



Oifig An Chigire Príosún
Office of the Inspector of Prisons

Strategic Plan 2025–29

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Foreword by the Chief Inspector

This new Strategic Plan for the Inspectorate covers the four-year period, mid-2025 to mid-2029

All strategic plans look to the future, this one more than most, because new legislation will transform the role of the Inspectorate during the life of the Plan.

The Inspection of Places of Detention Act will grant the Inspectorate an enhanced mandate, extending beyond prisons to include monitoring detention by An Garda Síochána, in court holding cells and detainee/prisoner transport. The Inspectorate will be designated as a “National Preventive Mechanism” (NPM) under the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture (OPCAT).

Consequently, the horizons of this Plan are broad, capturing our current statutory role, envisaging our future functions, and mapping the actions required to manage this significant transition.

Our **vision** and **mission** are ambitious. Ireland’s criminal justice system should respect, protect and fulfil the human rights of people deprived of their liberty. The Inspectorate is working actively to ensure that their rights are upheld and to promote accountability across the criminal justice system.

Our work is, and will remain, **values-driven**: human rights-focussed; independent and impartial; transparent and collaborative; progressive and responsive.

Our high-level **strategic goals** are clear. The Inspectorate aspires to bring about measurable improvements in the lives of people deprived of their liberty, in line with national and international human rights standards, and best practice. We will create and implement a world class National Preventive Mechanism that independently monitors the treatment of people deprived of their liberty across the criminal justice system. As we build an Inspectorate fit for the future, our standards of corporate governance will remain high.

It would not have been possible to draw up this new Strategic Plan without the active participation of the Inspectorate’s dedicated staff team and the principled engagement of a wide variety of stakeholders. I am deeply grateful to everyone who has given time to contribute to our strategic planning process. One crystal-clear message shone through from our internal and external consultations: the independence of the Inspectorate is its most valuable asset; it must be protected at all costs, now and into the future.



Mark Kelly
Chief Inspector

Our Vision, Mission & Values



Our Vision

A criminal justice system that respects, protects and fulfils the human rights of people deprived of their liberty.



Our Mission

To ensure that the human rights of those deprived of their liberty are upheld and to promote accountability across the criminal justice system.

Our Values

01	We are Human Rights-Focussed , valuing diversity and respecting the dignity of all individuals. We act with kindness and strive to create an inclusive environment where everyone is treated with fairness and respect.
02	We are Independent & Impartial . Our work is guided by authoritative knowledge, rigorous standards, and a dedication to objectivity in all we do.
03	We are Transparent & Collaborative , working openly and inclusively to build trust. Through collaboration, influence, and expertise, we foster professionalism and accountability in all our engagements.
04	We are Progressive & Responsive , challenging conventional thinking and embracing innovation. We take initiative, remain adaptable, and respond proactively to the needs of those we serve.

Who We Are

Established under the Prisons Act 2007, the key functions of the Office of Inspector of Prisons include inspecting prisons, reporting on conditions, investigating serious incidents such as deaths in custody, ensuring compliance with legal and human rights standards, and advising on prison policy.

The Inspectorate has the authority to access records, interview prisoners, and recommend improvements to promote accountability and transparency in the prison system.

Our organisation is driven by a deep commitment to upholding human rights, an unwavering dedication to driving meaningful change, and independence in fulfilling our mission.

We conduct independent inspections and provide reports on prison conditions while assessing, reviewing and monitoring all aspects of prison operations and management.

We carry out evidence-based investigations into deaths in prison custody to provide clarity and prevent recurrence. Through our inspections, investigations, recommendations, and findings, we aim to drive systemic improvements in prison practices and policies.

By rigorously monitoring prison conditions, we seek to enhance the living conditions of prisoners and the working conditions of prison staff, aligning with national and international human rights standards. Our work safeguards the rights of imprisoned individuals, prevents mistreatment, and holds the state accountable for prison conditions.

Our primary task is to conduct independent inspections, investigations, and monitoring of all prisons in Ireland, guided by a human rights-based approach.

Our work benefits individuals detained in prisons and the families of those who pass away while in prison custody.

How We Built this Plan

After an open process, consultant Kathleen O'Meara was appointed to facilitate the development of this Strategic Plan. Kathleen used the Appreciative Inquiry methodology for this project.

This methodology is built on a strengths-based enquiry designed to allow the organisation to build a strong shared vision for the future as a foundation for the Strategic Plan, and the actions needed to realise it.

A review of the organisation's achievements was conducted, and three Appreciative Inquiry workshops were facilitated. Key external stakeholders were interviewed, a landscape analysis was conducted, and a document review was undertaken.

Key Issues Informing Our Work:

01

Prison Overcrowding:

Prison overcrowding has reached crisis levels, with deteriorating conditions being faced by prisoners and staff. As the remit of the OIP is focussed on the human rights of those deprived of their liberty and the staff who work with them, the extent and impact of overcrowding will be a priority issue for the OIP during the lifetime of this Strategic Plan.

02

Mental Health in Prisons:

Overcrowding is exacerbating the challenges faced by prisoners who are dealing with mental health issues. The OIP's Thematic Inspection Report published in 2024 refers to the “degrading” conditions found in more than one place of detention and the factors that are undermining the quality of treatment, safety and dignity of prisoner-patients. This issue will remain high on the agenda for the OIP.

03

Harm Reduction:

Suicide prevention, reducing self-harm and substance use are critical issues which are linked to both overcrowding and the deficit of mental health services being available to all who need them in prisons.

04

Health of Older Prisoners:

Older prisoners are the fastest growing group in prisons, leading to the need for comprehensive social care programmes¹. Poor physical and mental health is more common among the 10% or so of prisoners over the age of 50 in Irish prisons.

¹O'Hara et al. (2014) Undertaking action research in prison: Developing the Older prisoner Health and Social Care Assessment and Plan, Action Research vol. 12 no. 2 pp.136-150. doi:10.1177/ 1476750314524006

Context for this Strategic Plan

“The Programme for Government 2025, Securing Ireland’s Future”, includes a commitment to ratify and implement the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT).

The legislation required to give expression to this commitment is the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill. The General Scheme of the Bill was published in June 2022. Once enacted, it is anticipated that the Inspection of Places of Detention Act will:

- 01 Expand the Inspector of Prisons’ Role to oversee all criminal justice-sector detention facilities.
- 02 Designate National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) to inspect places of detention, with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) coordinating.

The passage of the legislation and the enactment of OPCAT will generate a considerable change in the operations of the Office of Inspector of Prisons. Preparing for and implementing this change is a significant part of the landscape impacting the OIP’s work for the duration of this Strategic Plan.

Our Strategic Goals

- 01 To bring about measurable improvements in the lives of people deprived of their liberty, in line with national and international human rights standards, and best practice.



- 02 To create and implement a world class National Preventive Mechanism, that independently monitors the treatment of people deprived of their liberty across the criminal justice system.



- 03 To continue to ensure high standards of corporate governance, and build an organisation fit for the future.



How We Will Implement this Strategic Plan

Cross cutting areas of action across all Strategic Goals.

01

Engage effectively with stakeholders, including people with experience of being deprived of their liberty.

02

Conduct expert policy and legislative reviews and implement innovative evidence-based approaches. Use research and data to influence public policy and legislation.

03

Continuously review and refine practices, learning from national and international partners. Facilitate knowledge transfer and information sharing with partner agencies.

Goal 01



To bring about measurable improvements in the lives of people deprived of their liberty, in line with national and international human rights standards and best practice

Objective 1.1

Develop and apply clear human rights-based frameworks for monitoring places of detention

Objective 1.2

Monitor conditions of detention

Objective 1.3

Promote harm reduction practices in prisons

Objective 1.4

Promote respect, dignity, and human rights standards in the criminal justice system

Areas of Action

- Produce and publish comprehensive monitoring frameworks tailored to specific detention settings
- Regularly review and continuously improve the monitoring frameworks in light of evolving standards and best practice

Areas of Action

- Build capacity for real-time monitoring, including remote access to relevant datasets
- Conduct a multi-annual inspection programme
- Produce authoritative, evidence-based inspection reports in a timely manner
- Follow up with key stakeholders on implementation of recommendations

Areas of Action

- Conduct death in custody investigations and produce reports in a timely fashion
- Promote harm reduction strategies in line with best practice
- Develop measures and indicators for inspections

Areas of Action

- Monitor recommendations and implementation of action plans
- Contribute to the creation of an effective prisoner complaints system
- Organise consultations and collaborations with stakeholders
- Organise engagement with organisations representing vulnerable groups
- Engage effectively with stakeholders including people with experience of being deprived of their liberty
- Publish and share data collected on conditions in prisons

Goal 02



To create and implement a world-class National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) that independently monitors the treatment of people deprived of their liberty across the criminal justice system

Objective 2.1

Engage in Stakeholder Collaboration

Objective 2.2

Enable the office to carry out its NPM remit through sufficient staff, knowledge, and skills

Objective 2.3

Develop a framework for monitoring police detention

Objective 2.4

Raise awareness amongst stakeholders

Areas of Action

- Clarify the remits and responsibilities of the NPM
- Motivate stakeholders and grow leadership

Areas of Action

- Ensure adequate staffing and expertise
- Provide ongoing training and development

Areas of Action

- Establish transparent benchmarks to assess human rights compliance
- Liaise effectively with other national police accountability mechanisms

Areas of Action

- Ensure all stakeholders are aware of the NPM's role and their rights and responsibilities
- Conduct research into applicable national and international standards
- Engage in awareness-raising activities with law enforcement, civil society, legal professionals, and detainees
- Continuously review and refine practices, learning from national and international partners

Goal 03



To maintain high standards of corporate governance and continue to build an influential organisation fit for the future

Objective 3.1

Ensure Transparency

Objective 3.2

Build capacity across the organisation

Objective 3.3

Develop more robust governance structures

Objective 3.4

Design a communications and strategic engagement strategy

Areas of Action

- Promote the Inspectorate as a voice for reform of the prison system
- Amplify the Inspectorate's voice through building stronger relationships with media, civil society and government

Areas of Action

- Conduct an organisational redesign incorporating the NPM
- Identify necessary resources, structures and relationships
- Strengthen back-office capacity to support core functions

Areas of Action

- Enhance existing governance arrangements to better protect functional independence
- Hold the organisation accountable for the effective performance of its statutory functions

Areas of Action

- Develop and roll out a media and public affairs plan
- Map and engage key stakeholders

Climate Action

The Office of the Inspector of Prisons, as a Public Sector Body, has a responsibility to play its part in a whole of Government approach to combating the threats posed by climate change. Collective commitment and concrete action are required to combat and mitigate against the very real challenges that we face.

The actions set out within our Roadmap, will be actively led and supported by the Senior Leadership Team and we will invest the necessary time and resources to ensure that the commitments set out within this document can be successfully actioned and implemented.

**Senior Leadership Team,
Office of the Inspector of Prisons**

The OIP's Climate Action Roadmap is drafted in line with the Public Sector Climate Action Plan 2025 (CAP25) published in April 2025. The Roadmap provides the Inspectorate with a strategic vision, coordination, organisation and mobilisation regarding its public sector climate obligations. The Inspectorate has nominated a Climate and Sustainability Champion at senior management level and established a Green Team with representatives from across the organisation. The OIP links with the SEAI and reports into its Public Sector Monitoring and Reporting platform.

Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

The Office of the Inspector of Prisons is committed to fulfilling its obligations under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, 2014

The Office recognises its responsibility to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity, and protect the human rights of public sector staff and service users.

The OIP's Public Sector Duty working group coordinates the Office's Public Sector Duty activities and oversees the OIP's Public Sector Duty action plan. The composition of the working group is intended to broadly represent the functions of the Office, and includes representation from senior management.

The Inspectorate has developed a Public Sector Duty Action Plan. The Plan sets out a number of actions under the guidance of the working group.



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