



Pre-Budget Submission  
**Budget 2025**

**September 2024**

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

This submission is written against the backdrop of unprecedented prison overcrowding. The highest ever prison population in the history of the state was recorded in late June 2024, when the number of people in custody surpassed 5,000; this record has been frequently beaten since.<sup>1</sup>

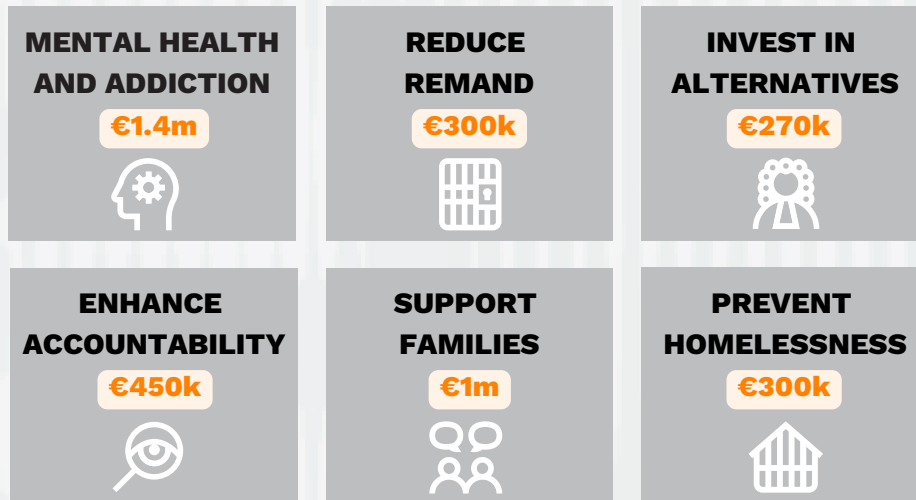
**IPRT believes that prison expansion not only contradicts existing government policy, but the lengthy process of prison building will not offer any short-term solution to hundreds of men and women currently sleeping on prison floors and thousands more who are sharing cells. If financial resources and political will are not invested in supporting and championing effective alternatives to prison, the resources needed to continually increase the prison estate will be a financial and social drain on the State for decades to come.**

However, while not a long-term solution to the problem, the Irish Prison Service (IPS) should be adequately resourced in the short-term to ensure it can safely staff overcrowded prisons. This is important for everyone living and working in prison. This should include resources to help alleviate current pressures where existing staff are available and willing to work additional hours.







Imprisonment, while necessary in some cases, in many other cases is an ineffective, counterproductive and hugely expensive response to offending. This is particularly the case for people on shorter sentences (less than 12 months) who made up three-quarters of all sentenced committals to prison in 2022.<sup>2</sup> IPRT believes that both short- and long-term savings can be made within discrete areas of the Justice vote by shifting emphasis to cheaper and more effective responses to offending, some of which lie outside of the Justice vote.

Budget 2025 provides an opportunity to invest in practical measures that will help to alleviate chronic prison overcrowding. It also provides an opportunity to invest in key supports to improve the lives of people in prison, people leaving prison, and their families.

IPRT calls for strategic and evidence-based investment under six action areas:



### Summary of IPRT's priority investment areas for Budget 2025

<b>MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION</b> 	Allocate <b>€1.4m</b> to enhance the prison psychology service, expand the Prison In-Reach Court Liaison Service, and resource addiction counselling and other support services to facilitate the roll-out of a pilot dual diagnosis programme in prison.
<b>REDUCE REMAND</b> 	Invest <b>€300k</b> to introduce a pilot Supported Bail Service for women to help improve compliance with bail conditions and better address some of the underlying causes of offending.
<b>INVEST IN ALTERNATIVES</b> 	Invest <b>€270k</b> in community alternatives to imprisonment - particularly restorative justice. This could help tackle overcrowding in prisons and could reduce both financial and social costs to the State.
<b>ENHANCE ACCOUNTABILITY</b> 	Allocate <b>€450k</b> to appropriately resource the bodies who will be responsible for implementing the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) to ensure they are adequately prepared in advance of ratification.
<b>SUPPORT FAMILIES</b> 	Allocate <b>€1m</b> for measures to support children and families of people in prison, including improvement of visiting facilities, finalisation of in-cell telephony and video booth rollout and to extend the Family Links Programme nationally.
<b>PREVENT HOMELESSNESS</b> 	Invest an additional <b>€300k</b> in Housing First to support all people leaving prison to secure accommodation and to enhance wraparound supports for people with experience of the criminal justice system.

### **1. Respond to mental health and addiction – €1.4M**

While a range of investments are needed to improve responses to mental health in the penal system, this submission focuses on resourcing three of the short-term actions identified by 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) in 2022.<sup>3</sup> These recommendations were scheduled to be implemented during 2023 and 2024.

IPRT urges the Government to take concrete steps to fully resource the areas below in order to lay the foundations for further long-term work in this area.

#### ***Ensure the psychologist to prisoner ratio is at least 1:150***

A ratio of one psychologist to every 150 prisoners, the internationally recognised minimum, was recommended in the IPS' 2015 external review of psychology services, *New Connections*.<sup>4</sup> This was endorsed in Ireland's national mental health policy, *Sharing the Vision*,<sup>5</sup> and further supported by the HLTF in 2022, which recommended resourcing "at least" this level.<sup>6</sup>

To meet the ratio of one psychologist per 150 prisoners, the IPS would need around 34 psychologists.<sup>7</sup> Currently, there are authorised posts for 14 Senior Psychologists (which equates to seven full-time posts due to management and supervision commitments) and 23.4 Psychologists.<sup>8</sup> Achieving the minimum ratio therefore requires funding for three additional Psychologists and one additional Senior Psychologist. However, this minimum ratio is only a baseline. If the role of psychology is to be enhanced further, the service will need to be bolstered with further posts and resources.

In 2022, the IPS Psychology service saw 1,303 prisoners (of a target of 2,000), and in 2023, 1,627 prisoners were seen (of a target of 2,200).<sup>9</sup> The 2024 target was also set at 2,200. While the target for 2025 is not yet set, the level of need is unlikely to decrease. Increasing the number of posts would help the Psychology Service to meet these targets by improving the psychologist-prisoner ratio.

**Action:** Increase the number of approved posts for working-level psychologists to a minimum ratio of 1:150 by recruiting one additional Senior Psychologist and three Staff Grade Psychologists.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate an additional €360,000 ring-fenced funding to the IPS to recruit psychologists.<sup>10</sup>

**Expand the successful Psychiatric In-reach and Court Liaison Service (PICLS) model**

Further resourcing is required to ensure that people with mental illnesses can be diverted from the prison system and receive appropriate treatment and supports in a timely manner. People with mental illness, particularly major mental illness, can be vulnerable in a prison setting. Their psychiatric needs are often not appropriately met, and the factors that led to their original offending are, by in large, not addressed meaningfully by contact with the prison system.

The HSE, through the National Forensic Mental Health Service, delivers PICLS at Ireland's busiest remand prison, Cloverhill Prison, and to a lesser extent to other courts remanding to Cloverhill Prison. PICLS prepares reports for Courts and aims to ensure that, insofar as possible, people presenting before the Courts, where the crime reflects an underlying mental illness, are referred to psychiatric facilities and treated appropriately.<sup>11</sup>

Between 2006 and 2023, PICLS diverted 1,996 patients from Cloverhill Prison to healthcare locations outside of prison.<sup>12</sup> PICLS provides a financial saving as it supports the diversion of people before the Courts to community facilities, where feasible, rather than potential admission to the high-cost Central Mental Hospital (CMH) following sentencing. Not only is this more cost effective, but it also mitigates against the demand for limited CMH beds.

The expansion of the successful PICLS model has been considered and/or recommended by a range of bodies,<sup>13</sup> and the implementation plan for Ireland's national mental health policy, *Sharing the Vision*, contains an action for 2023 to "devise an implementation plan for expanding PICLS nationally".<sup>14</sup> Research on PICLS has noted the increased likelihood of successful transfer of care to the community through the addition of a "relatively low-cost" housing support worker to the model;<sup>15</sup> the HLTF has also noted that this should be "an integral component" of nationwide PICLS provision.<sup>16</sup>

**Action:** Expand the PICLS model to at least one additional prison in 2025. In addition to operating costs, the pilot expansion should include – at a minimum – posts for 0.5 WTE Consultant Psychiatrist, one working working-grade psychiatrist, one Advanced Nurse Practitioner, one forensic mental health nurse, and one housing support worker. Cost savings could be achieved if some staff could serve on multiple sites and if administrative functions could be centralised. Outside of the greater Dublin area, the prison with the highest proportion of people on remand is Cork Prison, and as such, a similar service could be considered. This might also be supported by the relative concentration of other services in Cork City.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate an additional €540,000 to the HSE NFMHS, to pilot the expansion of the successful PICLS court diversion model to an additional site.<sup>17</sup>

### **Establish a pilot dual diagnosis programme in prison**

While comprehensive data are not available, it is estimated that up to one in four people in prison have a dual mental health and addiction diagnosis.<sup>18</sup> While a range of psychological and substance misuse treatments are available in prison, these are separate services.

The HLTF recommended the establishment of a pilot dual diagnosis programme in a prison at the “earliest opportunity”, to provide the basis for further learning with the potential for rollout across the prison estate.<sup>19</sup> The Health Needs Assessment also identified this as a significant area of unmet need and noted that “absence of specialist dual diagnosis services is viewed as an impediment to the efficacy of addiction, psychology and mental health services” and noted that the formation of a specialist dual diagnosis service is considered to be of “paramount importance”.<sup>20</sup>

To support the successful roll-out of a pilot dual diagnosis programme, there first needs to be increased resourcing made available for addiction counselling services. As of the end of May 2024, approximately 12.5% (618 people) of the prison population were engaged in addiction counselling and a further 17% (827 people) were on waiting lists to access such services.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, integrating a dual diagnosis programme may also require increased resources for primary healthcare. However, the ongoing addition of a Mental Health and Addiction Lead by the IPS should support this work.

The development of a dual diagnosis programme is a more intelligent and appropriate allocation of resources rather than discrete provision through mental health and addiction services. It can also be expected that the targeted interventions delivered through a dual diagnosis programme may enhance effectiveness of treatment, which may reduce pressures on existing psychology and addiction services, and result in improved outcomes for people accessing the service.

**Action:** Resource a pilot dual diagnosis model of care in a prison. This would better align service provision in prison with community provision, following the introduction of the HSE Dual Diagnosis Model of Care. In addition to service provision, funding should also be apportioned to provide for comprehensive analysis of the programme, including the operating model and the outcomes.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate an additional €500,000 to the IPS, to increase relevant service capacity in order to pilot a dual diagnosis programme.

## 2. Reduce remands to custody – €300k

While pre-trial detention can play a role in ensuring that certain defendants will be brought to trial in some criminal proceedings, when used excessively it results in considerable cost to the State. More importantly, reliance on pre-trial detention impacts the right to liberty and the presumption of innocence.

An effective way to improve compliance with bail conditions, particularly for people who have complex personal challenges, lies in the provision of bail supports and services that allow the accused to address offending-related behaviour within their community while awaiting trial.

Supported bail schemes provide real alternatives to pre-trial detention. These programmes generally consist of supervision and support within the local community, and commonly seek to address issues including addiction, mental health, homelessness, and financial debt, taking a more holistic approach compared to custodial options. The aims of these services are to prevent offending on bail, ensure appearance at court, and to reduce remands to custody to a minimum.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, the benefit of such schemes can extend beyond the remand period, with research in Scotland finding that nearly all interviewees on supervised bail had a positive change in their behaviour over time.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to the effectiveness of bail supports and services, research has shown that such schemes are more cost effective than remanding people in custody. In 2022, the average cost of an “available, staffed prison space” in an Irish prison was €84,067 – or an average of €230 per day, per prisoner. Assuming an average of 800 people in prison each day held solely on remand/trial warrants,<sup>24</sup> it costs the State approximately €184,000 per day to house people who have not actually been sentenced in prison. Assuming this rate of remand on any given day across the year, the annual cost to the State is approximately €147.2 million. Conversely, an inquiry in Scotland in 2018 heard that an investment of £1 million in bail supervision paid for 402 bail supervision cases, at a unit cost of £2,636 for the duration of the support provided.<sup>25</sup>

For women in contact with the criminal justice system in particular, their backgrounds tend to be even more complex. Features such as poverty, addiction, accommodation problems and poor family relationships, can make it difficult for women to adhere to traditional bail conditions.<sup>26</sup>

**Action:** Pilot a supported bail service for women, as committed to in the Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform (2022).<sup>27</sup> Outcomes and learnings should be formally documented with the intention of first expanding the scheme for women, and later adopting it for men.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate €300,000 to the Probation Service, to cover staffing and operational costs associated with the setting up of a supported bail service for women.<sup>28</sup>

### 3. Invest in alternatives – €270k

Evidence shows that community interventions are more effective than short-term prison sentences at addressing offending behaviour and breaking the cycle of reoffending. Prison can, by its very nature, disrupt factors that can help prevent offending, including family relationships, housing, employment and access to healthcare and support.

The 2020 Programme for Government made a commitment to “work with all criminal justice agencies to build capacity to deliver restorative justice, safely and effectively”.<sup>29</sup> This commitment was progressed through the publication of the Department of Justice Policy Paper on restorative justice in 2023, which identified that the preferred policy option for enhancing the delivery of restorative justice is “to strengthen existing capabilities within current structures”.<sup>30</sup> However, further resourcing is required.

The use of restorative justice in criminal contexts is supported by rigorous international evidence, indicating high levels of victim and offender satisfaction, positive results for supporting desistance from crime and victim recovery, high levels of compliance with agreed actions, and high participation rates among those offered restorative justice.<sup>31</sup> Restorative justice is legislated for, and used widely, in many countries around the world. In Europe, recent European frameworks support making restorative justice available for all offences, at all stages of the criminal justice process.<sup>32</sup> However, data analysis in 2023 and the preceding years indicates that the recorded restorative justice caseload within the formal criminal justice process in Ireland has decreased in recent years.<sup>33</sup>

The 2009 National Commission on Restorative Justice projected, if restorative justice were widely applied in Ireland, with some caveats, that between 290 and 579 persons due to be sanctioned before the courts could be diverted from a custodial sentence and that this could lead to a reduction of between 42 and 85 prison spaces per annum, leading to a cost saving of €4.1 to €8.3 million.<sup>34</sup> Although the figures and estimated costs may be outdated, the relationship between the rise in restorative justice cases and the reduction in prison populations and related expenses is evident. Reducing the number of prisoners per head of population over time would also free up funding for community-based sanctions and other preventative services.

**Action:** Increase the funding available to the Probation Service and its community-based organisations for the provision of restorative justice services by 20%. This should support the expansion of such services into all geographical areas of the State so that there are viable options available to the judiciary and to victims and people convicted of offences wherever appropriate.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate an additional €270,000 to enhance the availability of restorative justice.



#### 4. Enhance accountability – €450k

Ireland is now the last country in the European Union to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).<sup>35</sup> Among the most timely investments to strengthen accountability in prison would be to provide additional resources to enable preparation for the ratification of the OPCAT. Ratification represents an historic opportunity to strengthen the culture of human rights within Irish detention facilities and put in place safeguards to ensure that some of the most vulnerable individuals in our society are protected.

IPRT welcomed the pre-legislative scrutiny of the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill 2022, which is intended to ratify OPCAT, but we have concerns about the slow progress to enact the legislation.

The eventual ratification of OPCAT and putting in place the associated infrastructure, will require significant investment to enhance staffing and ensure financial independence. However, in the interim, it is vital that bodies that will be involved in Ireland's National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) are provided with the resources required to prepare for ratification. Given the 17-year delay with ratification, we must ensure that the bodies tasked with forming part of the NPM are prepared to carry out their functions from early on in this process. In particular, the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC), which has been named as the NPM coordinating body (designate), will require resourcing in order to allocate appropriate staffing levels and budget for this new function. This will also be particularly relevant for bodies who will be required to shift to a preventative approach in their work, and for bodies whose monitoring remit will be significantly expanded.<sup>36</sup>

**Action:** Allocate appropriate resources to IHREC, the Office of the Inspector of Prisons and other bodies that will form part of the NPM to allow for training, preparation and staffing to allow them to fulfil their eventual mandate. Further funding will be required in subsequent years following ratification for necessary infrastructure, to further enhance staffing, and for engagement as necessary.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate an additional €450,000 to ensure adequate preparation for the ratification of OPCAT.



### 5. Support children and families of people in prison – €1M

The recognition of children of prisoners in national policy as a cohort of children who may face additional challenges and discrimination is welcome.<sup>37</sup> Now, resourcing needs to be committed to ensure that this recognition results in better experiences and outcomes for these children.

The appointment by the IPS of a first-of-its-kind National Family Connections Officer is positive.<sup>38</sup> It is hoped that this will enhance IPS capacity to implement further reforms in this area but this is one role to coordinate right across the prison estate. A comprehensive programme of supports is required to better meet the needs of approximately 6,500 children who have a parent in prison in Ireland on any given day,<sup>39</sup> although recent updated statistics published in the UK suggest this could be a significant underestimate.<sup>40</sup> Supports for these children and their families should include the development and roll out of the Family Links Programme<sup>41</sup> across the prison estate, as agreed by the IPS during 2024<sup>42</sup> to assist families of people in prison to develop and/or maintain stable relationships.

Another area requiring targeted investment is capital projects to enhance contact between people in prison and their families, including through the development of child-friendly visiting spaces in every prison, the finalisation of the in-cell telephony project and the installation of video booths.

Additional funding should also be allocated towards progressing the actions outlined in Ireland's national policy framework for children and young people, including consultation with children and families on the development of visiting policies and the provision of training opportunities for all prison staff on child rights.<sup>43</sup>

Research in the UK found that the re-offending rate for prisoners who received visits from family was 39% lower than for those who did not.<sup>44</sup> Investment in building familial relationships can save money longer term through a subsequent reduction in offending in communities, reduction in costs to the State for repeat imprisonment, and better outcomes experienced by children with a parent in prison.

**Action:** Provide funding to the IPS to enable the implementation of a comprehensive Family Connections programme. This programme should include the roll out of Family Links, and capital projects to complete the full roll-out of in-cell telephony and the installation of video link booths across the prison estate, as well as funding to enhance visiting conditions.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate an additional €1 million to the IPS, ring-fenced for initiatives designed to support connections between people in prison and their families.

## 6. Prevent homelessness – €300k

Homelessness can be a cause of criminal activity and subsequent imprisonment, while in other cases people become homeless as a consequence of their contact with the criminal justice system. This can obstruct the path to desistance from offending. In 2022, approximately 9% of people declared that they had “no fixed abode” on committal to prison.<sup>45</sup> However, IPRT believes that the true figure is likely to be considerably higher. An Irish systemic review of studies estimating the prevalence of homelessness on committal found that 17.4%, or one in six people, were homeless on committal.<sup>46</sup> Again, this is an estimate.

While IPRT welcomes that the Department of Justice has recently commissioned research into the scale and impacts of homelessness in the criminal justice system, in line with a recommendation made by the HLTF,<sup>47</sup> the research should analyse the use of remand detention for people experiencing homelessness.

The Programme for Government committed to ensuring that aftercare and transition plans and protocols are developed for vulnerable homeless people or those at risk of homelessness leaving state settings, including prison.<sup>48</sup> However, there is no national strategy to cater to the housing needs of those who have experienced contact with the criminal justice system. At a minimum, all people leaving prison should be supported with pre-release planning, throughcare and accommodation on release.

A Criminal Justice Housing First pilot scheme operated in the Dublin region between October 2020 and May 2024. However, it appears this has since been streamlined into the mainstream Housing First.<sup>49</sup> While there is much to be done across various sectors to address homeless, enhancing the availability and suitability of Housing First will go some way towards meeting the needs of people with experience of the criminal justice system who, quite often, are experiencing multiple complex disadvantages.

Internationally, Housing First has been proven to be highly cost-effective and represents a more efficient allocation of resources than traditional services. For example, the Housing First model has been shown to save on the alternative costs of frequent use of other services such as homeless supports, medical, and psychiatric services as well as criminal justice services.<sup>50</sup>

**Action:** Enhance the availability of Housing First and ensure that the criteria and the types of wraparound social and health supports are updated to reflect learnings from any evaluation of the Criminal Justice Housing First pilot.

**Budget 2025:** Allocate an additional €300k to Housing First to support the targeted delivery of wraparound supports.

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- 2 Irish Prison Service, [Annual Report 2022](#) (IPS 2023), 46
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- 11 Houses of the Oireachtas, ‘[Prisoner Diversions](#)’ (17 December 2019)
- 12 Shauna Bowers, “[I tried to get help for my son after a manic episode. Instead he got a criminal record](#)” The Irish Times (2 September 2024)
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- 14 HSE and Department of Health, [Implementation Plan 2022–2024](#) (HSE 2022), 85
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- [16 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](#) (DoJ and DoH 2022), 181
- 17 This is comprised of staffing costs (0.5 WTE Consultant Psychiatrist, 1 WTE Psychiatrist, 1 WTE Forensic Mental Health Nurse, 1 WTE Advanced Nurse Practitioner and 1 WTE Housing Support Worker) and operational costs. For resources on costings, see: HSE, [HEALTH SECTOR CONSOLIDATED SALARY SCALES](#) (HSE 2024)
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- 40 Ministry of Justice, ['Estimates of children with a parent in prison'](#) (MoJ, 18 July 2024)
- 41 The Family Links programme was a multiagency collaboration aimed at developing prison support services for families during the period of imprisonment. While there was some implementation of this programme at in different prisons at various stages between 2014 and 2018, this work has since stopped. For more, see: Darragh Bradshaw and Orla Muldoon, ["Family Links" Evaluation Report](#) (CDI 2017); and Kieran O'Dwyer, Sharron Kelliher and James Bowes, [Prisoners Returning Home: Prisoners and Family Reintegration](#) (CDI 2019)
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