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## A large, dark olive-green circle is centered on the page. It has a thick white border. Inside the circle, the words 'Justice' and 'report' are written in a white, sans-serif font, stacked vertically. The background of the entire page is a light blue and white gradient with abstract, flowing, wavy lines in shades of blue and green.

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# Strengthening Ireland's industrial security

justice report



A key priority for the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration is to strengthen national security. This objective was highlighted in the Programme for Government and includes a range of objectives the Government are committed to achieving, writes EY's Gary Comiskey.

In addition, the National Risk Assessment, published in late 2024, identifies an "increase in global insecurity and division" as a key risk facing Ireland.

It is very clear that the risk to national security extends beyond traditional threats such as breaches of state borders or attacks on state assets. The National Risk Assessment notes that "an increasingly divided world can also be seen in the growth of trade tensions between the large international trading blocks, including in relation to

technology and critical materials, developments which impact on our current economic model".

## Reconsidering industrial policy

In response to shifting global dynamics, Ireland is now reassessing long-held views on sovereign industrial policy. There is growing consensus that strategic intervention is vital for safeguarding industrial security, enhancing economic competitiveness,

protecting national interests, and addressing challenges such as climate change and technological disruption.

A recent EY report explores how governments can revitalise sovereign industrial policy in light of these trends. The report highlights how China's rapid emergence in the automotive sector has challenged Germany's longstanding leadership, demonstrating the speed at which circumstances can change and the complexity of industrial policy decisions. It also reflects on vulnerabilities exposed in global supply chains during the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing geopolitical tensions, particularly between the United States and China, which have underscored the risks of economic interdependence.

While some caution against potential government overreach and market distortion, others argue that well-structured industrial policies are necessary to address market failures and seize strategic opportunities. The

Advertorial

challenge lies in striking a balance between increased state involvement and market-driven growth, while avoiding protectionist actions that could fragment the global economy.

## Risks and opportunities for Ireland

As a small, open economy, Ireland faces the unique challenge of balancing economic security with its global trading position. Security policies should be guided by three main objectives: reducing dependence on geopolitical competitors, promoting competitiveness within domestic industries, and supporting social and political stability at home.

Ireland's robust multinational manufacturing sector contributes approximately €50 billion to GDP annually, accounting for around 30 per cent of the national total. Given its significance, it is essential for Ireland to identify key products within strategic industries. Targeted government and industry investment can then be directed to ensure resilience of supply and competitiveness in these areas. Since it is not feasible to support every product, efforts must concentrate on those goods vital for maintaining national economic security and competitiveness.

In addition to strengthening domestic industrial security, Ireland must remain cognisant of its role in the global economy and the potential risks posed by other countries seeking to bolster their own industrial security. The EY Geostrategic Outlook report found that governments worldwide are increasingly implementing regulatory measures, such as foreign direct investment restrictions and subsidies in strategic sectors, to protect national interests and promote domestic manufacturing. Such actions could have significant implications for Ireland's manufacturing base.

## Government and industry partnership: A path forward

Addressing industrial risk effectively requires a strong partnership between government and industry. While it is

*“Establishing clear regulatory frameworks will attract sustained corporate investment, while ongoing incentives will encourage companies to invest in strategic sectors.”*

neither possible nor desirable to apply sovereignty measures to all products and components, ensuring the security of industrial production is becoming a top priority for business leaders. Many are prepared to make significant compromises to reduce risks in their supply chains and production capabilities.

Clear objectives and effective prioritisation are essential, focusing efforts on supporting domestic manufacturing and safeguarding the supply of critical goods through collaboration between government and the private sector. According to the *EY CEO Outlook Pulse survey (April 2024)*, 82 per cent of CEOs globally are willing to engage in initiatives to enhance national resilience and autonomy, with 56 per cent open to accepting reduced profit margins for domestically produced goods aimed at the local market.

Ireland can harness this corporate willingness by enacting targeted policy measures. Establishing clear regulatory frameworks will attract sustained corporate investment, while ongoing incentives will encourage companies to invest in strategic sectors. Increased government funding should also be allocated to support crucial research and development initiatives.

Continued focus on industrial policy and investment is necessary to foster innovation and strategic production. A robust regulatory, social, scientific, and financial ecosystem will drive both incremental and transformative innovation, thereby strengthening Ireland's industrial sovereignty. Ongoing efforts by agencies such as IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland, and Research Ireland to invest in workforce development and

research are fundamental to achieving these objectives.

Ireland should also maintain robust public-private dialogue to define a clear vision of national strategic concepts, goals and challenges. This collaboration will engage public decision-makers and CEOs in making long-term investments, ensuring alignment on priorities and fostering sustainable economic growth. This dialogue will inform key development such as the proposed pharmaceutical strategy for Ireland and other similar strategies.

Public investment may also be required to bridge the gap in production costs between the Ireland and elsewhere. Clearly any investment or subsidy will need to consider State Aid rules but can be used to foster the inception of new industries, and sharing risks associated with breakthrough innovations. Although CEOs have indicated they are willing to reduce their profit margin to manufacture products domestically, public investment is still likely to be required to attract new business and continued multinational investment.

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## Government commitments on justice

As the State grapples with an understaffed Garda, an overloaded judiciary, and an epidemic of gender-based violence, *eolas Magazine* outlines the Government's key priorities as laid out in the 2025 Programme for Government.

Published in January 2025, the Programme for Government contains 119 commitments on justice. Priorities include increased resourcing for An Garda Síochána, modernising the courts and legal system, and tackling violence against women and girls.

Under the banner of “safe and secure commitments”, the framework says the Government is “committed to building stronger, safer communities”.

### Garda recruitment

To address a shortage of officers, the PfG commits the Government to provide funding for 5,000 new garda recruits by 2030.

As of August 2025, there are 14,369 active gardaí across the State, alongside 3,494 civilian staff and 296 reservists. The figure of 14,369 is a decrease of 188 from the 2009 figure of

14,547. If garda recruitment had held pace with population growth, there would have been 17,623 gardaí.

To improve the attractiveness of a garda career, the PfG says the Government will “consider allowing garda trainees to undergo part of their training in... universities or technological universities” while also increasing the trainee allowance, while also “examining the introduction of an accelerated graduate entry programme”.

To facilitate the anticipated rapid rise in recruitment, the PfG reiterates support for the expansion of Templemore Garda Training College in County Tipperary, alongside a pledge to “consider” the establishment of a second training college.

In August 2025, *The Irish Times* reported that Minister for Justice, Home

Affairs and Migration Jim O’Callaghan TD was warned by the Policing Authority that “in the absence of radical and meaningful reform... it is highly unlikely the target of at least 5,000 gardaí... will be met”.

### Enforcement

The number of automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) cameras is set to increase and, partially in response to the 2023 Dublin riots, facial recognition cameras (FRT) will be legislated for. The Irish Council for Civil Liberties have branded FRT “highly intrusive and invasive technology that is faulty, unreliable and discriminatory”.

To protect gardaí, there will be investment in extra equipment and technology, including body armour, additional vehicles, and water cannons.

Alongside this, all gardaí will be equipped with body-worn cameras. Gardaí will also receive guidance on the use of artificial intelligence in criminal investigations.

As crime continues to proliferate online, gardaí will be given the authority to “request” passwords for electronic devices when executing a search warrant, and the National Cyber Crime Bureau will receive an increase in funding.

## Modernising courts legal systems

To address understaffing, the PfG commits the Government to appointing 20 additional judges within 12 months, alongside establishing a judicial training institute to “support ongoing training and continuous professional development for judges”. They are expected to be appointed in 2026.

The Government is also committed to a review of the criminal justice system within 12 months, with publication expected in Q1 2026.

Currently, sentencing guidelines are standardised across the State, the PfG contains a commitment to “draw up sentencing guidelines for a particular crime area”. The Government also commits to “[developing] new guidelines to set clear rates of scales of fees for all forms of civil litigation”.

In 2023, the European Commission introduced an “e-evidence package”, simplifying the process of police and judicial authorities obtaining electronic evidence in criminal investigations. The PfG commits the Government to “prioritising implementation of the e-evidence package”, including the creation of a new standalone agency.

To improve the efficiency of the administration of justice, the framework commits the Government to “designing and implementing a modern courts infrastructure”.

## Tackling crime

The PfG contains a commitment to the publication of a Rural Safety Strategy, published in September 2025, and an action plan to tackle corruption and economic crime.

In recent years, a spate of protests outside the homes of TDs and councillors, most notably that of then-Taoiseach Simon Harris TD have occurred. In response to this, the Government

have committed to “asking the Joint Oireachtas [on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration] to consider a ban on protests outside private homes”.

A commitment to banning the wearing of face coverings at protests was watered down in May 2025, as the Criminal Law and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025 stopped short of an outright ban on the wearing of face coverings at protests. Instead, gardaí will have the power to require an individual to remove a face covering, subject to criteria.

While stopping short of outright decriminalisation, the Government have also reiterated its commitment to pursuing a “health-led” approach to drug addiction, diverting those found in possession of drugs for personal use to health services. Simultaneously, sentences for those involved in the supply of narcotics will be reviewed to “ensure the punishment... reflects the destruction and devastation those drugs impose on our communities”.

## Gender-based violence

Since 1996, 275 women have been murdered across the State, 63 per cent in their own homes. According to the 2024 *EU gender-based violence survey*, 35 per cent of Irish women have experienced psychological, physical and/or sexual abuse from an intimate partner, with 25 per cent of women experiencing sexual violence as an adult with a partner; a staggering estimate of over 660,000 people.

To fight this epidemic, the PfG commits the Government to introducing a Zero Tolerance Plan [on gender-based violence] for 2026-2030 alongside delivering 280 refuge spaces by 2026.

Stronger laws against ‘spiking’ were introduced to the Dáil in May 2025, alongside the criminalisation of ‘sex for rent’, as promised in the PfG.

The framework also commits the Government to reviewing maximum sentences to those convicted of child sexual abuse, and examining proposals to remove guardianship rights from those convicted of killing their partners.

# Operation Táirge



Gardaí attached to Pearse Street Garda Station pictured on patrol in Dublin City Centre as part of Operation Táirge.

In December 2023, An Garda Síochána launched Operation Táirge, supporting operational activity aimed at detecting and preventing organised retail crime.

The purpose and objectives of the Operation were aimed at addressing an international trend observed following the pandemic which saw the level of retail crime, but also aggravated retail crime rise.

Operation Táirge has served to disrupt such organised retail crime, and has led to a significant number of arrests and charges in its first year.

This included the arrest of 8,460 people and the issuance of 20,052 charges or summons between December 2023 and November 2024.

Significant arrests were made in June of this year further supporting the success of the Operation, with 47 individuals arrested and charged in connection with ongoing investigations under Operation Táirge on 18 June in the DMR North Division.

These included offences relating to incidents of robbery, burglary and theft in across the North Dublin area. A total of 76 charges were brought against those arrested in this phase of the investigation.

The initiative supports retailers, creates avenues for greater engagement between this sector and An Garda Síochána, and serves to identify and prosecute those involved in organised retail crime as well as recidivist offenders.

Operation Táirge has seen An Garda Síochána working with high risk retailers to enhance prevention, investigation and prosecution, and key to this is encouraging those affected to report such thefts and incidents.

An Garda Síochána is particularly conscious that retail crime has a significant impact on individuals, on the retailer, and on the wider community and we are here to support those affected.

Inspector Damien Boland of the Garda National Community Engagement Bureau acknowledges that a success of the operation has been the positive engagements forged from its roll-out.

“Retail Crime is not a victimless crime. This can clearly be seen from the reports of assaults and verbal abuse on retail staff. It effects staff safety, staff retention and staff recruitment. It is imperative that this crime is not tolerated in society and that perpetrators are reported and held accountable for their actions”.

He adds that “the engagement between An Garda Síochána and retailers has been greatly enhanced, resulting in improved intelligence and greater collaboration”.

There are a number of strands to how Operation Táirge is utilised to combat this type of crime, and there are specific areas of focus.

For instance, An Garda Síochána may use an intelligence-led approach to identify criminals engaging in retail crime. Gardaí also work with retailers to strengthen their security and other measures to help prevent them becoming victims of this criminality. An Garda Síochána also aims to identify and target the areas where organised retail crime black markets operate, and their leadership.

Primarily there is a focus on disrupting the most prolific groups in operation through the use of organised crime legislation and proceeds of crime legislation.

While awareness raising of the consequences of committing such offences also has an important role in deterring people from becoming involved in this crime.

Operation Táirge forms an integral part of An Garda Síochána’s *Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy* supporting operational activity aimed at detecting and preventing Organised Retail Crime.



Gardaí attached to Pearse Street Garda Station pictured on patrol in Dublin City Centre as part of Operation Táirge.

Organised retail crime is usually co-ordinated and well-organised by people who recruit others to commit theft from retailers.

It is a term used to describe situations where a number of individuals are acting together, targeting retailer outlets to steal significant quantities of goods. This generally results in the reselling of these goods on the black market.

It also encompasses refund fraud, which sees an offender attempting to benefit financially or materially from the theft by seeking a refund or exchange for the stolen goods.

The organised nature of this activity may not be immediately obvious. An Garda Síochána do rely on retailers to engage with them. It could be that an attempt to steal was prevented but information about that incident may link to other crime in the locality.

There are a number of other avenues being explored to develop upon the success of the Operation, according to Inspector Boland.

“While recent figures indicate the positive impact Operation Táirge has had since its introduction, there is now an opportunity to build on those positives and further enhance the collaboration between An Garda Síochána and the retail sector.

“For instance, the Garda National Crime Prevention Unit continue to lead out on the delivery of Operation Táirge. This includes holding biannual National Days

of Action to ensure the operational objectives are met. This is in addition to local days of action which have already been planned to counter retail crime trends,” Inspector Boland said.

He added that An Garda Síochána remains dedicated to ensuring the safety of all communities countrywide and works very closely with community leaders and stakeholders, to address local issues.

Operation Táirge is led by the Organised Retail Crime Tasking and Co-ordination Group within An Garda Síochána and supports each Garda region to monitor and respond to emerging trends in their area.

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W: [www.garda.ie](http://www.garda.ie)

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# Improving rural safety



The *Rural Safety Plan 2025-2027*, published in September 2025, contains 18 actions and 53-sub actions aimed at improving four key areas: community safety and engagement; property crime; roads policing; and animal wildlife and crime.

The establishment of local community safety partnerships (LCSPs) is identified as central to delivering on the plan's actions. It asserts that each LCSP is required to develop a tailored community safety plan.

## Community safety and engagement

Action one is to support a collaborative approach to rural safety. In line with this, the National Office for Community Safety is responsible for the establishment of 36 LCSPs by Q4 2025 and delivery of a strategy for improving community safety by Q2 2026.

Action two is to support crime detection and prevention in rural communities. Under this, the Garda must develop its Crime Prevention and Reduction Strategy 2026-2029 by Q4 2025. The plan also states that the Garda and Muintir na Tíre must support and encourage participation in community alert programmes but does not set targets for this sub-action.

Action three is to ensure nationwide accessibility to youth justice services through ongoing investment in youth diversion and youth justice initiatives. Action four is to promote youth engagement in rural communities through Foróige, farm safety events, and the Divisional Garda Youth Awards.

Action five is to promote senior engagement and safety in rural communities underpinned by continued implementation of the Garda Síochána Older People Plan and Property Marking Ireland's Senior Alert Scheme.

Action six is to improve drug harm reduction in rural communities. This is underpinned by PsyCare expanding the Nightlife Intervention and Training for Empowerment into rural communities by Q1 2027. PsyCare must also partner with LCSPs, youth services, and local gardaí to improve drug harm reduction literacy by Q1 2027.



## Property crime

Action seven is to prevent and deter the theft of farm and forestry machinery, and agricultural vehicles. To achieve this, the use of crime prevention products, technologies, and programmes must be encouraged. No targets are set for this sub-action.

Additionally, Property Marking Ireland is responsible for establishing and developing a property marking service for larger organisations by Q4 2027.

Action eight is to tackle home burglaries and trespassing on private property. To achieve this, the Irish Farmers' Association (IFA) and the National Rural Safety Forum must inform the public of trespassing laws. No targets are set for this sub-action.

Action nine is to prevent fraud and cyber-crime targeting rural communities. In line with this, an aim is set for Muintir na Tíre's community safety app CAIRDE to be launched in Q4 2025.

Action 10 is to reduce crime against rural businesses. In line with this, engagement with Garda community crime prevention programmes such as Business Watch must be encouraged but no targets are set to measure this.

## Road safety

Action 11 is to enforce road traffic legislation to improve safety on rural roads. In line with this speed enforcement zones must be reviewed. Action 12 is to raise awareness of safe and responsible road use. To achieve this, the RSA is tasked with implementing educational measures aimed at protecting vulnerable road users.

Action 13 is to increase the availability of safe options for rural communities. Under this, the NTA must implement 52 Connecting Ireland routes across rural Ireland by Q4 2026. The plan also sets an aim for the NTA to "continuously review routes to identify areas of social exclusion". Despite indicating that reviews must be continuous, the plan sets a delivery deadline of Q4 2024.

## Animal and wildlife crime

Action 14 sets an aim to develop strategies to combat wildlife crime including illegal hunting, trespassing, and intimidation. In line with this, gardaí and the NPWS must liaise with local communities, stakeholders, community alert groups, and the IFA in "identified problem areas". It does not indicate what the aim of this liaison is.

Action 15 is to maintain oversight of animal welfare and dog control policies. In line with this, the Department of Agriculture must engage with local authorities and "disburse relevant allocations to local authorities" to implement and enforce legislation.

Action 16 is to "foster collaboration among agricultural representative groups to address animal safety issues". In line with this, the plan asserts that the IFA and National Rural Safety Forum must "strengthen engagement" with the Farmers and Animal Welfare Network by Q1 2026. It does not state how delivery of this sub-action will be measured.

Action 17 is to promote education and awareness campaigns on the dangers posed by uncontrolled dogs. The NPWS must produce awareness leaflets and structured media campaigns by Q3 2026.

Action 18 is to encourage livestock keepers to report stolen livestock to gardaí and their regional veterinary office as well as log updates on the AIM system. In line with this, relevant information for reporting must be included in the IFA's newsletters and brochures.

While the plan is clear on targets for some sub actions it lacks detail on numerous others. For example, the plan states that uptake of crime prevention tools should be encouraged but does not outline how this should be measured.

However, it does provide comprehensive detail on the implementation of LCSPs which are identified as the most important component in delivering on the strategy's goal of making rural communities safer.



# Courts Service's next phase of modernisation

*eolas Magazine* talks to Owen Harrison, Chief Information Officer (CIO) at the Courts Service, about his digital transformation plans for this next phase and how they will benefit the justice sector and end-users.

The previous ICT strategy 2021-2024 and the initial years of the Courts Service Modernisation Programme were about laying the foundations to realise the long-term vision for an organisation that supports access to justice in a modern, digital Ireland. The transition from the first strategy to this second ICT, Digital and Data strategy demonstrates a strong alignment with the *Connecting Government 2030: A Digital and ICT Strategy for Ireland's Public Service* and its goal of "providing better access to trusted, high quality digital government services; services that are delivered in an equitable, inclusive and, sustainable manner with better service".

From a digital perspective the strategy centres around a Unified Case Management System (UCMS), which aims to provide a single, modern platform through which users can manage and engage with cases. This will replace 150 internal legacy systems for Courts Service staff, provide a portal for external court users and a judicial view of the system for the judiciary to manage their cases, access and annotate documents and track upcoming court dates.

Harrison has introduced the UCMS for the Courts Service staff which interacts with the Judicial UCMS and the external facing portal to provide a single modern platform that allows users to manage cases online.

The CIO is taking a user-centred and incremental approach to the rollout. The digital team works closely with users one system at a time, adapting and ideating based on user feedback and constantly updating before progressing further.

"We have reached the point where digital divorce proceedings have been dealt with before the Court. In the coming months, once we are satisfied with the pilot experience, we will roll-out the Portal and judicial UCMS nationwide for Circuit Court Family Law."

## The path forward

"A key priority is to introduce the Courts Portal for probate. We have already introduced UCMS internally to the probate offices and are looking forward to introducing the ability to apply for probate online. In the next few years across Civil and Family Law, the Portal

will allow for e-filing, e-serving, making e-payments, and the collection of digital orders. We intend to expand to e-bundles, online handling of books of pleadings, which contain the relevant documents and evidence for a hearing. All of this will help to open up interaction with the courts system at a time that suits court users."

Harrison, who is motivated by improvement right across the justice sector as a result of the work of the Courts Service, is excited for the next stage.

"Further benefits for the justice sector will be realised when we can maximise UCMS to integrate with other systems. For example, integrating with finance systems to streamline online payments, receipting, reconciliation, data management, and reporting. Another example, a data exchange with Revenue will support probate applicants being able to use the same information that they have provided to the Revenue system. This should reduce data entry and errors, modernise the Probate application process, and streamline case management and resolutions.



Harrison is particularly interested in the benefits which will enable Ireland to meet EU regulations.

“Our improved ICT capability within the organisation will allow us to support the implementation of e-CODEX, Service of Documents, Taking of Evidence, and other EU digital systems. Enhancing collaboration between Ireland and other EU member states to improve access to justice and judicial cooperation across Europe.”

Harrison also envisages benefits from the integration of UCMS with the digital audio recording (DAR) in courtrooms.

“Centralised management of courtroom sound systems to a single point of support for all courtroom technology will enable us to move away from the current fragmented arrangements which occupy too much space in the courtroom. Ultimately, we will pair these improvements with a gradual equipment upgrade to modernise the audio experience for courtroom users.”

External consultation with users prior to the development of this ICT, Digital and Data strategy, emphasised the critical importance of the capability and option to attend hearings remotely. Particularly, for example, in cases with vulnerable witnesses, to help those involved feel safer and more secure. Coupled with the DAR improvements and integration

with the UCMS, enhancing the remote court platform will

continue. Continued collaboration is also envisaged with An Garda Síochána and the Irish Prison Service which are already reaping the benefits of video technology enabled courtrooms.

Improvements in data maturity assessments (DMA) held since the start of the Modernisation Programme illustrate the achievements made to enhance the collation, quality, management and measurement of data in the initial years. Harrison describes the implementation of the Courts Service Data Architecture, Unified Data Model and Data Lake under 2021 Data Strategy as a game changer.

“Having a ‘single source of truth’ in place provides users access to up-to-date, consistent, and accurate information, essential for informed decision-making.”

This will lead to Harrison’s ambition of transforming the Courts Service into a data-driven organisation.

“All areas across data need continued improvement from data management, governance and retention to data quality and sharing to an improved understanding of the power of data across our staff and the judiciary. Ultimately the goal is to increase the datasets shared on our Open Data Portal, which provides a vital

mechanism to grow public trust through openness and transparency.”

Building trust with the user for Harrison is about all users, he explains: “It is essential that all individuals who engage with the Irish legal system can understand and navigate content, systems, data, and processes. To that end, our services must be delivered in an equitable and inclusive manner, providing better service to those who need assistance, in alignment with the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty.”

This focus on accessibility has led to a recent major upgrade of courts.ie. The ambition for the website upgrade, using a plain language approach, is to significantly lower the reading age, reach over 90 per cent in the National Disability Authority Accessibility Score (top 10 per cent of public body websites) and achieve a Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 level of ‘AA’.

W: [www.courts.ie](http://www.courts.ie)



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Courts Service**



# New legislation required to reform ‘in camera’ family law proceedings

Describing the current operation of the in camera rule in family court proceedings as “failing to ensure absolute protection for children and families”, a comprehensive report has recommended an overhaul of the rule to enhance transparency in the administration of family justice.

Labelling the current operation of the rule “confusing”, the principal recommendation of the report, titled *The Operation of the In Camera Rule in Family Law Proceedings* and published in May 2025, is that “the most comprehensive way of addressing many of the existing shortcomings surrounding the operation of the [in camera] rule... is the creation of primary legislation that would apply across all relevant proceedings”.

Published by the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, the report describes the current operation of the rule as “an impingement on young people’s lives”. The 253-page report contains 21 recommendations regarding in-camera family court proceedings.

## Name and parameters of the in camera rule

Article 34.1 of Bunreacht na hÉireann defines in-camera proceedings as those “otherwise than in public”. The report says this term “does not provide sufficient clarity” on the parameters on the rule and recommends a “new title be

given to this rule... [providing] a clear, concise explanation which is reflective of the actual naming of the rule”, namely court proceedings that are held in private and with reporting restrictions in place.

To provide clarity, the report recommends that the “transparency and privacy rule is clearly and consistently defined in law, policy, and practice”.

In keeping with the principle of open justice, the report recommends that any definition of the in camera rule “does not extend further than is necessary to the extent that its operation impacts constitutional or legal rights”.

The study considered international equivalents of the in-camera rule, recommending that “certain [eligible] individuals, professions, and services [such as foster parents, schools, etc] should have automatic access to redacted versions of the court order akin to the approach of Australia”, providing the material is not published.

Based on the position taken in England and Wales, and Australia, the report says parties to the proceedings are

“permitted to request a copy of the transcript of the digital audio recording pertaining to their family law proceedings”, subject to strict privacy rules to avoid publication.

To improve transparency and fairness regarding proceedings, the report recommends the introduction of “an efficient mechanism” to ensure all cases connected to the parties “can be systematically tracked between courts and judges”.

## A ‘gagging order’

As part of the research, 13 judges were interviewed, 317 members of the public completed an online survey, and 18 focus groups comprising professionals such as lawyers and social workers, court service staff, academics, and journalists were conducted.

Some participants argued that the in camera rule acts as a ‘gagging order’, significantly impairing the ability to access support services. The report describes the rule as “rendering the true implementation of [a child’s] right to be heard unworkable”.

To counter these concerns, the report recommends “a pragmatic approach be adopted... allowing private communication between parties to... family law proceedings and their family members and friends as to what is happening in court to seek support and/or access to services”.

The report recommends granting victims of domestic abuse or coercive control the right to seek the permission of the court to waive their right of anonymity, similarly to victims of sexual crimes.

## Balancing privacy and transparency

The overriding purpose of the in camera rule, namely that “the privacy rights of children and parties... be maintained” in family court proceedings is reaffirmed in the report.

To improve transparency, the report recommends the establishment of a “system of reporting of anonymised family law judgments” with a recommended minimum percentage of between 10 per cent and 15 per cent of judgments published from all court levels.

The report further recommends removing the current requirement for academics to seek ministerial permission for “bona fide academic researchers” before accessing family court proceedings, alongside introducing a “presumptive right” for eligible journalists to access proceedings and speak to parties involved, though judges retain discretion to refuse access in limited circumstances.

## Breaches of the in camera rule

Describing judges’ enforcement of rule breaches as “light touch”, the report recommends ensuring that “clear provisions as to what constitutes a breach [are] set down in legislation”. A distinction is drawn between “inadvertent breaches and those of a more deliberate or malicious nature”. It adds that appropriate sanctions for a breach should be clearly outlined in legislation.

Although initially envisaged as a temporary measure during the Covid-19 pandemic, the report recommends that “a remote hearing option... where all the standard court rules and etiquette would apply... should be available to facilitate access to justice for certain categories of individuals such as persons with disability, full-time carers, and domestic abuse victims”.

Furthermore, the report says: “The new guidance should address how the in camera rule would operate within remote hearings.”

The report finds that in most instances, “a very narrow interpretation of the in-camera rule is being applied” to those granted access to reports of in camera proceedings due to concerns that providing copies to these parties risks a breach of the rule. Countering this, the report recommends that “parties should be permitted to retain a copy of any court ordered report... that contains information relating to them”.

## Justice ‘must be seen to be done’

In its introduction, the report quotes former Chief Justice Liam Hamilton as saying: “In a democratic society, justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done.”

The in camera rule conflicts with this principle by excluding members of the public from accessing proceedings and imposing reporting restrictions. As the report says, these impositions are necessary to “protect the right to privacy of the parties and any children to whom these proceedings relate”.

At present, the rule is used to protect the identity of parties and children related to the proceedings, but the operation of the rule has been criticised for limiting transparency and undermining the principle of open justice.

The operation of the rule has been likened to a ‘gagging order’, hampering the ability of victims to seek support. In December 2021, Mary-Louise Lynch of Survivors Informing Services and Institutions (Sisi) said the rule created a “paradise for abusers” in family courts, claiming that abusers are being given access to children following in camera proceedings.

Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration Jim O’Callaghan TD says: “I have asked my officials to now consider this report and revert by the end of this year with policy proposals for my consideration that will reform the in camera rule.”



Derval McDonagh, Chairperson of IPRT and Saoirse Brady, Executive Director with Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration Jim O'Callaghan TD in April 2025.

# Delivering the Government's justice priorities

Earlier this year, the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) set out its priorities for the newly-formed government to improve and enhance our criminal justice system and the specific steps it should take to deliver on its Programme for Government commitments.

In particular, the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) highlighted the urgent and pressing need to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention Against Torture (OPCAT) as well as progress key legislation to support greater use of community-based sanctions.

While we have seen some green shoots of progress, these have been somewhat overshadowed by the Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT)'s report, published in July 2025 following its eighth official visit to Ireland in May 2024.

The Committee raised serious concerns around potential inhuman and degrading conditions, observing that “three or four prisoners were held in cramped, squalid spaces with insufficient ventilation”.

As well as noting the increase in inter-prisoner violence, the CPT expressed its “deep concern” about “the deterioration of physical safety” particularly noting an increase in allegations of deliberate ill-treatment by prison staff since 2019 and excessive use of force by staff, singling out Cloverhill and Limerick prisons and outlining incidents of serious concern.

It also raised the alarm around “a deeply troubling pattern of deaths in custody” including preventable deaths and the failure on the part of the Irish Prison Service (IPS) to complete adequate reviews and implement systemic learning.

The Committee particularly highlighted the situation of people with mental health issues in prison without access to adequate healthcare, women in prison, mothers and babies in prison and the treatment of people held on restrictive regimes for both security and protection, including the treatment of a transgender woman.

It also noted the problematic use of closed supervision cells (CSCs), including the routine practice of stripping prisoners naked and placing them in thin, rip-proof ponchos, which appeared to be a punitive measure.

The Committee also emphasised the impact of staff shortages on mental health and addiction teams when the prisons are already overstretched and cannot meet demand. At a recent IPRT

event, the Chief Inspector of Prisons, Mark Kelly noted that during general inspections since, some of the same serious issues persisted despite being earmarked by the CPT for immediate action.

Notably, the Committee visited Ireland before we crossed the threshold of 5,000 people in prison in July 2024. Since then, the prison population has continued to grow with records being broken almost weekly. At the end of September 2025, there were 5,490 people in prison with 454 sleeping on a mattress on the floor while a further 516 were on temporary release. This situation is clearly untenable and makes it almost impossible for the IPS to comply with basic human rights standards.

However, responsibility for this crisis does not only lie at the door of the prison authorities. It must be tackled at the highest levels of government. The CPT recommended that when a prison has reached capacity, no one else should be admitted. This echoes a recommendation made by the Strategic Review Group on Penal Reform back in 2014 and while it might seem extreme to some, our prisons cannot cope with demand. Investment in alternatives to detention is the most effective way to divert people from the criminal justice system. Research and international experience show we cannot build our way out of the prison overcrowding crisis and more immediate and humane solutions are necessary.

The CPT repeated its call for the State to ratify OPCAT, an international human rights treaty that Ireland first signed in October 2007. We are now the only EU member state that has not ratified this treaty. As the State prepares to take on the EU Presidency in July 2026, we will see a flurry of legislation to ensure we are compliant with our international legal obligations. This appears like an opportune moment to ensure the Inspection of the Places of Detention Bill is enacted to allow for OPCAT ratification. Arguably, this would also strengthen our bid to become a member of the UN Human Rights Council in 2027.

The autumn legislative programme gives us some cause for cautious optimism as the Inspection of Places of Detention Bill is listed for priority drafting. We also welcome changes brought forward by Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, Jim O'Callaghan TD to expand the use of community service



Graphic recording by Robyn Deasy at IPRT 30 year anniversary event.



IPRT team members meeting with Chief Inspector of Prisons, Mark Kelly, and colleagues from the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP) in March 2025.

orders (CSO) in the General Scheme of the Civil and Criminal Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025, currently undergoing pre-legislative scrutiny. IPRT has long campaigned for the increased use of non-custodial sentencing options to tackle the overcrowding crisis and reduce the use of short-term custodial sentences. The proposed reforms are welcome, particularly the obligation on the court to provide reasons for its decision to impose a custodial rather than a community sentence.

We believe this bill takes us one step closer to making the principle of prison as a last resort a reality but to see real progress we must also see the Community Sanctions Bill 2014 prioritised and significant investment made in the Probation Service. In Budget 2025, the Probation Service's entire budget of €60 million was still less than the additional €79 million granted to the IPS. Until we see a redirection of funding into the necessary services, IPRT is

concerned that prison and the criminal justice system will continue to have to step in where other social services have failed.

With an overcrowding crisis overwhelming our prisons, the EU Presidency around the corner and a UN Human Rights Council bid on the horizon, now is the time for the State to take action to meet its human rights obligations to deliver meaningful criminal justice reform.

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## **Digitalising justice services**

Darragh Brennan, Head of Citizenship and Modernisation, Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, speaks to Joshua Murray about digitally enhancing the Department's service delivery.

**Joshua Murray (JM): Can you give us a broad overview of the Department's modernisation efforts?**

**Darragh Brennan (DB):** Modernisation in immigration service delivery has a few key dimensions. On the technology side, we are replacing outdated systems, consolidating them, and moving toward a single source of data. At present, information is scattered across multiple databases, and much of our work is still paper-based. By digitalising our services, we will build a 360-degree view of those who use our services which will be better for both them and our staff.

**JM: What are the main challenges involved?**

**DB:** There are three. The first is technology, more specifically, modernising our systems. Second is structure; where we are re-engineering processes and moving towards what we call a 'functional model', combining efficiency with better service. The third branch is focussed on people, which is about ensuring that staff have the training, support, and tools they need to deliver effectively.

**JM: Which reforms have worked well, and which have been more of a learning curve?**

**DB:** Staff engagement has been a real success. They know the systems best, so we have made sure they have a strong voice in shaping reforms. That has helped us rebuild immigration service delivery from the ground up.

We have also worked to understand our users better, listening to feedback and tackling pain

points. Some major wins include the new digital contact centre, where users can check application status, ask questions, and book appointments online. We have also launched the first stage of our case management system, covering EU Treaty Rights forms which we believe is the first real step in digitalising services and consolidating information.

**JM: In terms of digitalisation, how does the department balance innovation with ensuring accessibility for all?**

**DB:** Accessibility is essential. We know some users may not have strong digital literacy or may face other challenges. That is why our forms and websites are written in plain English and designed to meet accessibility standards.

Not everyone can use digital services, so we will continue to provide offline channels as well. Modernisation is about inclusion and making sure services work for everyone, not just the majority.

**JM: Does that mean a reduction, but not elimination, of traditional service delivery models?**

**DB:** Exactly. Service design cannot happen in a vacuum. Everyone experiences the system differently, and we need to understand those pain points before redesigning services.

While we are moving ahead with digital tools, accessibility is at the heart of our approach. We cannot just design for 90 per cent of users, it is about delivering for people and having services which work for 100 per cent of users.



## Profile: Darragh Brennan

Darragh Brennan is Head of Citizenship and Modernisation at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. He has responsibility for the citizenship team, including citizenship by naturalisation, international family reunifications, non-EEA investors and entrepreneur start-up, and atypical permits in the Department.

This team has responsibility to ensure that the full range of ministerial responsibilities pertaining to naturalisation as encompassed by the Irish Nationality and Citizenship Act 1956 as amended is exercised with appropriate due diligence and that the integrity of the immigration process is protected.

# Justice at a crossroads

justice report



Even traditional offences are reshaped, with domestic abuse cases now often including digital stalking via devices, while harassment increasingly occurs through social media. More broadly, traditional crimes are becoming more complex to investigate and prosecute, as they involve digital evidence such as mobile data, surveillance footage, and online communications, which demands greater technical expertise, time, and inter-agency co-ordination.

## Structural gaps

This convergence of volume and complexity is straining justice systems worldwide. Cases are taking longer to process on an end-to-end basis, undermining the timeliness of justice and eroding public confidence. Cross-agency processes, which are essential to uphold independence, governance, and accountability, can also introduce limitations on how to tackle the increasing volume and complexity, particularly when systems are not fully integrated or when coordination mechanisms are underdeveloped, as is the case in many jurisdictions.

Prison overcrowding remains another critical concern in justice systems across many jurisdictions. As of September 2025, 11 of the 14 Irish prisons were operating above 100 per cent capacity. Despite proposals to expand prison capacity, experts argue that such measures fail to address the root causes of offending. The Irish Penal Reform Trust advocates for alternatives to incarceration, especially for non-violent offences, highlighting the need for restorative justice, community-based sentencing, and investment in rehabilitation programmes.

Public expectations for transparency, fairness, and responsiveness are rising. To remain effective, Ireland's justice system must evolve, building new capabilities, integrating processes, and committing to reform that goes beyond digital upgrades to address the structural foundations of justice delivery.

Justice systems worldwide are at a crossroads, where tradition meets the force for change. Calls for reform are growing louder, from civil society, legal professionals, and international bodies, driven by a shared recognition that justice must evolve to meet the demands of modern governance and public expectation.

The justice system in Ireland has long relied on established customs and procedures that have provided continuity and structure. However, these same traditions now risk becoming barriers to progress.

The nature of crime is evolving rapidly, challenging long-standing assumptions about how justice is delivered. Justice systems must now manage high volumes of traditional offences whilst responding to increasingly complex, digitally enabled threats.

Conventional crimes remain prevalent. In Ireland 76,142 thefts and 20,019 assaults were recorded in 2024, up 12 per cent and 6 per cent respectively since 2019 as reported by the Central Statistics Office. However, these are now compounded by crimes that exploit digital platforms and technologies. Ransomware attacks targeting public services, online child exploitation facilitated through encrypted messaging apps, and cryptocurrency-enabled fraud are just a few examples of how criminal behaviour has adapted to the digital age.

Advertorial

## How can justice systems evolve?

Rising caseloads, increasingly complex digital crime, and growing public expectations have exposed the limitations of traditional legal frameworks. In response, several jurisdictions have introduced ambitious reforms, offering practical lessons for Ireland as it seeks to reform its justice system.

In England and Wales, the Leveson Review proposed structural changes to reduce delays, including reclassifying offences to avoid jury trials and creating new judicial divisions for mid-level cases, saving thousands of court sitting days.

Northern Ireland has similarly focused on delay reduction through its Speeding Up Justice programme. The expansion of out-of-court disposals allows lower-level offences to be resolved more proportionately. Crucially, the abolition of oral evidence at committal hearings has streamlined pre-trial processes, freeing up Magistrates' Court capacity and reducing re-traumatisation for victims.

In Ireland, the Courts Service is working on its own Modernisation Programme, focused on improving access to justice, reducing delay and cost within the justice system and maximising the use of technology to improve services.

## Beyond digital upgrades

To modernise infrastructure, the UK's His Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service Reform Programme introduced online courts, unified case management systems, and remote hearings, improving transparency and efficiency. Ireland's Courts Service is rolling out similar reforms, including AI-assisted scheduling and digital jury systems. Full implementation, supported by training and accessibility, will be essential.

However, technology alone is insufficient. As crime becomes more digitally complex, justice personnel must be equipped with new skills and ways of working. Justice systems are investing further in capability building to ensure criminal justice organisations can manage encrypted communications, forensics, and cross-border cybercrime.

*"With the right leadership, investment, and vision, Ireland can build a justice system that is not only fit for purpose but fit for the future."*

## Integrated digital ecosystems

Many jurisdictions are working on how to improve collaboration across the multiple agencies responsible for delivering justice. For example, the Netherlands and Estonia have developed integrated digital platforms linking police, courts, and correctional services.

## Sentencing and rehabilitation

Other jurisdictions have embraced community-based alternatives to certain offences that are classed as low-level:

- **United States:** Cities like New York have expanded restorative justice and re-entry programmes.
- **Norway:** A reintegration-focused prison model has achieved low recidivism through humane conditions and structured release planning.
- **Brazil and Costa Rica:** Legal reforms have reclassified offences to avoid custodial sentences, expanding probation and community service.

International bodies such as the UNODC advocate for sentencing policies that prioritise alternatives to custody, including electronic monitoring, fines, and restorative justice.

## Shaping a future-ready justice system

EY is working with Justice systems around the world, and we understand that these systems are not static. The institutions must evolve with society. Ireland's justice system is at a turning point. The pressures are real, but so is the opportunity. Policymakers are embracing evidence-based, cross-system solutions that reflect the realities of today's justice landscape and have the opportunity to collaborate with other justice systems across the world.

With the right leadership, investment, and vision, Ireland can build a justice system that is not only fit for purpose but fit for the future.

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*Sean Breen is a director in EY's Government and Infrastructure practice and provides support to a wide range of government and public sector clients. Breen has worked extensively across the justice sector and has assisted with a number of large-scale transformation projects.*

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# Youth Justice Strategy progress

The latest progress report on the *Youth Justice Strategy 2021-2027* shows a youth justice system becoming more collaborative, data-driven, and evidence-informed, with an increasing focus on prevention, diversion, and rehabilitation.

The 2024 statement highlights strengthened coordination across agencies through the Youth Justice Oversight, Governance and Advisory Groups, which met regularly throughout the year. These bodies, the report says, have helped sustain focus on addressing underlying factors of youth offending, supporting early intervention, and promoting desistance.

Ongoing priorities include capacity-building for Youth Diversion Projects (YDPs), developing supports for children in care, and enhancing data systems for evidence-based decision-making. The Department also continued its partnership with Northern Ireland through the North South Youth Justice Advisory Group, which met twice in 2024 to discuss shared challenges and legislative developments, including the forthcoming Children (Amendment) Bill 2024.

The joint-commissioning or No Wrong Door approach, now active in six pilot areas, continues to promote collaboration between local services to ensure young people receive coordinated support without duplication or gaps.

## Youth diversion projects

One of the strategy's central aims is full national coverage of YDPs. The report asserts that this moved closer to completion in 2024. Following four new projects launched in 2023, the Department advanced plans for two final projects in north Tipperary and east Clare, completing the network.

Consultations with local services, including Tusla, the Probation Service and Education and Training Boards, informed the design of new projects that will serve children aged between eight and 11, family members of participants, and harder-to-reach groups. Six expressions of interest were received, and assessments were undertaken by local committees chaired by senior gardaí and supported by community-based organisations and the University of Limerick's Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) team. The successful providers will be announced in early 2025, with operations expected to begin by year-end.

The national network of YDPs represents a cornerstone of the State's preventative strategy, offering structured interventions and family support to divert young people away from offending behaviour and into pro-social development pathways.

## Court Accompaniment Scheme

The 2024 report says that “significant progress toward introducing” a nationwide Court Accompaniment Scheme for young defendants was made. Modelled on the Victim Support at Court (V-SAC) initiative, the scheme will provide trained youth justice workers to explain court processes and offer informal emotional support, without overlapping with legal representation.

This initiative, to be delivered through participating YDPs, aims to reduce stress for young defendants and strengthen engagement with diversionary options. Early pilots will run in Dublin, Kerry, Kildare, Limerick, Laois, Sligo, Clare, and Leitrim, with training developed jointly by V-SAC and the Solas Project. A full national rollout is anticipated by the end of 2025.

## The Greentown Programme

The Greentown Programme, designed to disrupt the recruitment of children by criminal networks, continued in two confidential trial sites. Its four pillars of network disruption, community efficacy, intensive family support, and pro-social opportunities remained central to delivery. A standard operating procedure was finalised to support data sharing and collaboration among agencies, and work began to replicate the Twinsight research process for updated crime-network mapping.

The Department has confirmed funding for Greentown until 2026, conditional on evaluation and replication milestones. International collaboration also deepened, with Irish representatives engaging in knowledge exchange with Dutch officials on the Prevention with Authority initiative.

## Relationship-based practice

The newly integrated youth diversion projects research and development team focused on embedding the relationship model of practice across YDPs. Through national workshops, new training resources, and a ‘mastery group’ of expert practitioners, the model emphasises trust-building, empathy, and accountability as foundations for behavioural change.

Training programmes on motivational interviewing, restorative practices, and outcomes-focused planning were delivered nationwide, reflecting the strategy’s objective of ensuring growing professionalisation of the youth justice workforce.

## Collaboration across the system

The 2024 statement says that the Probation Service and Young Persons Probation (YPP) worked with 764 young people during the year, supporting community supervision, pre-sentence assessments, and restorative approaches. A new Youth Joint Agency Response to Crime (Y-JARC) project was launched in Dublin’s north inner city to coordinate responses to high-risk youth offending.

Cooperation with the North’s Youth Justice Agency intensified, with shared training and practice exchange is intended to be pursued in 2025. Meanwhile, Oberstown Children Detention Campus continued implementing its Children’s Rights Policy Framework, focusing on education, employment readiness, and reintegration supports.

Speaking in the Dáil in April 2025, Minister of State at the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration with special responsibility for International Law, Law Reform and Youth Justice, Niall Collins TD, said: “The youth justice strategy is a forward-thinking plan designed to address the unique challenges faced by young people in Ireland.

“At its core, it emphasises early intervention, prevention, family support and community engagement. It includes a number of key objectives aimed at promoting positive behavioural change. It is only by targeting this behaviour that we can break the cycle of young people reoffending.”

# A new era of independent policing oversight



Elaine Byrne, Chairperson of the Policing and Community Safety Authority.

The Policing and Community Safety Authority (PCSA), formally established on 2 April 2025, marks a new chapter in independent oversight of An Garda Síochána.

The Authority brings together the functions of the former Policing Authority and the Garda Síochána Inspectorate, with strengthened inspection powers and an enhanced role in community safety.

At its core, the PCSA exists to independently and transparently oversee and assess the performance of An Garda Síochána in providing policing services to communities across Ireland. Our work builds on the legacy of our predecessor organisations; the Policing Authority and the Garda Síochána Inspectorate and

places the public interest at the centre of everything we do.

Gardaí hold significant powers to use force, to search homes and to restrict our liberty. These powers must always be used legally, fairly and proportionately. Robust supervision, management and oversight from inside the policing organisation is one element of the checks and balances that seek to ensure the appropriate use of policing powers. Independent civilian oversight, provided by the PCSA, is another essential check that ensures policing powers are exercised in a way that serves all communities, respects the law and upholds human rights.

We give effect to this oversight through continuous engagement, with communities, with garda members, and garda management. This includes monthly meetings with the Garda Commissioner, held both in public and private.

We listen to the experiences of people in the community in all its diversity. We listen to gardaí who are delivering the policing service. And we listen to and challenge those in garda management on the performance of the service.

An integral part of the Authority's remit is meeting with the Garda Commissioner and senior officers in person almost every month, both in public and private. The meetings held in public are live-streamed and recorded. The agendas and minutes of all the meetings are published on our website. A cursory glance at the agendas of our first six meetings, three of which were in public, gives an indication of the breadth of our work.

*“We are committed to ensuring that Ireland’s policing service operates with transparency, accountability, and the confidence of the people it serves.”*

## Community safety

Keeping communities safe is about more than policing. It requires a collaborative approach involving mental health services, housing, youth services, local authorities, and education; all involved in multi-agency cooperation. The inclusion of community safety in our name and mandate is an exciting development. It recognises that safety is complex, personal, and our sense of being and feeling safe can change through our life.

We work closely with other agencies through the National Community Safety Steering Group and the recently established National Office for Community Safety, sharing information and insights to help shape this new dimension of our role.

## A busy first few months

In April 2025, we began developing the 2026-2028 Policing Priorities by engaging directly with communities and garda personnel around the country. We wanted to find out what areas of policing are most important for gardaí to focus on. Four in-person regional events brought together around 100 community stakeholder groups. A public online consultation received 3,794 responses and our staff met more than 400 serving gardaí from every county.

These new Policing Priorities, currently with the Minister for approval, will form a cornerstone of our future oversight work. They are the benchmark against which we will assess garda performance, reflecting the voices of both those who deliver and those who receive the policing service.

At our July 2025 Authority meeting in public, the Authority discussed the Crowe Report, which revealed serious shortcomings in roads policing performance, revealing how a significant minority of gardaí are not doing their jobs properly and have no interest in doing so. It highlighted wider issues of performance management. We continue to engage closely with the Garda Commissioner on how these findings are being addressed, both immediately and at a strategic level.



Authority members of the PCSA at the meeting in public with Garda Commissioner in Dublin in September 2025.

At our most recent meeting in public in September 2025, the new Garda Commissioner, Justin Kelly, outlined his vision and ambition for An Garda Síochána and was questioned on key policing priority items. Each month, the Garda Commissioner also submits a detailed report to the Authority – published for transparency – and it contains important information on the use of force, garda strength, information on suspensions and the key focus of the organisation. The PCSA does not have a role in individual complaints made against gardaí; this is the remit of Fiosrú, the new statutory body replacing the Garda Síochána Ombudsman Commission (GSOC), which deals with complaints from members of the public about the gardaí.

## Inspections and oversight in practice

The PCSA now has the power to conduct announced and unannounced inspections at garda stations and facilities. A key milestone this year was the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the PCSA and An Garda Síochána setting out the framework of inspections. These inspections, and the reports arising from them, will be published and will play a central role in shaping our future oversight. Work is already under way on our Inspection Plan 2026.

We are also finalising our Strategic Plan 2026-2028, developed following extensive consultation. It is ambitious but achievable, focused on improving both the policing service the public receives and the working environment for those who deliver it.

As required by legislation, the Authority’s members bring collective expertise across human rights, social services, the justice system, data and services for victims. As a practising barrister, my own work has brought me into contact with people from all walks of life, deepening my understanding of community and fairness in public service. The Authority is supported by a dedicated executive team under the leadership of the Chief Executive Helen Hall. Together, we are committed to ensuring that Ireland’s policing service operates with transparency, accountability, and the confidence of the people it serves.

**Elaine Byrne BL is Chairperson of the Policing and Community Safety Authority.**

W: [www.pcsaireland.ie](http://www.pcsaireland.ie)

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## The shortfalls of government's anti-racism plan

Thirty-one months after the launch of the *National Action Plan Against Racism* (NAPAR) in March 2023, *eolas Magazine* considers progress on its implementation.

NAPAR commits to “identify and eliminate any policing practice that targets specific racial and ethnic minority groups, including through racial or ethnic profiling”. However, no clear statutory prohibition of racial profiling currently exists in Irish law.

Civil society reports, including those from the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) and the Irish Network Against Racism (INAR), have noted the absence of explicit legal bans, detailed definitions, or sanction frameworks. Without legal clarity, policy commitments may be difficult to enforce and victims may have limited formal means of redress.

Data collection and publication disaggregated by race, ethnicity, or other protected grounds remains inconsistent. Policing bodies do not reliably publish statistics on stop-and-search, use-of-force, complaint outcomes, or internal investigations in forms disaggregated by race or ethnicity.

Similarly, the courts and prosecutorial services do not consistently provide breakdowns by racial or ethnic category for charging, sentencing, remand, or judicial decisions. The absence of such data complicates assessment of whether reform efforts are producing equitable outcomes.

## Hate crime and racist incidents

Recent Garda figures indicate the number of hate crimes and related discriminatory incidents in Ireland has increased modestly. In 2024, there were 676 hate crimes and hate-related (non-crime) incidents recorded, up from 651 in 2023. Of those 676, 592 were hate crimes and 84 were non-crime hate-related incidents.

“Anti-race” was the most prevalent motive among discriminatory motives, comprising 39 per cent of all recorded motives in 2024, rising from 36 per cent in 2023. “Anti-nationality” also increased, accounting for about a quarter of all discriminatory motives in 2024, compared to about 18 per cent in 2023. The most common categories of crime in which hate motives are evident include public order offences, minor assaults, and criminal damage (not by fire).

## Community experience and trust

A Policing Authority-commissioned report, *Experiences of Policing Among Brazilians and People of African Descent in Ireland*, describes perceptions among affected communities of profiling, dismissive responses to reports of racist incidents, and limited trust in Garda responsiveness.

Similarly, the INAR/ICCL Policing and Racial Discrimination in Ireland report describes differential treatment in interactions with gardaí across a range of settings, including during identity checks, crime reporting, and use-of-force incidents.

## Resource constraints and staffing pressures

Recent assessments outline well-documented staffing and resource pressures affecting the Garda. The recruitment and retention of members, as well as constraints in training capacity, are cited among factors limiting performance on policing priorities.

These pressures are reported to complicate implementation of reform measures across oversight, complaints handling, and other obligations under the NAPAR.

## Analysis

The increase in reported hate crimes and related incidents suggests somewhat greater reporting or awareness, but does not establish whether the underlying incidence is increasing, or whether reporting remains incomplete.

The persistence of “anti-race” as the leading motive indicates that racial discrimination remains the dominant category among hate motives.

The rise in anti-nationality motives suggests shifts in the pattern of discrimination or harmful attitudes.

Regions and offence types data show that a substantial portion of hate-motivated incidents occur in public order offences, minor assaults, and vandalism.

As of October 2025, several of the institutional frameworks promised under NAPAR are in place. However, the evidence indicates that in the justice and policing domains, several commitments have not yet been fully realised: statutory prohibition of profiling remains unestablished; disaggregated data remains incomplete; and trust among affected communities continues to show deficits.

The recent statistics on hate crime and discriminatory incidents provide measurable data points, however, they also underscore that recording and responding to incidents remains uneven.

# 50 years of justice



Director of Public Prosecutions, Catherine Pierse.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the appointment of the first Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP), Eamonn Barnes in January 1975, writes Director of Public Prosecutions Catherine Pierse.

Before the enactment of the Prosecution of Offences Act 1974, when the practical implications of an independent DPP were still being considered, Limerick State Solicitor Gordon Holmes wrote to the Attorney General, Declan Costello, stating: “Candidly, we are absolutely plagued with representations here, largely coming, I am afraid, from TDs.”

In a later letter, he described how one TD had lobbied on behalf of both an accused person and a victim in the same case, a clear illustration of why a new Office was needed. The creation of the Office of the DPP was intended to strengthen public confidence in the rule of law by ensuring that prosecution decisions could not be subject to political interference or even the perception of it. Another key principle of our prosecution service, one that is established in the Irish Constitution, is that when we prosecute, we act on behalf of the people of Ireland, and not on behalf of any one participant in the criminal process. Independence therefore is at the heart of why our office was created.

Although we act on behalf of the people, the prosecution does also have an important role to play in vindicating the rights of victims, accused persons and witnesses and ensuring fairness at all stages of the process. A prosecution decision can have enormous consequences for the individuals involved. Where a decision is made not to prosecute, victims can feel disbelieved and unheard. Where a decision is made to prosecute, an accused person’s life can be turned upside down with implications for their job, family and future. The wider community’s confidence in the rule of law is also at stake.

Today the values of independence and fairness remain at the core of the Irish prosecution service. They are as essential now as they were in 1975 to maintaining the rule of law in a functioning democracy. When the Office was established, there were four lawyers making prosecution decisions. Today we have a staff of almost 300, from legal and other professional backgrounds.

We work closely with State Solicitors in 30 locations around the country and over 200 barristers on our panels. We now deal with around 17,000 files a year, make prosecution decisions in all serious cases and conduct prosecutions in the higher courts. Recent government decisions mean that we are also working towards being able to provide better support for, and quality assurance of District Court prosecutions which are taken by our colleagues in An Garda Síochána in the name of the DPP.

The nature of crime has also evolved dramatically over the past 50 years. The Office now deals with increasingly sophisticated forms of organised crime, financial and corporate offending, cybercrime, and offences involving digital evidence and international co-operation. The volume of digital data continues to grow relentlessly, from mobile devices, social media platforms, and CCTV footage. For example, 15 years ago, a file involving a typical late-night assault on a street might have included a victim's statement, a memo of interview with the accused, and perhaps a few witness statements. Today, that same file could include phone footage from bystanders, CCTV from nearby premises, and records of social media activity following the incident. This surge in digital material gathered during investigations and submitted to my Office for review continues to reshape both the volume and complexity of evidence that must be assessed when deciding whether to prosecute, examined for relevance at the disclosure stage, and ultimately presented in court. It is clear that all of us who work in the criminal justice system must re-examine how this data is managed at each stage of the process, and the policies and practices that underpin our current approach to disclosure.

While my office operates independently in making prosecution decisions, effective criminal justice depends on collaboration among various agencies to improve the system for all those who must interact with it. Independence does not mean isolation. My office continues to collaborate on a range of projects and working groups with colleagues from An Garda Síochána, the Courts Service, the Legal Aid Board, the Department of Justice, and the Probation Service with the aim of improving the criminal justice system and the efficient running of the courts.

*"Today the values of independence and fairness remain at the core of the Irish prosecution service."*

In response to increased demands on the criminal justice system, additional funding has been provided to support the recruitment of legal and support staff and enhance our information management systems. The rapid increase in the demands has prompted efforts to identify ways in which we can collectively work towards a more efficient and effective system which better meets the needs of the people who are interacting with it, and in particular the victims, accused persons and witnesses.

I welcome the Government commitment in this year's Programme for Government to conduct a review of the criminal justice system, and publish an action plan to improve efficiency, remove blockages and cut waiting times. In the meantime, work is already underway to deepen collaboration across the system so that unnecessary delays are avoided. By way of example, earlier this year the Office of the DPP committed, along with 15 other criminal justice agencies, to the implementation of a Juvenile Protocol for the handling of Central Criminal Court cases involving children. This judicially led initiative was launched in February 2025 with the aim of ensuring that all such cases are dealt with within 12 months of the date of the allegation.

Notwithstanding the many changes that have taken place in the Irish prosecution service over the past 50 years, our mission has remained the same, to deliver a fair, independent, and effective

prosecution service on behalf of all the people of Ireland. Difficult prosecution decisions must continue to be made without fear or favour. Cases must be pursued fairly and in the public interest, while protecting the rights of both victims and accused persons. This commitment serves not only those who directly interact with the justice system, but also everyone who values living in a safe and fair society.

*To learn about the work of the Office of the DPP:*

*W: [www.dppireland.ie](http://www.dppireland.ie)*

*To read more about the 50th anniversary of the Office:*

*[www.dppireland.ie/about-us/50-years](http://www.dppireland.ie/about-us/50-years)*






# Arrivals




## Lifts



## Escalators

# New migration strategy

The newly-published *National Asylum and Migration Management Strategy* sets out a new framework for handling migration and asylum under the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

Produced under EU Regulation (EU) 2024/1351, the strategy is designed to “deliver a fair, efficient, and sustainable model of accommodating applicants” while ensuring Ireland meets its obligations under the new EU Pact on Migration and Asylum.

The pact is aimed at creating a common European system for migration and asylum across EU member states. It seeks to balance two main objectives:

- Efficiency and control of migration flows (including irregular migration); and
- Ensuring the protection of rights for those in need of international protection. The pact entered into force on 11 June 2024, with the bulk of the legislative instruments scheduled for application by mid-2026.

The Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, which led the strategy’s development, describes the plan as a “comprehensive framework for asylum and migration management in Ireland”. It highlights declining international protection applications in 2025 and emphasises that migration is

essential to “deliver economic growth and jobs, and to raise living standards”.

At its most forward-looking, the strategy acknowledges that “migration remains central to sustaining our economy and public services”. Legal migration and talent attraction feature prominently, with new schemes such as the Seasonal Employment Permit and participation in the SUSTAIN Europe and STEP programmes. These initiatives aim to create, in the Government’s words, “mutually beneficial partnerships that support migrants who may alternatively have taken irregular routes”.

The plan also commits to addressing the weaknesses of Ireland’s asylum infrastructure. A new Comprehensive Accommodation Strategy seeks to move “away from reliance on private providers, with a scaling up of state-owned accommodation at its core”, targeting a 35,000-bed capacity by 2028.

Oversight is to be strengthened through a proposed Chief Inspector of Asylum Border Procedures, empowered to “inspect asylum border facilities,

investigate potential breaches of fundamental rights, and deal with complaints”.

However, much of the strategy’s energy remains directed toward control and compliance. It promises to “continue to increase returns through aligning with EU law” and to “arrange more enforced returns, including through new charter flights”. Integration, meanwhile, is deferred to a separate forthcoming migration and integration strategy, leaving gaps in social policy coherence.

The strategy clearly is aimed at appealing to anti-immigration sentiment among parts of the general public and is symptomatic of a government which is walking the tightrope between not calling immigration a crisis while also failing to outline immigration as a defining and positive feature of modern Ireland.

The challenge ahead lies not only in managing migration effectively, but in realising the strategy’s implicit recognition that mobility, far from a threat, is “an essential underpinning” of Ireland’s economic and social future.

# The Parole Board

The Parole Board is an independent body established under the Parole Act 2019. It currently reviews parole applications from people in prison serving a life sentence and decides whether or not they should be released on parole.

Parole involves release from prison under certain conditions. If granted parole, the person must comply with all the conditions of their parole order. They are still serving a life sentence, but in the community. The person may be returned to prison if they reoffend or break a condition of the parole order.

A person serving a life sentence can usually apply for parole when they have served 10.5 years of their sentence. Parole will not be granted to anyone who has served less than 12 years or is serving a sentence for another offence.

When deciding on a parole application, the Parole Board considers many factors including:

- the potential risk presented by the applicant to the safety and security of the public;

- the applicant’s rehabilitation and capacity to reintegrate into society; and
- whether it is appropriate that the applicant be released on parole.

The Parole Board may also request reports from relevant services relating to the applicant. Free legal aid is available to persons applying for parole.

## Engagement with victims

The Parole Act 2019 defines a “victim” as:

1. A person who has suffered harm, including physical, mental or emotional harm or economic loss, which was directly caused by a criminal offence for which the person is serving a term of life imprisonment;

2. The family members of a person whose death was directly caused by a criminal offence and who have suffered harm including physical, mental, or emotional harm, or economic loss as a direct result of that offence.

Relevant victims can make a submission to the Parole Board, if they wish to do so. A submission is an account in their own words of the effect and impact the offence has had on them. They can tell the Board how the offence affected them and how the parole applicant’s release might affect them, their family and their community.

A victim can also ask the Parole Board to consider specific conditions to be attached to a person’s parole order, if granted. Meetings with victims are held separately to the Parole Board’s meeting with the parole applicant.

Free legal aid is available to victims to assist them in making their submission.

For more information visit [www.gov.ie/paroleboard](http://www.gov.ie/paroleboard)



**An Bord Parúil**  
The Parole Board

As a victim of a serious crime

# MY VOICE COUNTS

If you have been a victim of a serious crime and as a result of that crime a person is serving a life sentence, you have a right to a voice in the parole process.

Register your wish to have a voice in the parole process today.

Visit [gov.ie/paroleboard](http://gov.ie/paroleboard)  
or call **01 474 8770**

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