and the potential impact on the ability of staff to carry out their duties.

As discussed in Standard 12 (p. 56), the prison population in Ireland is ageing, and with it there are emerging training needs to make staff in prisons better placed to deal with this growing cohort of people in prison and their distinctive needs.⁶⁸⁸ Providing training on the signs of cognitive decline or impairment would enable staff to identify individuals in prison who are in need of further assessment by a medical professional, as well as how to support them.⁶⁸⁹

⁶⁸³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 80) 26.

⁶⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁶ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Thematic Inspection: An Evaluation of the Provision of Psychiatric Care in the Irish Prison System February – March 2023' (2024) 19 <https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/OIP-Thematic-Inspection-Report-on-Provision-of-Psychiatric-Care-in-Prisons_Feb-2024-Publish.pdf>.

⁶⁸⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 80) 2.

⁶⁸⁸ Global Brain Health Institute and Crime and Punishment Research Group, School of Law, Trinity College Dublin, 'Discussion Forum on Ageing, Brain Health and Cognitive Impairment in Irish Prisons June 2026' (Trinity College Dublin 2026) <<https://www.gbhi.org/media/2864/download?inline>>.

Assessment of Standard 29: No change

In 2025, available information indicated that staff in two prisons felt confident in their levels of training in some areas. However, they also indicated low levels of confidence in their training in a number of other areas. Of note is the low level of confidence in relation to dealing with people in prison with mental health difficulties, which may have implications for both staff and the people in prison they are charged with caring for. There is also an evident need for training for staff to support them in dealing appropriately with the ageing cohort of the prison population.

Standard 30 Developing positive relationships and work culture

Positive relationships between prison management, staff, and people in prison custody are facilitated and supported. Leadership at all levels ensure that positive working cultures are maintained within all prisons.

Assessment: No change

Establishing and maintaining good working relationships between people in custody and staff at all levels helps to create a positive prison environment. Prison staff also play a critical role in upholding the dignity of people in prison through their day-to-day interactions.

The majority of prison staff who responded to the OIP's survey (82 per cent, 195 out of 237) indicated that rehabilitation of people in prison was an important part of their job.⁶⁹⁰ Reports by the PVCs for Cloverhill and Cork also noted that individuals in prison had reported "positive" and "relaxed" relationships with the staff.⁶⁹¹ The Dóchas PVC reported that the anticipated rise in assaults, disciplinary reports or self-harm due to overcrowding had not occurred, attributing this to the "dedication, commitment and humanity of the management team and prison officers".⁶⁹² It did add, however, that "this success in no way provides justification for the normalising of chronic and extreme overcrowding" and that it rather feared that "the cost of this, in human terms, for staff as well as the women incarcerated goes largely unnoticed".⁶⁹³

The impact that working in such overcrowded prisons with insufficient staffing has on staff was also observed by stakeholders in consultation with IPRT. Several stakeholders stated that the morale amongst staff in prisons appeared to be low and there was a sense of staff feeling depleted, due to the overcrowding and the effect it has on essentially every aspect of prison life.⁶⁹⁴ Education staff's low morale was specifically highlighted by stakeholders, who observed that they were usually just as uninformed as external organisations and service providers, when their activities were cancelled without explanation or much prior warning.⁶⁹⁵

As highlighted in PIPS 2024, under its *Strategy 2023-2027*, the IPS committed to undertaking a 'Culture Audit' to assess organisational culture and to implement a 'Culture Roadmap' to promote a unified service-wide culture centred on health and wellbeing, with the view to positively influencing the everyday experiences of both staff and people in prison.⁶⁹⁶ Despite commitments that it would take place in 2023 and then 2024, the IPS reported in 2025 that it was due to take

⁶⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁰ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 80) 26.

⁶⁹¹ Cork Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' 2

<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e3b2cf8f/Cork_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>; Cloverhill Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report of the Visiting Committee 2025' 2

<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/c1d28aa8/Cloverhill_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁶⁹² Dóchas Centre Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025' (2026) 4

<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/41ae0e7a/D%C3%B3chas_Centre_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁶⁹³ *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁴ (n 85); 'Stakeholder Survey' (26 June 2026).

⁶⁹⁵ (n 97).

⁶⁹⁶ Irish Prison Service (IPS), 'Strategy 2023-2027' 17 <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/IPS_Service_Strategy-2023-2027-1.pdf>; Irish Penal Reform Trust, 'Progress in the Penal System 2024' (2025) 74 <https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7726/iprt_pips_2024_report_final_digital.pdf>.

place in the last quarter of the year.⁶⁹⁷ However, by the end of 2025, no publicly available information indicated that the Culture Audit of the IPS had been carried out. **IPRT reiterates its recommendation to the IPS to undertake its culture audit as soon as practicable, and explore how other initiatives such as independent Measuring Quality of Prison Life surveys may complement this work.**

Assessment of Standard 30: **No change**

For the second year in a row, low morale amongst staff in prison has been observed, despite the efforts of staff in some prisons to carry out their duties effectively and maintain positive relationships with individuals in custody, made even more difficult by the impacts of overcrowding and the under-resourcing of staff. It is also the second year that a lack of progress has been reported in relation to the Culture Audit that the IPS committed to undertaking.

Standard 31 Use of force and restraints

Physical force is only ever used as a measure of last resort when there is an immediate and serious risk of harm. The use of physical force and restraints are accurately recorded and reported. Prison staff are skilled in de-escalation and conflict resolution approaches, and the use of these approaches is emphasised in prison policy.

Assessment: **Regress**

The use of force in Irish prisons may involve either a spontaneous physical intervention, where a prison officer responds with force to an unexpected violent situation, or a planned physical intervention, in which force is used deliberately by a prison officer or other staff member, usually during the relocation of an individual who is not complying. Both are governed by Section 93 of the Prison Rules 2007 and by an unpublished internal IPS *Use of Force Standard Operating Procedure* (the *Use of Force SOP*).

Section 93(1) of the Prison Rules 2007 provides that force should only be used for “maintaining or restoring good order or safe or secure custody”, and such force must only be used when “reasonably necessary and proportionate to achieve that purpose”, whereas the Use of Force SOP states that it “should only be undertaken as a last resort, after all other attempts to resolve or de-escalate the situation have failed”.⁶⁹⁸

The 2021 *IPS Code of Ethics* also states that when force is used it must be:

- The minimum force necessary;
- Only used as a last resort;
- For the shortest necessary time to achieve the purpose; and
- Used in accordance with prescribed and humane techniques and in compliance with relevant Service policies, standard operating procedures, manuals and operating instructions.⁶⁹⁹

It also requires that the individual is examined by a medical professional ‘as soon as possible’ following an incident involving the use of force, and that the recording and reporting of the details are provided in writing to the prison Governor as soon as possible following the event, and that this is true and accurate.⁷⁰⁰ These three documents make up a comprehensive policy framework regarding the use of force, and are aligned with Rules 64-66 of the European Prison Rules and Rule 82 of the Mandela Rules.

⁶⁹⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Dóchas Centre Inspection Report - Action Plan’ 7 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/Dochas-Centre-Inspection-Report-Action-Plan-1.pdf>>.

⁶⁹⁸ Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘Departmental Data – Monday, 8 Sep 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (8 September 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-09-08/1691>> accessed 24 August 2026.

⁶⁹⁹ Irish Prison Service, ‘Irish Prison Service Code of Ethics’ 19 <https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/Irish-Prison-Service-Code-of-Ethics-2021-FINAL-DECEMBER-2021.pdf>.

⁷⁰⁰ *ibid.*

Whilst there are policies in place to guide how force should be used in a controlled and measured way in Irish prisons, there is a lack of transparency regarding the publication by the IPS of the number of incidents where it is used – both planned and spontaneous. Even when this data has been specifically requested, it has not been made available – regardless of whether that request was made by elected officials, IPRT or others.⁷⁰¹ This inhibits oversight and accountability regarding the use of force and restraint in Irish prisons, making it difficult to monitor whether it is being used only as a last resort, with the minimum force necessary and for the shortest amount of time.

The Mental Health Commission provides a strong example of the publication of data related to the use of force and restraint, which provides detailed data on the use of physical restraints in approved centres across Ireland, including the total number and their duration.⁷⁰² In the UK, while the prison system there does not routinely publish data on the use of force and restraints, in April 2025 it did publish an analysis of the use of force from 2018 to 2023.⁷⁰³ It yielded both positive and concerning findings, with examples of good practice being the establishment of learning reviews for staff following use of force incidents, and involving people in prison in discussion forums on the use of force.⁷⁰⁴ The analysis found that “the force a prisoner experiences appears to be linked with their age, gender, and ethnicity”, with women experiencing some of the highest rates of force proportionally, and black and Muslim men being subjected to higher rates of certain techniques, such as PAVA spray and batons.⁷⁰⁵ Analysing the data in an Irish context would provide valuable insights to the IPS, to ensure it is adhering to its own policies on the use of force, to develop and tailor staff training and to enable greater external oversight and accountability.

In the absence of specific data on the use of force and restraint, one potential indicator of excessive use of force is Category A complaints made by people in prison. As mentioned under Standard 22 (p. 86), there was an increase in the number of Category A complaints made in 2025, compared to 2024.⁷⁰⁶ As Category A complaints relate to “assault or use of excessive force against a prisoner or ill treatment, racial abuse, discrimination, intimidation, threats or other conduct against a prisoner of a nature and gravity likely to bring discredit on the Irish Prison Service”, they may be suggestive of the use of excessive force, but cannot serve as a comprehensive record, given the other allegations that fall under Category A.⁷⁰⁷ Similarly, as mentioned in Standard 28 (p. 109), the IPS data on ‘physical interventions’ is not disaggregated, meaning that very little insight can be gained about incidents where staff are using physical force against an individual in prison.⁷⁰⁸

The lack of publicly available data is compounded by reports of poor internal record-keeping by some prisons regarding use of force incidents. In its inspection of Mountjoy Prison, the OIP found that records were being selectively kept, whereby “incidents in which prisoners had injured each other were being noted; however, incidents in which prisoners allegedly sustained serious injuries requiring hospitalisation at the hands of staff were not”.⁷⁰⁹ It recommended that the level of detail in the recording of use of force incidents be improved.⁷¹⁰ The OIP made similar recommendations in its inspection of Castlerea Prison, where it found that “operational reports and statements from officers tended to contain limited information, in many cases the level of detail was insufficient for management to determine if the level of force used was necessary, lawful and proportionate in the circumstances”.⁷¹¹ It did note, however, that the pilot Health and Safety Register in Castlerea Prison was a positive initiative that could improve managerial oversight of serious incidents; however, adjustments were needed to ensure that officers provide statements about the circumstances in which they used force.⁷¹²

Poor management of records regarding the use of force, combined with an absence of publicised data on its application, creates a significant gap in monitoring and accountability on this issue in Irish prisons. This continued inertia by the IPS

⁷⁰¹ Oireachtas, ‘Departmental Data – Monday, 8 Sep 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas’ (n 101). IPRT submitted an information request to the IPS on this issue, but at the time of publication had not received the information.

⁷⁰² Mental Health Commission, ‘Mental Health Commission - Annual Report 2025’ 65 <<https://www.mhcirl.ie/sites/default/files/2026-06/MHC%202025%20Annual%20Report.pdf>>.

⁷⁰³ HM Prison & Probation Service, ‘Use of Force Review: An Exploratory Analysis of Use of Force in Prisons 2018 to 23’ <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/68093394e4d2b76ccfb527a0/Use_of_Force_Evaluation_Report.pdf>.

⁷⁰⁴ *ibid* 3–4.

⁷⁰⁵ *ibid*. Maslaha, ‘Maslaha Briefing 2 - The Hidden Lives of Muslims in Prison’ <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/67487919889d3a3537e4ecd1/t/682498b84c08eb6b979d44e9/1747228859106/Maslaha_Briefing_2.pdf>.

⁷⁰⁶ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (n 80) 35.

⁷⁰⁷ Irish Prison Rules 2007.

⁷⁰⁸ Irish Prison Service, ‘Assaults on Prison Staff and Prisoners 2024 – 2025’ (n 44).

⁷⁰⁹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (n 80) 18.

⁷¹⁰ *ibid*.

⁷¹¹ *ibid* 22.

⁷¹² *ibid*.

in ensuring transparency about how force is used by staff against individuals in prison is cause for concern, particularly in light of CPT findings in 2025 that there were indications of ill-treatment and excessive use of force by prison staff on people in custody. This included one incident in 2023 in Cloverhill Prison in which the individual was left with brain injuries following a violent incident.⁷¹³ The CPT report warned that the treatment of this individual may amount to torture.⁷¹⁴

As highlighted in PIPS 2024, there is a lack of reporting around the use of anti-spit masks in Irish prisons, despite this issue also being raised in 2021 and 2022.⁷¹⁵ Anti-spit masks are covers placed over the nose and mouth of a restrained individual to prevent the transmission of spit and other bodily fluids. They were introduced into the Irish Prison Service in 2019.⁷¹⁶ Both the UN Subcommittee on the Prevention of Torture and the UN Committee against Torture have recommended in their reviews of State Parties that State Parties cease using anti-spit masks, as their use constitutes a form of inhuman and degrading treatment, which may amount to torture in some cases.⁷¹⁷ Given these conclusions, it is of urgent importance that the IPS systematically monitor and publicise data regarding the use of anti-spit masks, to enable external oversight and accountability regarding their use.

Assessment of Standard 31: **Regress**

In 2025, concerns regarding the absence of data on the use of force and restraints in Irish prisons persisted. These concerns were exacerbated by the inadequacy of record-keeping in a number of prisons regarding incidents of the use of force. The lack of publicised data, combined with poor or negligent record keeping, creates a significant gap in oversight. Given that the CPT raised concerns regarding both ill-treatment by some prison officers and poor record keeping, it is concerning that little action seems to have been taken by the IPS to improve regular, systematic and disaggregated data collection and dissemination. The failure to disaggregate data relating to “physical interventions” and the lack of data on the use of anti-spit masks also inhibits monitoring of this issue.

Standard 32 Cohorts at risk of discrimination

All staff and managers at all levels take a proactive approach towards protecting any person in prison at-risk of discrimination due to their age, gender, ethnicity (including Traveller status), nationality, sexuality, disability, or any other characteristic.

Assessment: **Regress**

There are certain groups of people in prison who are at heightened risk of discrimination due to certain characteristics, or have specific needs that differ from the general prison population. It is essential that they are not subjected to any form of discrimination by any member of staff, are protected from discrimination by other members of the prison population, and that their specific needs or vulnerabilities are supported by all staff in the prison.

Under the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty, the IPS has a legal duty to promote equality, prevent discrimination, and protect the human rights of employees and those to whom it provides services to (i.e. people in its

⁷¹³ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Report to the Irish Government on the Visit to Ireland Carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (n 4) 16.

⁷¹⁴ European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), ‘Response of the Irish Government to the Report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Its Visit to Ireland from 21 to 31 May 2024’ (2025) 4, 16 <<https://rm.coe.int/1680b6c60b>>.

⁷¹⁵ Irish Council for Civil Liberties, ‘ICCL Report to the UN Human Rights Committee: Alternative to the State Report for Ireland’s 2022 Review under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights’ (2022) 18 <<https://www.iccl.ie/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ICCL-report-to-UN-Human-Rights-Committee-2022.pdf>>.

⁷¹⁶ *ibid.*

⁷¹⁷ United Nations Committee Against Torture, ‘Concluding Observations on the Seventh Periodic Report of New Zealand’ (2023) CAT/C/NZL/CO/7 16 <<https://docs.un.org/en/CAT/C/NZL/CO/7>>; United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, ‘Report of the Subcommittee: Visit to Australia Undertaken from 16 to 23 October 2022: Recommendations and Observations Addressed to the State Party’ (2023) CAT/OP/AUS/ROSP/1 paras 31–32 <<https://docs.un.org/en/cat/op/aus/rosp/1>>.

custody). Under the Duty, set out in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014, the IPS' Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit publishes an Action Plan each year.⁷¹⁸ Action Plans have been published by the Unit since 2020, however none was published for 2024 nor 2025.⁷¹⁹ In September 2025, the Minister for Justice stated that there was "ongoing work" by the Unit to strengthen policies and support a culture of respect across the prison estate", but did not provide information regarding the Action Plan for either year.⁷²⁰ **IPRT reiterates its recommendation made in PIPS 2024, that the IPS develop and publish policies on combating and preventing discrimination of at-risk groups in Irish prisons as a matter of priority.**

The need for increased emphasis on tackling discrimination and the development of relevant policies is evidenced by the fact that in 2025, 61 per cent of people in prison who responded to the OIP's survey indicated that they had experienced discrimination in the prison (185 out of 305).⁷²¹ This is a very slight decrease since 2024, when 62 per cent of respondents (286 out of 464) reported experiencing some form of discrimination in prison.⁷²² These responses for 2024 and 2025, notably when there was no Action Plan in place, represent an increase in the number of people in prison indicating that they had experienced discrimination while in custody, with less than half of survey respondents in 2023 reporting the same (49 per cent, 236 out of 486).⁷²³

Of the survey responses by people in prison in 2025 who indicated that they had been discriminated against, 21 per cent (63 out of 305) reported discrimination based on Membership of the Traveller Community, while 15 per cent (47 out of 305) believed it was due to their nationality, up from 10 per cent (48 out of 464) in 2024.⁷²⁴ In the 2024 survey, Membership of the Traveller or Roma Communities was not differentiated, making it difficult to know the number from each group, with nine per cent (40 out of 464) citing discrimination on this basis.⁷²⁵ Race or ethnicity was cited by 12 per cent (38 out of 305) as the basis for the discrimination they faced, an increase on the seven per cent (32 out of 464)⁷²⁶ who cited this in 2024.⁷²⁷

The proportional increase in 2025 among those citing discrimination based on Membership of the Traveller Community, race or ethnicity or nationality is concerning, particularly, when for two years in a row, no Action Plan has been produced by the IPS' Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Unit. Whilst the importance and evident need for such an Action Plan should not be undermined, IPRT also emphasises that policies can only go some way towards preventing discrimination, and are reliant on a healthy organisational culture in which discrimination in any form is not tolerated and is proactively combatted.

In consultation with IPRT, stakeholders working frequently in prisons observed that more diversity was needed in the recruitment of prison officers, as a way of preventing and reducing discrimination observed in the prisons.⁷²⁸ The IPS held a prison officer recruitment competition in July 2025, and by the end of the year, 304 prison officers had been recruited.⁷²⁹ Based on publicly available information, it is not clear that any explicit efforts were made to recruit candidates with backgrounds that tend to be underrepresented in the IPS as part of this recruitment drive.

⁷¹⁸ 'Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Unit' (*Irish Prison Service*) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/equality-diversity-inclusion-unit/>> accessed 26 August 2026.

⁷¹⁹ *ibid.*

⁷²⁰ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Wednesday, 17 Sep 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (17 September 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-09-17/938>> accessed 24 August 2026.

⁷²¹ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 80) 26.

⁷²² Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2024' 22 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/OIP-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>>.

⁷²³ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2023' <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Office-of-the-Inspector-of-Prisons-Annual-Report-2023.pdf>>.

⁷²⁴ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 80) 26. Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2024' (n 125) 22.

⁷²⁵ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2024' (n 125) 22.

⁷²⁶ *ibid.*

⁷²⁷ Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2025' (n 80) 26; Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Annual Report 2024' (n 125) 22.

⁷²⁸ (n 85).

⁷²⁹ 'Recruit Prison Officer Competition' (*Irish Prison Service*) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/about-us/staff-and-corporate-service/recruitment/competition/>> accessed 26 August 2026; Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prison Service – Tuesday, 4 Nov 2025 – Parliamentary Questions (34th Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (4 November 2025) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2025-11-04/1360>> accessed 26 August 2026; Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' 22 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e243cb1e/IPS_Annual_Report_2025_English.pdf>.

Assessment of Standard 32: Regress

In 2025, there was a disappointing regression in efforts to combat discrimination against certain groups in Irish prisons. Not only did the IPS not publish an Action Plan for 2025 for the second year in a row, but the proportion of individuals alleging discrimination on the basis of Membership of the Traveller Community, race or ethnicity or nationality, increased since 2024. Such an increase demonstrates the need for increased diversity among IPS staff, particularly prison officers, as one potential measure to mitigate discrimination.

ASSESSMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Section E: Safety and protection in Irish prisons

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
26. Solitary confinement	For another year, data on the use of solitary confinement was not made unavailable, deepening longstanding concern regarding the use of this practice, its frequency and duration. The absence of public information on this issue gives rise to questions about Ireland's adherence to its obligations under international human rights law regarding the protection of those in State custody again exposure to torture and inhuman and degrading treatment. There was a notable and concerning increase in individuals spending 23 hours in their cell over the course of the first half of the year – with data for the second half of the year not made available. Overall, IPRT maintains that the IPS and the Department of Justice must take immediate steps to prohibit the use of prolonged solitary confinement in both statute and in practice, and ensure measures are in place to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of solitary confinement in Irish prisons.	Unable to assess	The IPS take immediate steps to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of solitary confinement in all Irish prisons. The IPS should immediately improve its data collection in relation to the practice of solitary confinement, including the central recording and public reporting, at a minimum on an annual basis, of the number of people subjected to solitary confinement, the number of instances of solitary confinement, and the length of each instance. The State should enact legislation to prohibit prolonged solitary and abolish it in practice as a matter of utmost priority.
27. Safety & security in Irish prisons	In 2025, there were some positive measures taken by prison management to improve safety and security, such as enhanced drug seizures and increased efforts to prevent drugs from entering the prison. The establishment of the Violence Management Steering Group is also encouraging, though it remains to be seen what role the group will play. Overall, however, violence increased across the prison estate, with a rise in assaults against both people in prison and staff. The introduction of incapacitant spray in prisons also risks escalating tensions between people in prison and prison staff, rather than quelling them. The use of such spray also makes any hope for relationship and trust building between people in prison and staff unlikely, creating a more tense environment for both.	Regress 	The IPS invest in proven interventions that can help address violence in prisons, including violence reduction and conflict mediation programmes.
28. Prison escorts	The increase in the number of Category A complaints regarding the PSEC, combined with the lack of transparency regarding the policies and guidelines in relation to the health and welfare of individuals under escort is cause for concern, as it highlights the need for systematic monitoring and accountability of escorts to and from prison.	Regress 	The IPS establish and publicise clear policies and guidelines relating to the health and well-being of individuals under escort.

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
29. Staff training	In 2025, available information indicated that staff in two prisons felt confident in their levels of training in some areas. However, they also indicated low levels of confidence in their training in a number of other areas. Of note is the low level of confidence in relation to dealing with people in prison with mental health difficulties, which may have implications for both staff and the people in prison they are charged with caring for. There is also an evident need for training for staff to support them in dealing appropriately with the ageing cohort of the prison population.	No change 	The IPS identify and tailor the training needs of prison staff, and provide repeat training on identified issues, including training on mental health.
30. Develop positive relationships and work culture	For the second year in a row, low morale amongst staff in prison has been observed, despite the efforts of staff in some prisons to carry out their duties effectively and maintain positive relationships with individuals in custody, made even more difficult by the impacts of overcrowding and under resourcing of staff. It is also the second year that a lack of progress has been reported in relation to the Culture Audit that the IPS committed to undertaking.	No change 	The IPS undertake its Culture Audit as soon as practical and explore how other initiatives such as independent Measuring Quality of Prison Life surveys may complement this work.
31. Use of force & restraints	In 2025, concerns regarding the absence of data on the use of force and restraints in Irish prisons persisted. These concerns were exacerbated by the inadequacy of record keeping in a number of prisons regarding incidents of the use of force. The lack of publicised data combined with poor or negligent record keeping creates a significant gap in oversight. Given that the CPT raised concerns regarding both ill-treatment by some prison officers and poor record keeping, it is concerning that little action seems to have been taken by the IPS to improve regular, systematic and disaggregated data collection and dissemination. The failure to disaggregate data relating to “physical interventions” and the lack of data on the use of anti-spit masks also inhibits monitoring of this issue.	Regress 	The IPS publish detailed data at least annually on the use of force and restraints by staff in Irish prisons. The IPS should immediately prohibit the use of anti-spit masks or similar devices in Irish prisons.
32. Cohorts at risk of discrimination	In 2025, there was a disappointing regression in efforts to combat discrimination against certain groups in Irish prisons. Not only was no Action Plan published by the IPS for 2025, for the second year in a row, but the proportion of individuals alleging discrimination on the basis of Membership of the Traveller Community, race or ethnicity or nationality, increased since 2024. Such an increase demonstrates the need for increased diversity in the IPS staff, particularly prison officers, as one potential measure to mitigate discrimination.	Regress 	The IPS develop and publish policies on combating and preventing discrimination of at-risk groups in Irish prisons as a matter of priority.

Section F

Release and reintegration

Section F

Release and reintegration

Standard 33 Parole system

The parole system is fair, transparent, and removed from political control.

Assessment: Regress

Parole plays an important role in supporting an appropriate balance between upholding the rights of victims and the wider public and the rights of a sentenced individual to a fair and balanced system of release. The parole system in Ireland is administered by the Parole Board, an independent statutory body established by the Parole Act 2019. The Parole Board currently considers the parole applications of people serving life sentences and who have served at least 12 years of their sentence in prison (however they may apply for consideration for parole once they have served 10.5 years of a life sentence).

While the Parole Act currently only applies to people serving a life sentence (and therefore only people serving life sentences may be considered for parole), the Act provides that the Minister for Justice may make Regulations under section 24(3) to extend parole eligibility to those serving a sentence of eight years or more. The *Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024* noted that the introduction of Regulations under section 24 should occur 'as soon as possible', and in early 2024, the Minister for Justice stated that policy work on the Regulations had commenced.⁷³⁰ However, by the end of 2025, there was no reported progress regarding the development of these Regulations. IPRT firmly believes that parole eligibility should be expanded to those serving long sentences (i.e. eight years and over), and therefore **urges the Department of Justice to prioritise the drafting and introduction of these Regulations. The Department of Justice must also, as a matter of priority, ensure that the Parole Board is sufficiently resourced and staffed to effectively fulfil its current remit and take on a greater number of parole applications when section 24 Regulations are introduced. Commensurate resources must also be provided to the Probation Service to supervise additional individuals released on parole.**

In 2025, the Parole Board considered 81 parole applications and issued final decisions in 55 cases.⁷³¹ The Parole Board granted 12 Parole Orders and refused 44 applications.⁷³² In 14 cases, Temporary Release was recommended and in 10 cases there was a recommendation to transfer the person to an open centre, either Shelton Abbey or Loughan House.⁷³³ It is encouraging to see alternative recommendations such as these being made where parole has not been granted.

In 2025, the Parole Board considered fewer applications than it did in 2024, when it reviewed 108 applications and issued decisions in 70 per cent of them (76 applications). It is also a decrease from the number reviewed in 2023.⁷³⁴ The reason for this reduction is not clear.

⁷³⁰ Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Parole Boards – Tuesday, 23 Jan 2024 – Parliamentary Questions (33rd Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (23 January 2024) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-01-23/440>> accessed 31 August 2026; Department of Justice, 'Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024' (2022) 66 <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/review-of-policy-options-for-prison-and-penal-reform-2022-2024.pdf>>.

⁷³¹ Parole Board, 'Parole Board Annual Report 2025' 5 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/09d823a8/Parole_Board_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁷³² *ibid.*

⁷³³ *ibid* 17.

⁷³⁴ Parole Board, 'Parole Board Annual Report 2024' 13 <https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/be8018a6/Parole_Board_Annual_Report_final.pdf>.

Table 26: Parole Board decision making 2022-2025

	2022	2023	2024	2025
Number of applications considered/reviewed*	22	95	108	81
Number of final decisions issued	11	75	76	55
Number of parole orders granted	2	8	14	12
Number of temporary release and/or transfer to an open centre recommendations made	N/A	36	20	24
Number of applicants refused parole	N/A	67	62	44
Number of variations made to parole orders and orders revoked	N/A	N/A	8	27

As was the case in 2024, resource and capacity constraints continued to pose a challenge to the Parole Board in carrying out its work.⁷³⁵ The Parole Board's 2025 Annual Report stated that, whilst its caseload target had been met, it was "unable to undertake work in other areas that we are mandated to do as outlined in the Parole Act 2019".⁷³⁶ This included conducting or commissioning research, as well as creating greater awareness of the Parole Board's work amongst those serving life sentences, victims and members of the public.⁷³⁷ Whilst the Parole Board received an eight per cent funding increase in Budget 2026, it would appear that this is insufficient if the Board's remit is to be expanded with the introduction of the Regulations under section 24(3) of the Parole Act. In addition, the Parole Board noted in its Annual Report that staffing constraints remained "an ongoing and significant challenge" and that "this is likely to be a greater challenge in 2026".⁷³⁸

As was recorded in PIPS 2024, Ireland continued to have one of the highest proportions of people serving life sentences in Europe. In 2025, 9.6 per cent of the Irish prison population were serving a life sentence, compared with the European average of 3.2 per cent.⁷³⁹ This means that potentially higher numbers of people should be eligible for parole. In 2025, the Parole Board did not publish data regarding the number of people eligible for parole.

Table 27: Number of people in Irish prisons serving a life sentence, 2024-2025

	31-Dec-24	31-Dec-25
Total number of people in prison serving a life sentence	392	411

In its 2025 Annual Report, the Parole Board noted that it had been engaging with the Department of Justice throughout the year regarding the development of a Case Management System.⁷⁴⁰ The system was due to be implemented at some point in 2026, and, once in place, will greatly facilitate the Parole Board in carrying out its work, particularly by improving efficiency, reducing delays and supporting better-quality decision-making.⁷⁴¹

Assessment of Standard 33: Regress

In 2025, the Parole Board considered fewer applications than it did in the previous two years. For a second year in a row, the Parole Board cited resource and capacity constraints impinging on its work and indicated that such constraints would likely continue into the following year and may be exacerbated. No reported progress was made regarding the development of the Regulations under the Parole Act. There was encouraging progress regarding a Case Management System, but it remained unimplemented by the year's end.

⁷³⁵ Parole Board (n 2) 7.

⁷³⁶ *ibid.*

⁷³⁷ *ibid.*

⁷³⁸ *ibid* 23.

⁷³⁹ 'Prison Populations SPACE I 2025' (Council of Europe 2025) PC-CP (2025) 9 52–53 <https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2026/06/260626_rapport-space-i-2025.pdf>.

⁷⁴⁰ Parole Board (n 2) 5.

⁷⁴¹ 'IPRT Responds to the Parole Board Annual Report 2025' (1 August 2026) <<https://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/iprt-responds-to-the-parole-board-annual-report-2025/>> accessed 31 August 2026.

Standards 34 & 35

Release planning

Standard 34: All people in prison have comprehensive preparation and structured plans for release. National policy and legislation provide for a structured release system.

Standard 35: Protocols are in place for inter-agency coordination in order to ensure the successful reintegration of people into the wider community following their release from prison.

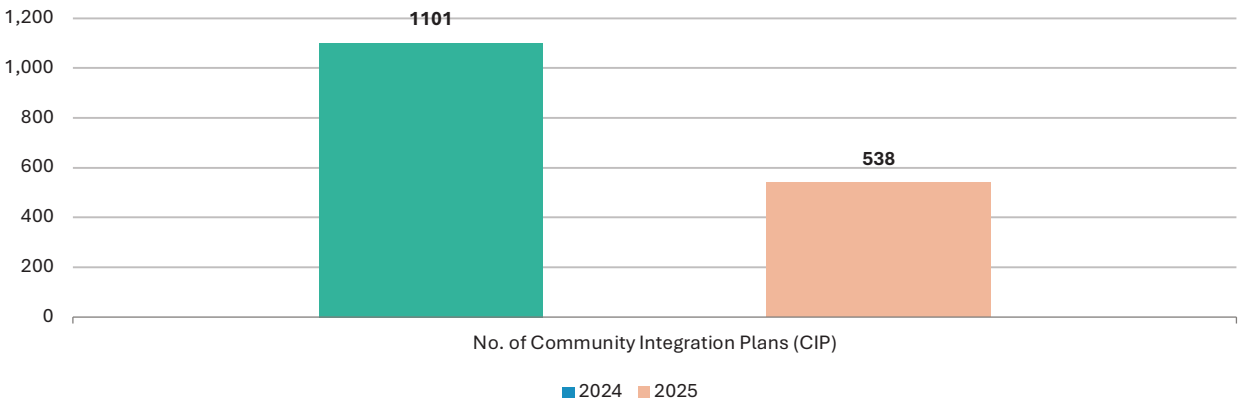
Assessment: Regress

Leaving prison can be a particularly vulnerable period for individuals, and meaningful planning and support for people released from prison is essential for ongoing rehabilitation and effective reintegration into wider society.

There is increasing recognition of the importance of supporting individuals with their preparation for release and reintegration into society, yet individuals embarking on this process continue to face barriers to social integration. Such barriers can arise from insufficient supports in prison, due to overcrowding and understaffing, as well as from a lack of services in the community, such as housing and employment.

Approximately nine months before a person is due to be released from prison, a Community Integration Plan (CIP) is supposed to be developed between that person and an Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) Coordinator in the prison. The aim of the CIP is to set out a plan for the person to prepare for their release, and it should cover important issues such as accommodation, employment or education, with the view that this will reduce the risk of reoffending upon release.⁷⁴²

Figure 19: Total number of Community Integration Plans (CIP), 2024-2025



In 2025, the number of people with a Community Integration Plan (CIP) was less than half the number in 2024.⁷⁴³ There was a significant reduction from 1,098 people having CIPs in 2024, down to just 538.⁷⁴⁴ This means that individuals across the prison estate preparing for their release were likely provided with insufficient support in this process, making their eventual release even more of a daunting prospect, both logistically and personally. A lack of support in the lead up to release runs the risk of undoing the personal development an individual has made during their sentence to address their offending behaviour.

⁷⁴² Houses of the Oireachtas, 'Prisoner Data – Tuesday, 21 Apr 2015 – Parliamentary Questions (31st Dáil) – Houses of the Oireachtas' (21 April 2015) <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2015-04-21/416>> accessed 31 August 2026.

⁷⁴³ Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁷⁴⁴ Ibid.

Table 28: Number of Community Integration Plans (CIP) per prison, 2024-2025^{745*}

	2024	2025
Arbour Hill Prison	37	14
Castlerea Prison	N/A	2
Cloverhill Prison	4	2
Cork Prison	123	128
Limerick Prison (M)	4	N/A
Loughan House	N/A	31
Midlands Prison	320	62
Mountjoy Prison	353	144
Portlaoise Prison	25	36
Shelton Abbey	32	N/A
Training Unit	9	24
Wheatfield Prison	140	N/A
Limerick Prison (F)	37	29
Dóchas Centre	14	66
Total	1098	538

**Data was not provided for Castlerea Prison and Loughan House in 2024, and Limerick Men's Prison, Shelton Abbey and Wheatfield Prison in 2025*

This material reduction in pre-release support was felt by individuals in prison. The Mountjoy PVC received seven complaints from men in prison regarding “pre-release preparation and fear of homelessness”.⁷⁴⁶ It recorded that a number of men had expressed anxiety about what they might face on release, as they felt “ill-prepared for release due to a lack of meaningful rehabilitation, with no housing, no employment or prospects in wider society”.⁷⁴⁷ Stakeholders told IPRT that they had observed similar experiences based on their work with people in prison, including that release planning was not happening to the extent that it should be, or at all, and this was impacting the affected individuals’ sense of preparedness.⁷⁴⁸

Concerns regarding the availability of stable accommodation upon release and the risks of being released into homelessness persisted in 2025, as in 2024.⁷⁴⁹ Stakeholders shared with IPRT that they had observed that some individuals were released into homelessness or insecure housing, as there was a lack of prior communication between the IPS and housing services.⁷⁵⁰ As one stakeholder expressed to IPRT, the cohort of people in prison that needs significant support “is denied it based on something they are powerless over”.⁷⁵¹

In 2025, there was a slight increase in the number of people who presented for emergency homeless service provision on the day they were released from prison, compared to 2024.⁷⁵² This number increased from 219 in 2024 to 237 in 2025.⁷⁵³ There was also a slight decrease in the number of people who applied for social housing in advance of their

⁷⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁴⁶ Mountjoy Prison Visiting Committee, ‘Annual Report 2025’ (2026) 16
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/47c4abd8/Mountjoy_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁷⁴⁷ Ibid 16–17.

⁷⁴⁸ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (8 June 2026); ‘Stakeholder Survey’ (26 June 2026).

⁷⁴⁹ Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2024’ (2025) 86
<https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/7726/iprt_pips_2024_report_final_digital.pdf>.

⁷⁵⁰ ‘Stakeholder Consultation 1’ (n 19).

⁷⁵¹ Ibid.

⁷⁵² Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁷⁵³ Ibid.

release, through the Resettlement Service run by Tosú, decreasing from 307 in 2024 to 291 in 2025.⁷⁵⁴

Table 29: Number of individuals who applied for social housing pre-release and the number of individuals who presented for homeless accommodation upon release, 2023-2025⁷⁵⁵

	2023	2024	2025
Number of people serving a sentence who applied for social housing in advance of release	283	307	291
Number of people who presented for emergency homeless accommodation on day of release from prison	239	219	237

The services provided by organisations like Tosú are crucial for preparing individuals for their release, particularly when formal supports through the prison system appear to have reduced in reach. In 2025, Tosú launched a new Community Reintegration Service, which will have four new Community Reintegration Coordinators based in Dublin, Cork and Limerick, with the aim of helping clients navigate the transition from prison back to their community.⁷⁵⁶ Such an initiative is encouraging and will hopefully provide enhanced support to people in prison preparing for release. However, the IPS still has a responsibility to ensure that people in its custody are released with the necessary supports.

The existence of pre-release courses in Castlerea, Arbour Hill and Limerick prisons is encouraging; however, the content, quality and availability of these courses are unclear. Such courses should be made available in all Irish prisons, to equip people with practical skills pre-release, and build their confidence, thereby mitigating the difficulty of the adjustment to life in the community upon release.⁷⁵⁷

The Outlook programme, an initiative run by Focus Ireland in collaboration with the IPS and Probation Service, continued to provide crucial support for a small number of women released from the Dóchas Centre. Launched in 2019, the programme provides support for women being released from prison and a number of women subject to probation conditions who need accommodation. As in PIPS 2024, IPRT recommends that the Outlook programme be expanded both in Dublin and beyond, and that a similar programme be established for Limerick Women's Prison. One stakeholder observed that some women in Limerick Women's Prison were seeking transfer to the Dóchas, in the hopes of availing of the Outlook programme's support.⁷⁵⁸

Assessment of Standard 34 & 35: Regress

In 2025, people leaving prison continued to face barriers to reintegration, including access to accommodation. There was a significant reduction in the number of people who were provided with a Community Integration Plan (CIP) in the lead up to their release – less than half of those who were provided with one the previous year. This reduction in support was reflected in the concerns expressed by people in prison as they neared their release, fearing homelessness and feeling ill-equipped due to a lack of rehabilitation in prison. While the establishment of Tosú's Community Reintegration Service is positive, greater progress in this area can be achieved through expanding and formalising initiatives such as the Outlook programme, as previously called for.

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁵ Data received by IPRT on 1 September 2026 through an information request to the IPS.

⁷⁵⁶ Irish Prison Service, 'Irish Prison Service Annual Report 2025' 42
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e243cb1e/IPS_Annual_Report_2025_English.pdf>.

⁷⁵⁷ Castlerea Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025'
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/e40264dd/Castlerea_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>; Limerick Prison Visiting Committee, 'Annual Report 2025'
<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/a4fc66ed/Limerick_Prison_Visiting_Committee_Annual_Report_2025.pdf>.

⁷⁵⁸ 'Stakeholder Survey' (n 19).

ASSESSMENTS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Section F: Release and reintegration

Standard	Assessment	Grade	IPRT recommends
33. Parole system	In 2025, the Parole Board considered fewer applications than it did in the previous two years. For a second year in a row, the Parole Board cited resource and capacity constraints impinging on its work and indicated that such constraints would likely continue into the following year and may be exacerbated. No reported progress was made regarding the development of the Regulations under the Parole Act. There was encouraging progress regarding a Case Management System, but it remained unimplemented by the year's end.	Regress 	The Department of Justice prioritise the drafting of Regulations under section 24 of the Parole Act. The State Increase funding to the Parole Board, to ensure it can effectively carry out its mandate, as well as increased funding for the Probation Service to supervise additional individuals released on parole, once the section 24 Regulations are commenced.
34 & 35 Release planning	In 2025, people leaving prison continued to face barriers to reintegration, including access to accommodation. There was a significant reduction in the number of people who were provided with a Community Integration Plan (CIP) in the lead up to their release – less than half of those who were provided with one the previous year. This reduction in support was reflected in the concerns expressed by people in prison as they neared their release, fearing homelessness and feeling ill-equipped due to a lack of rehabilitation in prison. While the establishment of Tosú's Community Reintegration Service is positive, greater progress in this area can be achieved through expanding and formalising initiatives such as the Outlook programme, as previously called for.	Regress 	The IPS increase the number of ISM Coordinators, as mentioned under Standard 17, to ensure more individuals have a Community Integration Plan (CIP) in place ahead of their release.



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