



Pre-Budget Submission
Budget 2024

September 2023

Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) is Ireland’s principal independent non-governmental organisation working for systemic penal reform and change.

Our vision is a just, humane Ireland where prison is used as a last resort.

Our mission is to advocate for a progressive criminal justice system that prioritises alternatives to prison, upholds human rights, and champions reintegration. We do this through conducting research, campaigning and changing attitudes.

Underpinning our work is the belief that our penal system matters; it forever alerts us to addressing the root causes of offending behaviour right across the different stages of life. We know that certain groups of people continue to be particularly impacted by the criminal justice system – people experiencing poverty and deprivation, those who have fallen out of the education system, people with addiction, people with mental health issues, or who have disabilities, some migrant and ethnic minority communities including Irish Travellers who continue to be over-represented in terms of youth justice, women’s detention, and adult male prisons. Approaching penal policy in this multi-faceted manner ensures the creation of safer and fairer communities now and in future.

IPRT is concerned that the increasing prison population – and the current state response, namely to increase prison spaces – contravenes clear commitments in the Government’s own Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024 to reduce the number of people serving short custodial sentences of 12 months or less. While we understand the need to provide capital infrastructure investment to update and improve the prison estate, Budget 2024 provides a timely opportunity to invest in practical measures that will help to alleviate the current situation of chronic prison overcrowding. It also provides an opportunity to invest in key supports to improve the lives of people currently in prison, those leaving prison as well as their families and children.

In Budget 2024, IPRT is calling on the Government to make the following investments:

- **Provide an additional €5 million to the Probation Service to support greater use of Community Service Orders and Probation Supervision.**

This allocation would help the Service develop its capacity to provide administrative post-custody supervision so it can facilitate all forms of post-release supervision requirements.¹ It would develop and support increased capacity in Community-Based-Organisations to develop and deliver an increase in the provision of Community Service Orders.²

- **Allocate €2 million in funding to the Irish Prison Service (IPS) to facilitate improved family contact between people in prison and their families and children.**

This funding would ensure the completion of the roll-out of in-cell telephones to the remainder of prisons that are awaiting introduction of this facility as well as providing video-call infrastructure to all prisons similar to the specialist video call booths that have already been installed in Cloverhill, Castlerea and Midlands Prisons in 2022 as an additional form of strengthening family contact beyond the Covid-19 pandemic.³ Any remaining funding should be used to provide and/or improve child and family-friendly visitation spaces in all prisons.

- **Invest €300,000 in measures to counter recidivism and support the community reintegration of women leaving the criminal justice system, particularly those assessed to be low-risk to society.**

These measures should include scoping the costs, through consultation, of building an open prison for women. They should also include specific funding to support the delivery of stepdown, community-based facilities, that offer supported-accommodation and other support services (e.g., family re-integration, health and well-being supports, etc.) for women leaving prison.⁴

1. *Informed by the Department of Justice, Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024.*

2. *Informed by the Probation Service Annual Report 2021.*

3. *Informed by the The Journal, 'Cell phones: €1.1m spent installing telephones in every cell at four prisons', June 2022; and IPRT, Progress in the Penal System (2022), May 2023.*

4. *Informed by the Focus/Tuath Housing Financial Report 2022.*

- **Allocate €1 million to the Irish Prison Service for the provision of additional Addiction Counselling Services and Psychological Services.**

This funding would facilitate the recruitment of two additional full-time senior psychologists assigned to Psychology Services to help address both the mental health and addiction challenges of those in prison (€400,000) and the recruitment of 12 addiction counsellors, as needs require across the prison estate, to improve the provision of addiction services in prisons (€600,000).⁵ While this is a very modest ask for 2024, we would urge the Government to cost the recommendations of the High Level Task Force to consider the mental health and addiction challenges of those who come into contact with the criminal justice sector.

- **Allocate €365,000 for the introduction of an education allowance for people in prison to comply with the Revised European Prison Rules.**

The introduction of an incentivisation gratuity of €3.50 per week for people engaged in structured educational activities in the prison estate, equivalent to the gratuity received by those engaged in prison work, will bring the IPS into compliance with the Revised European Prison Rules (Rule 28.4 and 105). The IPS should aim to double the numbers currently in attendance this year. In the longer-term, the IPS should scope the costs, through consultation, of phasing in an introduction of minimum wage equivalent in gratuities for those attending education or training workshops.⁶



5. Informed by a parliamentary question from Jim O'Callaghan, 27 June 2023.

6. Informed by the Office of the Inspector of Prisons, 'Thematic Inspection on Education & Work Training, April – June 2022', June 2023.

Delivering on these key asks will clearly signal the Government's commitment to implement key progressive measures to reduce reoffending, support desistance from offending, avoid overcrowding in prisons and reduce reliance on custodial sentences, in line with stated government policy.

In addition to these key asks, we are also calling on the Government to consider providing dedicated funding to support and provide restorative justice at all stages of the criminal justice system on a nationwide basis; including the funding of new referral pathways to ensure the accessibility of restorative justice services to address the gaps in services provision that currently exist.⁷

Another significant area for investment in 2024 will be in terms of the soon-to-be-established Inspectorate of Places of Detention.⁸ The Inspectorate, as well as the Irish Human Rights Commission as the proposed coordinating body for all National Preventative Mechanisms established in the State, will require increased and adequate resources to fulfil their respective roles in ensuring compliance with the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) which we hope to see ratified in 2024.

**REDUCE
OVERCROWDING**



**SUPPORT
FAMILIES**



**REINTEGRATE
WOMEN**



**HEALTHCARE
NEEDS**



**ENCOURAGE
EDUCATION**



7. Informed by the Department of Justice, Policy Paper, 'Promoting and supporting the provision of Restorative Justice at all stages of the criminal justice system', 8 August 2023.

8. Informed by the Joint Committee on Justice's Report on the topic of 'Pre-Legislative Scrutiny of the General Scheme of the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022, 8 March 2023.



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