



# CENTRE for JUSTICE and LAW REFORM

AT THE LAW SOCIETY OF IRELAND



## Justice Indicators



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# Centre for Justice and Law Reform: Justice Indicators

## About the Centre for Justice and Law Reform

The Centre for Justice and Law Reform is a research centre established by the Law Society of Ireland in 2025.

The purpose of the Centre for Justice and Law Reform is to improve the justice system and shape law reform to better serve the public interest.

The Centre conducts evidence-based research, provides a forum for open discourse, engages with policymakers, and advocates for appropriate reforms. This work is guided by an Advisory Board of leading experts in their respective fields (see page 5).

The Centre's initial programme of research (2025-2027) is led by the following themes:

- (i) Access to Justice;
- (ii) Economic, Social, and Cultural rights;
- (iii) Democratic Norms; and
- (iv) Evolving Legal Services.

The Justice Indicators paper addresses an important gap in justice-related research in Ireland. The Centre hopes that the findings will contribute to the evolving discourse on legal reform and assist policymakers in the development of evidenced-based strategies to enhance the justice system.

# Advisory Board to the Centre

## External Members



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# Executive Summary

In a well-functioning democracy, the justice system is a cornerstone of accountability, fairness, and the rule of law.

A justice system that operates effectively ensures that all individuals, irrespective of their social or economic status, are held to the same legal standards. It ensures that rights are protected through impartial, expert adjudication. A robust justice system also serves as a safeguard against abuses of authority, reinforces public trust in institutions, and provides mechanisms for resolving disputes fairly and effectively.

An efficient justice system is also important, enabling the timely resolution of legal disputes and mitigating the risk of delayed proceedings that may, effectively, deny justice. Efficiency strengthens public trust and confidence in legal institutions, ensures access to justice for all, and affirms the capacity of democratic institutions to respond promptly and impartially to societal needs. The European Commission, for example, specifically highlighted the need for Ireland to “regularly evaluate court performance based on defined indicators”<sup>1</sup> in the Ireland Chapter of the Commission’s 2025 Rule of Law Report.

A record €6.17 billion has been allocated to the Justice, Home Affairs and Migration budget for 2026. To ensure that spending and reform efforts are both effective and economical, they should be underpinned by reliable data and rigorous analysis. This approach enhances the quality of policymaking and reinforces public confidence and trust by demonstrating that reforms are driven by objective data. Evidence-based reform helps to identify what works, what does not work, and where resources can be most effectively deployed to improve outcomes for all.

The purpose of this Justice Indicators research paper is to provide policymakers with reliable and objective evidence to inform decision making. The Justice Indicators demonstrate how institutions of justice are performing compared with other jurisdictions. This research paper evaluates the resourcing, efficiency, and effectiveness of the Irish justice system across several core areas:

**(i) Trust**

**(ii) Policing**

**(iii) Courts, and**

**(iv) Prisons**

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<sup>1</sup> Commission, ‘2025 Rule of Law Report: Country Chapter on the Rule of Law Situation in Ireland’ SWD (2025) 907 final, 6.

The analysis presented in this research paper draws on more than 100 national and international data sources. These include the European Commission's EU Justice Scoreboard; the Council of Europe's Annual Penal Statistics (SPACE) reports; the OECD's Surveys on the Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions; datasets from Eurostat and the Central Statistics Office (CSO); the Council of Europe's CEPEJ Evaluation Report on European judicial systems; annual reports from the Courts Service; the Office of the Inspector of Prisons; and the Policing and Community Safety Authority; publications from the Department of Justice; and a wide range of academic and NGO reports and articles.

The justice system extends beyond the four areas examined: trust, policing, courts, and prisons. The Centre for Justice and Law Reform may expand the scope of the Justice Indicators Project to include additional indicators in future publications.

A key feature of the methodology employed in this paper is the traffic-light assessment tool. This is a simple visual tool to assess and communicate Ireland's performance under each justice indicator. The assessment and analyses are based on empirical data that have been collated from 101 reputable sources.



**Red traffic light:** Ireland deviates by more than 10% from the European Union or Council of Europe average.



**Amber traffic light:** Ireland deviates by between 3% and 10% from the European Union or Council of Europe average.



**Green traffic light:** Ireland is on a par with, or deviates by up to 3% from, the European Union or Council of Europe average.



**White traffic light:** Available data are insufficient to make an informed assessment.

Exceptions to this model are made where a deviation is clearly positive or negative. For example, higher public trust in the Gardaí is considered a positive outcome, even if it deviates by more than 10% from the EU average.

# Key Findings



## Trust in the Justice System



### Trust in An Garda Síochána (Green traffic light)

Trust in An Garda Síochána is comparatively high in Ireland. According to the OECD, 70% of Irish people reported trusting the Gardaí in 2023, which was higher than the OECD average of 63%. Trust in the Gardaí reduced by 5% between 2021 and 2023. An Garda Síochána's 2023 public attitudes survey found that 89% of people trusted the Gardaí, down from 91% in 2021.



### Trust in the Judiciary and Courts (Green traffic light)

Trust in the judiciary and courts is comparatively high in Ireland. OECD data show that 69% of the Irish population trusted the courts in 2023, which was above the OECD average of 54%. Eurobarometer Studies similarly found that the Irish population rated the independence of the judiciary and the courts between 71% and 74% from 2020 to 2025. This was above the equivalent EU average ranges of 52% to 56%.



### Confidence in the Effectiveness of the Prison Service (White traffic light)

The available data are insufficient to allow robust analysis of this indicator: there are no measures of public trust, no comparative data, and the most recent figures date from 2022. That year, a Department of Justice Criminal Justice Public Attitudes Survey (2022) found that 51% of respondents had confidence in the Irish Prison Service to provide safe and secure custody. The same survey reported that 34% of respondents were confident in the Irish Prison Service's effectiveness in rehabilitating prisoners.



## Policing



### Policing Expenditure (Red traffic light)

Ireland's policing budget has increased every year from 2019 to 2026, from €1.79 billion to €2.59 billion. This is an overall increase of €800 million, or 45%. In Budget 2026, policing was allocated 42% of the total justice budget of €6.17 billion. Ireland's per capita spend on policing (€437.44) was 28% higher than the EU average (€342.37) according to the most recent year for which data are available (2023).



### Number of Gardaí (Amber traffic light)

The number of Gardaí decreased over the period studied. In 2024, there were 14,191 uniformed Gardaí, compared with 14,307 in 2019. With Ireland's population increasing from 4.92 million to 5.38 million over the same period, the number of Gardaí per 100,000 inhabitants decreased from 291 (in 2019) to 264 (in 2024). That represents a reduction of 27 officers per 100,000 inhabitants, or 9%.

From a comparative perspective, in 2024, Northern Ireland had 328 police officers per 100,000, while England & Wales had 237. Scotland – similar to Ireland in population size and structure – had 300 officers per 100,000. Overall, Ireland's figure of 264 is above the average of the individual jurisdictions reviewed. Further, Garda recruitment numbers are increasing, with November 2025 seeing the largest single intake of Garda trainees entering the Garda College since 2014.

## Recorded Crime Incidents



### Homicide and Related Offences (Green traffic light)

In absolute terms, homicides and related offences in Ireland increased from 67 incidents in 2019 to 81 in 2024 (a 21% increase). Crime rates are more useful than absolute numbers when comparing the level of offending in different jurisdictions. Ireland reported lower rates of intentional homicide, which refers to the unlawful killing of a person with intent, than the EU average each year over the period studied: 2019 to 2023. In 2023, Ireland's intentional homicide rate was 0.64 per 100,000 people. It averaged 1.04 per 100,000 across Member States in the EU, meaning the intentional homicide rate was 62.5% higher in the EU than it was in Ireland that year (2023).



## **Sexual Offences** (Red traffic light)

Ireland has a comparatively high rate of sexual offences. Between 2019 and 2023, Ireland recorded an average of 57 sexual offences per 100,000 inhabitants annually, 43% higher than the EU average of 40 per 100,000. Ireland's yearly rate fluctuated between 52 and 62 per 100,000 people, while the EU average ranged from 36 to 45 per 100,000 people.



## **Theft and Related Offences** (Red traffic light)

Ireland's rate of theft and related offences has consistently exceeded the EU average. With an annual average of 1,143 per 100,000 people, this was 14% higher than the EU rate. Recorded incidents rose 11% between 2019 and 2024. They ranged from a low of 46,807 in 2021 to a high of 76,142 in 2024.

Important contextual factors influencing these figures, particularly those relating to sexual offences, are highlighted in the broader analysis in this paper.



## **Crime Detection Rates** (White traffic light)

Cross-jurisdictional comparisons of detection rates are not possible due to methodological limitations, but the data for Ireland show clear differences across offence types during the period studied (2019-2023).

Updated detection rates for homicide offences were high, ranging from 72% in 2019 to 83% in 2020, with an average of 82% between 2019 and 2022.

Sexual offences recorded much lower detection rates. These ranged from a low of 16% in 2022 to a high of 20% in 2019 and 2020. Updated detection rates for theft offences ranged from 33% in 2022, to 38% in 2020 – averaging 35% between 2019 and 2022. Contextual factors that influence the variance between detection rates are referenced in the broader analysis in this paper.





## Courts



### Court Expenditure (Red traffic light)

The Courts Service's gross budget has risen from €137 million in 2019 to €214 million in 2026. That represents an increase of €77 million, or 56%, compared with 2019. Ireland's per capita spend on the courts in 2022 was €38.23, which was 25% less than the European average of €50.70. Ireland's 2022 figure was also below that of England & Wales (€47.20), Denmark (€48.20), and Finland (€58.10). Ireland's per capita spend on the courts has been lower than the European average every year since 2010.



### Average Case Disposition Time (Red traffic light)

Ireland's case disposition times, which refer to the average length of court proceedings, are longer than European benchmarks.

The data indicate that, in 2022, Ireland's average of 541 days was more than three times the average European estimate of 168 days. In 2024, Ireland's average case disposition time was 486 days (16 months), the second-shortest recorded between 2019 and 2024. The longest was 590 days in 2019. This means that the overall average disposition time in the Irish courts reduced by 104 days (approximately three and a half months) from 2019 to 2024. Gaps in court level data limit a full assessment of Ireland's performance under this indicator.



### Caseload per Judge (White traffic light)

Ireland has consistently had fewer judges per 100,000 compared with other European countries. According to the Council of Europe, in 2022, Ireland had the lowest number of judges per 100,000 inhabitants among Member States – a finding reaffirmed in the 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

Between 2023 and 2024, average caseloads decreased in both the District Court and Circuit Court. The District Court recorded a 6% reduction, while the Circuit Court saw a smaller 3% decrease in caseloads per judge. Caseloads generally increased in the Superior Courts in the period reviewed. The Supreme Court experienced the highest percentage increase, with annual caseloads per judge up 32% from 2023 to 2024. The Court of Appeal recorded a 7% increase, while the High Court recorded a 9% increase in civil matters, but a 7% decrease in criminal matters.



### Case Clearance Rates (Red traffic light)

The Irish courts cleared fewer cases than the number of new cases initiated each year from 2019 to 2024. This means that the backlog of unresolved matters increased each year. Based on 2022 Council of Europe data, the 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard identified Ireland as having the lowest clearance rate among EU Member States.

Some of Ireland's courts had clearance rates above 100%. In 2024, for example, the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court resolved 124% and 104% of new cases, respectively. Civil clearance rates in Ireland provide only a partial view of dispute resolution, since many cases are settled outside formal hearings.



## Prisons



### Prison Expenditure (Red traffic light)

The Irish Prison Service's gross budget for 2026 is €579 million, an increase of €167 million (62%) since 2019. On a per capita basis, spending on prisons in Ireland increased from €41.84 per person in 2019 to €50.59 per person in 2023. This remains below the EU average, which increased from €50.09 per person to €60.06 per person over the same period.



### Prison Occupancy Rates (Amber traffic light)

Ireland's prison occupancy rate was below the EU average until 2021 but moved above the EU average in subsequent years. In 2019, Irish prisons operated at 94% capacity. Prison overcrowding in Ireland has escalated sharply since then. By December 2025, the occupancy rate had surpassed 123%, exceeding official capacity. From 2019 to 2023, Ireland's prison population grew at an average annual rate of 3.12%, while the EU average showed an annual decline of 0.02%.



### Remand Rates (Red traffic light)

Ireland's average remand rate between 2019 and 2024 (21%) remained below the Council of Europe average of 28%. Between 2019 and 2024, the proportion of Ireland's prison population held on remand rose from 20% to 21%, while the actual number increased by 34% (from an average of 723 to 967 prisoners). Ireland's remand rate is proportionately higher than that of Slovakia and England & Wales; it is approximate to the remand rate in Scotland; and it is lower than that of New Zealand.



### Average Prison Sentence Length (Red traffic light)

From 2019 to 2023, Ireland's average sentence served ranged between five and seven months, while the European benchmark was between 10 and 11 months. In 2023, the average length of time served in Irish prisons was seven months, compared with the Council of Europe average of 10 months. That same year, 12.5% of Ireland's prison population was serving sentences of less than one year, below the EU average of 18%. There was also a high turnover of short-term committals in Irish prisons, with 77% of new admissions in 2024 sentenced to less than a year.

Short sentences in 2024 were most often linked to offences under Government, Justice Procedures, and Organisation of Crime, and theft. Longer sentences included a notable share of life sentences (10%), and terms of ten years or more (9%).

*(The figures in the Key Findings section have been rounded for readability. More precise values are provided under each Justice Indicator in the main paper.)*

# Key Recommendations

In order to enable more detailed and rigorous analysis, there is a clear need for more comprehensive and transparent data collection and reporting across the Irish justice system. Data across the European Union should also become more interoperable and transparent. Specific improvements to data collection and availability that should be prioritised are:

## Average Case Disposition Time

1. The Courts Service should record and publish the average length of court proceedings (disposition times) for all courts and for all matter types.
2. The Courts Service should share data with the Council of Europe to enable the calculation of estimated disposition times for comparative purposes.

## Crime-Detection Rates

3. An Garda Síochána should separately report detection rates for historical crime incidents and contemporary crime incidents.
4. The CSO should separately publish detection rates for historical crime incidents, and contemporary crime incidents.

## Case Clearance Rates

5. The Courts Service should report the number of civil cases settled each year to enable a more accurate assessment of case clearance rates
6. The Courts Service should disaggregate administrative cases from civil cases in its reporting.
7. The Courts Service should record and publish the extent of the case backlog at each court level on an annual basis.
8. The Courts Service should record and publish the 'age' of the backlogged case load in the Irish courts each year.
9. The Courts Service should include a breakdown of the number of judges in each court in its annual reports.

## Caseload Per Judge

10. The Courts Service should publish the number of sitting days of each court to enable a more accurate calculation of judges' caseloads

11. The Council of Europe should expand the scope of CEPEJ (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice) Evaluation Reports to include caseloads per judge and enable comparison across Member States.

## Court Expenditure

12. The Courts Service should follow the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) reporting guidelines and include judicial salaries when reporting the annual public budget allocated to the functioning of the courts.

## Number of Gardaí

13. Eurostat should ensure that its own definition of 'police officers' is consistently applied when publishing policing figures for EU Member States.

14. An Garda Síochána should record and publish the number of resignations and retirements from, and appointments to, the service each year.

## Trust and Confidence in the Justice System

15. The Council of Europe should expand the scope in its annual SPACE reports (the Council of Europe's Annual Penal Statistics) to include indicators on public trust in prison systems.

16. The Department of Justice, in collaboration with the Irish Prison Service, should introduce data-collection mechanisms to measure public and stakeholder confidence in the effectiveness of the prison system.





# Introduction

Justice is not an abstract ideal; it is a lived reality that underpins the legitimacy of the State and the trust citizens place in its institutions. It has long been recognised that justice must not only be done but must be seen to be done. This reflects a fundamental truth: that justice systems depend not merely on internal processes, but on demonstrable fairness, accessibility, and effectiveness. In modern democracies, including Ireland, demonstrating these qualities requires more than intuition or tradition. It requires evidence.

Objective, reliable data are essential to understanding how well a justice system functions in practice. Without measurable indicators, it is not possible to assess whether institutions are meeting contemporary needs, whether they are operating efficiently, or whether they are delivering outcomes the public can trust.

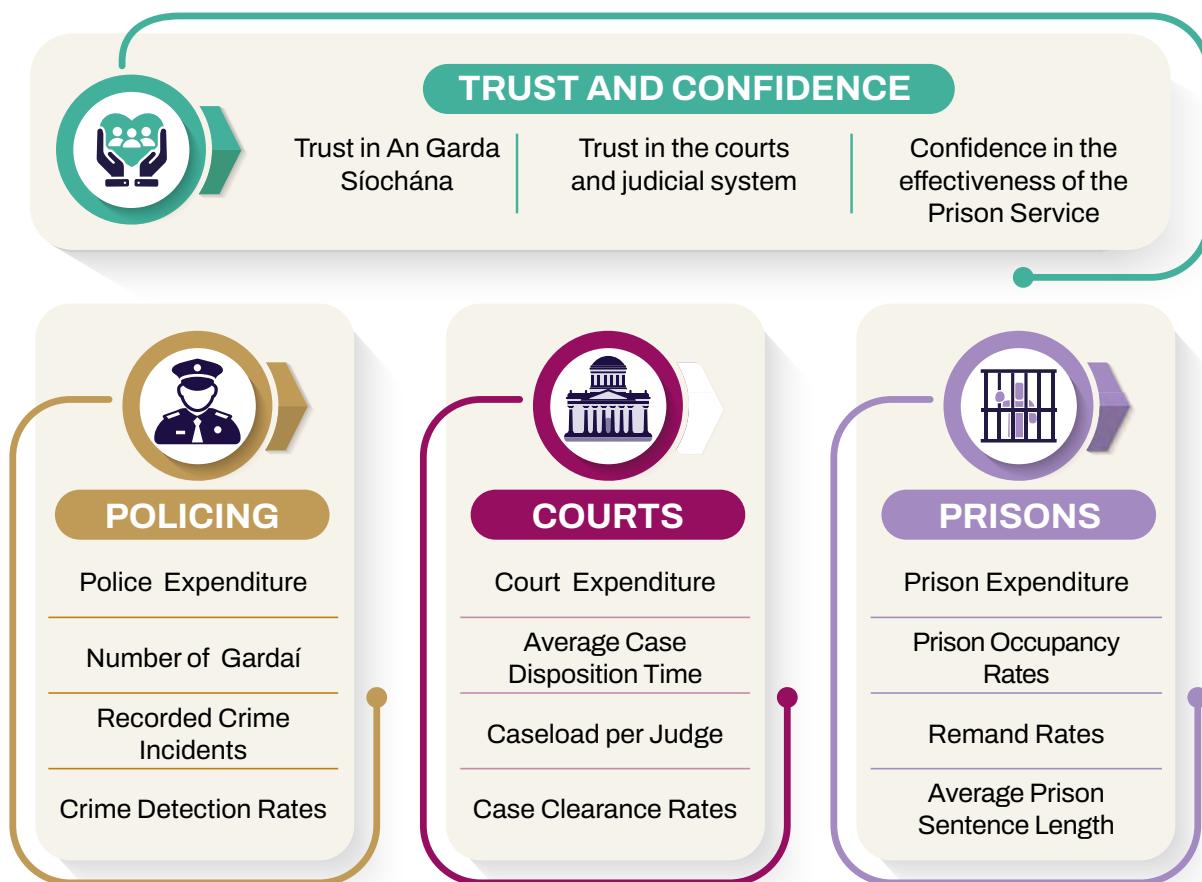
Against this backdrop, this paper examines a series of justice indicators designed to evaluate key components of the Irish justice system. For the purposes of this paper, 'justice Indicators' mean measurable data points that can be analysed to evaluate the efficiency, accessibility, fairness, and effectiveness of the justice system. The purpose of analysing justice indicators is to assess how well institutions of justice are performing compared with other jurisdictions and whether they meet current needs.

In this paper, a series of justice indicators have been proposed to evaluate the justice system in Ireland. The purpose is to provide an objective evidence base to inform the development of justice policymaking.

Courts-based justice is not the only form of justice. For example, community-based advocacy, non-court adjudicative bodies and tribunals, the ombudsman system, sectoral economic regulators, arbitration, and mediation all play key roles within the justice system. However, the focus of this paper is policing, the courts, and prisons. The paper considers these elements of the justice system in respect of both civil and criminal matters.

In addition to the data-driven indicators analysed across the different pillars of the justice system, this paper also considers available information regarding levels of public trust and confidence in the justice system. This provides important context to the analysis of the other 12 justice indicators.

The justice indicators analysed in this paper are as follows:



Each of these indicators is discussed in detail in the following sections of this paper.

The Centre for Justice and Law Reform intends to revisit this project periodically and may expand the scope to incorporate other elements of the justice system. One part of the system that has not been analysed in this publication, for example, is the issue of unmet legal needs. Unmet legal needs arise when justiciable problems are not recognised, solutions cannot be pursued, and / or people encounter additional stresses due to difficulties in accessing the justice system. This can happen when people cannot access lawyers or legal advice, or when they are unaware of their legal rights, or that their issue may be justiciable.

Unmet legal needs are clearly an access to justice issue. However, economic ramifications also stem from unmet legal needs, with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimating that they result in between 0.5% and 3% loss of GDP annually.<sup>2</sup> This is, therefore, an important issue. However, it lies outside the scope of analysis of this publication.

Adequate spending across all components of the justice system is essential to ensure the balanced, effective, and equitable administration of justice. While policing plays a critical role in maintaining public safety and enforcing the law in our communities – both important aspects of justice – the courts and prison system are equally vital institutions in upholding fair procedures, delivering fair outcomes, and ensuring compliance with the law.

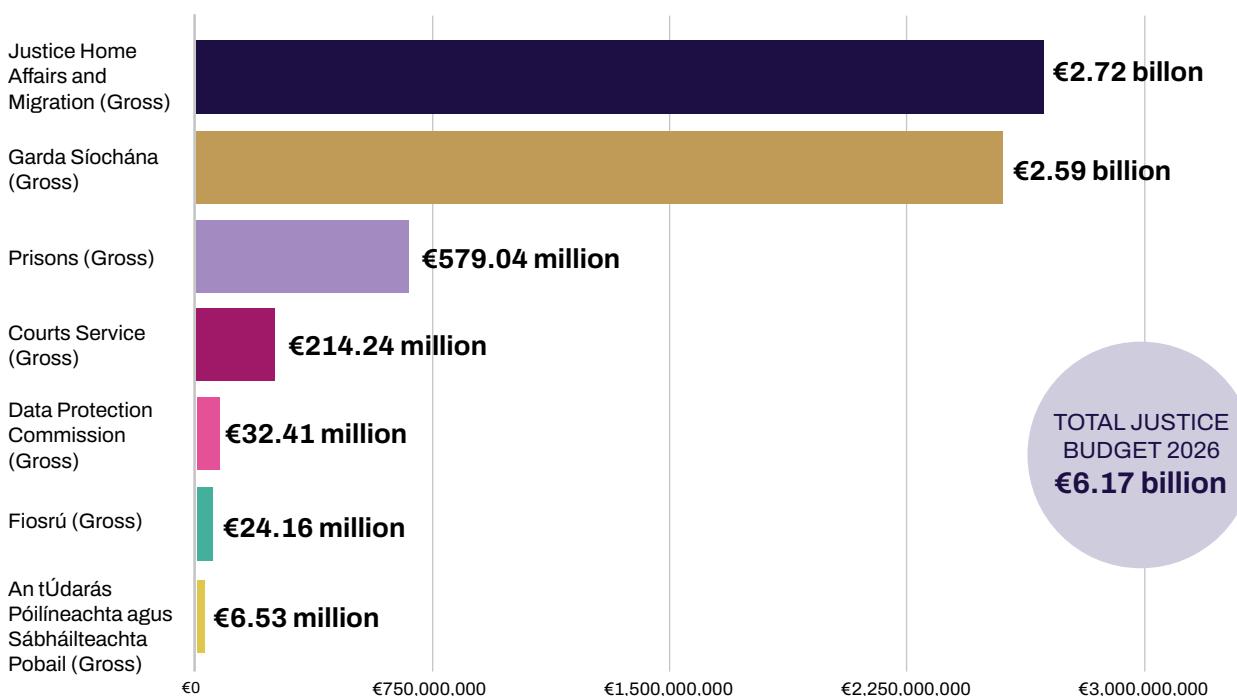
<sup>2</sup> OECD, *OECD Framework and Good Practice Principles for People-Centred Justice* (OECD Publishing, Paris 2021) at 15, available at <<https://doi.org/10.1787/cdc3bde7-en>>.

The Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration's budget for 2026 is €6.17 billion. Of this budget, €2.59 billion is allocated to An Garda Síochána, while €214.24 million is allocated to the courts, and €579.04 million to the Irish Prison Service. This means that 42% of the justice budget for 2026 is allocated to An Garda Síochána. The Courts Service's budget is 3.47% of the justice budget and the Prison Service's is 9.39% of the budget. These different funding allocations are illustrated in the chart below.

Each of the budgets discussed (for policing, the courts, and prisons) includes capital expenditure. Capital expenditure is allocated to fund long-term assets, such as the development of buildings or infrastructure. This means that the budgetary figures that are analysed in this paper include money that is allocated towards both the day-to-day running costs, and the funding of long-term assets and projects.

Capital expenditure constitutes 33.29% of the Courts Service's annual budget for 2026.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, 11.73% of the Irish Prison Service's budget and 6.71% of the budget of An Garda Síochána's budget comprise capital expenditure for 2026. The Courts Service's gross budget figure does not include judicial salaries, which are funded separately through the Exchequer, and which are managed by the Department of Finance. However, these salary figures have been included within the 'Courts Expenditure' indicator to give a more complete picture of the costs of running the courts. Capital funding for the Department of Justice decreased from €473 million in 2025 (8% of the justice budget) to €390 million (6% of the justice budget) in 2026.

### The Justice Budget 2026



Source: Where Your Money Goes<sup>4</sup>

The Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Gross) funding in the chart above refers to the Justice Vote, which covers the departmental civil service and immigration services.

<sup>3</sup> Website of the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/press-releases/minister-jim-ocallaghan-secures-record-allocation-of-over-617-billion-for-the-justice-sector-in-budget-2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Where Your Money Goes: Justice' (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.whereyourmoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

An tÚdarás Póilíneachta agus Sábháilteachta Pobail is the official title of the Policing and Community Safety Authority (formerly the Policing Authority).<sup>5</sup>

Government departmental budgets announced on Budget Day do not always reflect the actual costs that arise during the year. Departments may seek additional funding through Supplementary Estimates, which must be approved by Dáil Éireann, typically having been examined by the relevant Oireachtas committee. For example, in November 2025, a supplementary sum of up to €20.42 million was approved to cover salaries and expenses of An Garda Síochána.<sup>6</sup> A supplementary sum of up to €1,000 was approved for the Courts Service, and a supplementary sum of up to €27.86 million was approved for the Irish Prison Service.<sup>7</sup>

## Methodology

The Centre for Justice and Law Reform has endeavoured to employ as objective an assessment of the selected justice indicators as possible. Publicly available information from official sources has been used to assess developments in Ireland.

Rates of increase, per-population measures, and similar calculations were derived from publicly available data, and can be verified using the cited sources.

Where two sets of information have been combined (for example, a figure might contain information made available by the European Union that has been compared with information sourced from the Central Statistics Office (the CSO)), this has been clearly signposted.

The traffic light assessment of each justice indicator is predominantly based on how Ireland performs compared with other jurisdictions, generally Member States of either the European Union or the Council of Europe, depending on the availability of relevant data. Some of the traffic-light assessments are influenced by the fact that Ireland does not currently make sufficient information available.



**Red** signifies that Ireland has deviated by more than 10% from the European Union or Council of Europe average in the most recent year for which data are available.



**Amber** signifies Ireland has deviated by between 3% and 10% from the European Union or Council of Europe average in the most recent year for which data are available.



**Green** indicates that the State is on a par with, or has deviated by, up to 3% from the European Union or Council of Europe average in the most recent year for which data are available.



A **white** rating has been given where the data that are currently available are insufficient to enable an informed assessment.

5 Section 121 of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024.

6 Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration Jim O'Callaghan. Dáil Deb 19 November 2025 vol 1075 col 6 <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2025-11-19/28/>> accessed 25 November 2025.

7 Dáil Deb 19 November 2025 vol 1075 col 6 <<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/2025-11-19/28/>> accessed 25 November 2025.

Where relevant data are not available for comparison, from either European Union or Council of Europe sources, Ireland has generally been compared with jurisdictions of comparative population sizes and other common law jurisdictions.

There are some limitations in comparing Ireland's data against the averages of EU and Council of Europe Member States. The average figures are comprised of statistics from a variety of jurisdictions, not all of which are similar to Ireland in their size and socio-economic background. The data from larger Member States or from those that are less developed than others, for example, may disproportionately influence averages. Where possible, additional context has been included in the analysis to address this. Particular features of Ireland's legal system (such as its common law tradition) have been identified where they could complicate direct comparison. Additionally, the departure of the United Kingdom from the EU in recent years has impacted EU data: EU data prior to 2021 include the UK, while data from 1 January 2021 onwards do not.

Although not a perfect comparison, comparing Ireland with European averages and standards is valuable. As an EU Member State, Ireland's legal system is heavily influenced by EU law. The EU has worked for decades to establish justice standards by which all EU Member States are measured (such as the EU Justice Scoreboard and Rule of Law reports). These standards are well-known measurements in Ireland, and the European averages provide a useful benchmark against which to compare Ireland.

Eurostat's criminal statistics are compiled from data voluntarily submitted by EU Member States. There is no EU regulation that standardises national recording practices for criminal statistics, and criminal justice systems differ across the Union. Reporting practices, legal definitions, counting rules, and scopes differ across jurisdictions and may change over time, producing divergences that can affect cross-jurisdictional comparison and trend analysis. Consequently, comparisons should be interpreted cautiously.

This project primarily compares empirical data. Therefore, less emphasis has been placed on contextual factors, such as social, political, or historical influences. In-depth qualitative analyses of factors, such as perceptions of justice, the economic conditions of those seeking access to justice, and the role of the State lie outside of the main focus of this publication. In some instances, however, important contextual information has been included where necessary and appropriate. Where assertions of a more qualitative nature have been made, these have been supported by relevant material. This publication should be viewed as a starting point for further qualitative discussions rather than an end point with final recommendations.

Where meaningful comparison has been difficult to achieve, this has been acknowledged within the analysis or analytical boundaries. In many instances, this is due to an absence of adequate data in Ireland. In other instances, this is due to diverging methodological approaches towards the recording and classification of information.

In selecting the indicators for the first iteration of the Justice Indicators project, a range of criteria were applied to ensure a meaningful and representative foundation from which to build. Indicators relating to funding were selected, as they serve as useful benchmarks for comparing spending across different aspects of the justice system. Garda numbers were also included, given their

prominence in public discourse regarding justice. Trust-related indicators were included as trust is fundamental to the effectiveness and legitimacy of the justice system.

The project is designed to be iterative, with additional indicators to be incorporated over time; this initial set provides a solid baseline. Care was taken to represent different pillars of the justice system and to include key indicators that reflect each pillar's core functions, such as financial inputs and staffing, the speed of processes (e.g., disposition and case clearance times), effectiveness (e.g., detection rates, crime rates, average sentence lengths, and judges' caseloads), and respect for rights (e.g., levels of prison overcrowding and the use of remand).

It is important to highlight that some of the findings in relation to 2020 and 2021, in particular, may have been influenced by behavioural or societal changes arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and associated lockdowns and restrictions. The impact of the pandemic may explain some of the variances between those and other years. For example, the increase in case clearance rates during 2020 may be due to the pandemic disrupting normal court operations, particularly the ability to convene juries. This disruption led to a reduction in the number of trials that could proceed. With fewer cases advancing to full trial, some of the existing backlog was cleared through alternative mechanisms, such as settlements, adjournments, or administrative resolutions.

While the traffic-light assessment tool is useful for highlighting the extent to which Ireland deviates from, or aligns with, European Union or Council of Europe Member States, it is a blunt tool. As such, it does not allow a large degree of nuance to be included within the final rating. The analytical boundaries and analysis sections are intended to provide further insight into how the final traffic light ratings were determined.



# Trust in the Justice System







## Trust in the Justice System

Trust refers to the extent to which the general public perceives the justice system to be trustworthy, fair, and independent. This can extend to confidence in institutions, their procedures, and outcomes.

While trust is an abstract concept and difficult to quantify, it is relevant to an empirical assessment of whether justice is ‘working’ in this jurisdiction. Public perceptions of fairness can have an impact on people’s willingness to report crime, engage with the courts, or abide by the law. This can, in turn, affect measurable outcomes, including, for example, the numbers of reported crime incidents and the number of matters initiated in the courts.

Similarly, high public trust in justice institutions may play a role in shaping reform initiatives and resource allocation intended to enhance the effectiveness of the justice system.

Notwithstanding methodological limitations, high public confidence in the independence of the judicial system, or in the effectiveness of the prison system, serves as an empirical indicator that these institutions are perceived as impartial and accountable.

Public trust in institutions of justice is earned over time, but can be eroded quickly if institutions fail to act in a transparent, responsive, or fair manner. Therefore, a continuous assessment of public trust in the justice system can be useful. A reduction in trust can be an early indicator of problems that are not yet apparent from empirical data. It can also prompt public debate and further investigation into inequalities, unfairness, poor practice, or communication failures within the justice system.

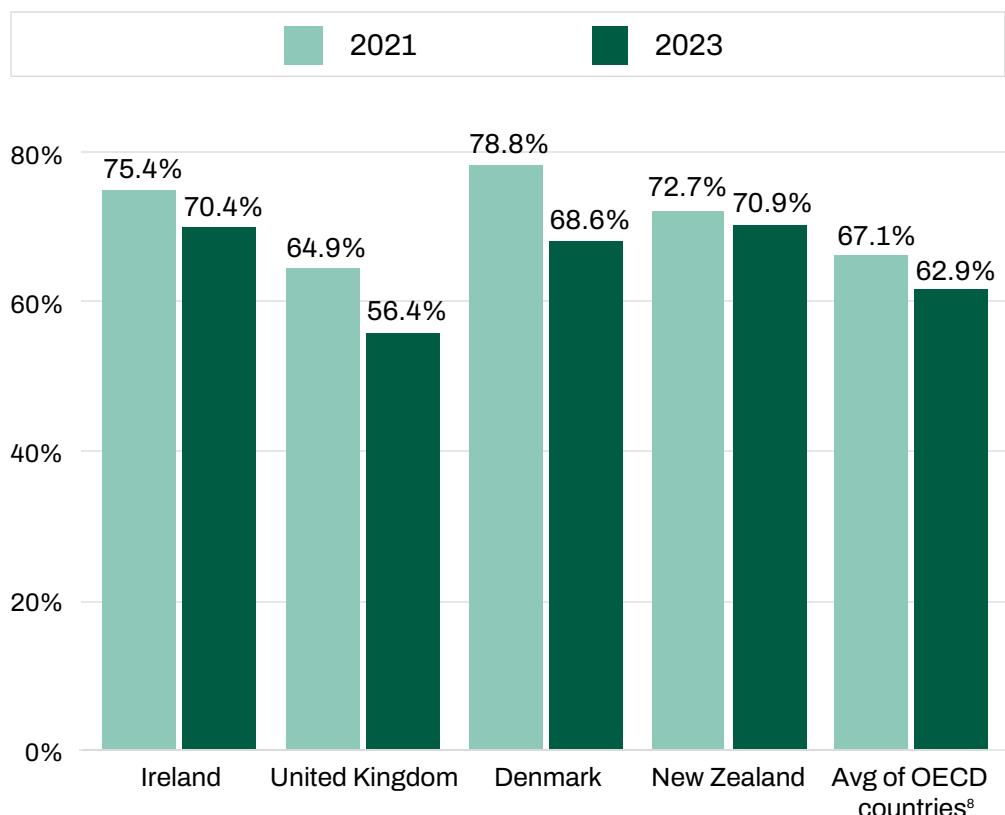
It is important to acknowledge that both trust and confidence are inherently abstract concepts. As such, they cannot be measured with empirical precision. For that reason, caution should be exercised when interpreting and relying on the justice indicators presented in this section of the publication.

## Trust in An Garda Síochána

This justice indicator refers to the percentage of the population that has trust in Ireland's national police service.

The figures presented in Figure 1 are drawn from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) *Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions*, conducted in 2021 and 2023. Figure 1 sets out both the OECD average levels of trust and the public's trust in the police services in Ireland, the United Kingdom, Denmark, and New Zealand. Trust was assessed on a scale from 0 to 10, with scores from 6 and above indicating that respondents expressed trust in the police.

**Figure 1: Percentage of people who rated their trust in the police between 6 and 10, on a scale of 0 to 10**



Sources: The Central Statistics Office Trust Survey,<sup>9</sup> OECD Survey of Trust in Public Institutions<sup>10</sup>

As Figure 1 indicates, the level of trust in An Garda Síochána was comparatively high in both 2021 and 2023. In both years, trust in the Gardaí was higher than across participating OECD countries on average.

<sup>8</sup> 30 OECD countries participated in the 2023 Trust Survey, and 22 OECD countries participated in 2022; OECD, *Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 10 July 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Trust Survey October 2023' (CSO, 10 July 2024) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-trsu/trustsurveyoctober2023/howtrustingarewe/#:~:text=Trust%20in%20the%20Garda%C3%AD%20and,%25%20and%2074.9%25%20respectively>> accessed 4 November 2025.

<sup>10</sup> OECD, *Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 10 July 2024).

In 2021, 75.40% of the Irish public indicated that they trusted the Gardaí. The average across participating countries was 67.10%, which is 8.3 percentage points lower than Ireland's figure.

In 2023, 70.40% of the Irish public indicated that they trusted the Gardaí. While this is a reduction on the 2021 figure, it is 7.5 percentage points higher than the OECD average for that year (62.90%).

In 2021, 64.90% of the UK population trusted its police force, which is 10.5 percentage points lower than the share of people in Ireland who indicated their trust.

In 2023, this had reduced to 56.40% of the population trusting the UK's police force. That is 14 percentage points lower than the figure for Ireland.

In 2021, Denmark, which has a comparable population to Ireland, reported public trust in its police that was 3.4 percentage points higher than the level reported for Ireland. In 2023, 68.60% of the Danish population reported that it trusted its police (2.2 percentage points lower than for Ireland). This represented a reduction in public levels of trust in the Danish police of 10.2 percentage points within two years.

New Zealand reported lower levels of public trust in its police than Ireland in 2021. In 2021, 72.70% of people indicated trust (2.7 percentage points lower than for Ireland). This changed in 2023, when 70.90% indicated their trust in the New Zealand police, which is very similar to Ireland's trust level that year.

In addition to the OECD surveys, An Garda Síochána commissions an annual public attitudes survey that employs the same scaling system as the OECD to rate public trust in the national police service. These figures are set out, below, in Figure 2.

Figure 2 demonstrates that An Garda Síochána reported high levels of public trust between 2019 and 2023, with the exception of 2020, for which data are unavailable. The lowest reported level of trust during this period was 89% in 2023, while the highest level (91%) was reported in both 2019 and 2021.

**Figure 2: Percentage of people who rated their level of trust in An Garda Síochána between 6 and 10, on a 0-10 scale, in the annual public attitudes survey.**

|                            | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 |
|----------------------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Trust in An Garda Síochána | 91%  | N/A  | 91%  | 90%  | 89%  |

Source: An Garda Síochána General Public Attitudes Survey<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/office-of-corporate-communications/press-releases/2024/december/peoples-perception-of-an-garda-siochanas-work-in-their-community-remains-positive-garda-public-attitudes-survey-2023.html> accessed 04 November 2025.

## Analysis

According to OECD surveys, Ireland demonstrates comparatively high levels of public trust in its national police service. However, the percentage of people who indicated that they trusted An Garda Síochána decreased between 2021 and 2023 (from 75.40% to 70.40%). Further data are required to assess whether this is representative of a downward trend in trust levels.

Trust in the police was higher in Ireland than in both the UK and Denmark in 2023. Trust in An Garda Síochána was higher than in New Zealand's police in 2021. However, in 2023, trust in the police in New Zealand was higher than in Ireland.

The levels of trust reported by An Garda Síochána (Figure 2) are higher than those reported by the OECD (Figure 1). For example, in 2021, An Garda Síochána reported that 91% of the population trusted the Gardaí, which is 15.6 percentage points greater than reported in the OECD survey. In 2023, the Gardaí reported a trust level of 89%, which is 18.6 percentage points greater than the OECD survey.

## Analytical Boundaries

Some caution should be exercised when relying on the data reported in the OECD trust surveys. First, since data are available for two years only, it was not possible to identify discernible trends. Secondly, participants surveyed were asked to indicate the extent to which they trusted a variety of different stakeholders by selecting a number between 0 to 10. In accordance with the OECD's recommended groupings, responses were classified as follows:

- **0 – 4: Do not trust**
- **5: Neutral**
- **6 – 10: Trust**

This means, therefore, that a trust level of 6 was recorded as equivalent to a trust level of 10.

Thirdly, 22 countries participated in the OECD's 2021 survey, while 30 participated in the 2023 survey. This means that the findings were not directly comparable across both years.

Additionally, the OECD surveys did not provide a formal definition of 'trust', which may cause discrepancies between its trust ratings and those reported in studies conducted by individual jurisdictions. Such differences are particularly evident when national studies define trust in terms of perceived confidence, fairness, or independence of the police.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, participants in the OECD surveys were asked to evaluate their trust across a range of public services and institutions. This framing may have influenced how respondents assessed their trust in the police, as their ratings could have been shaped by comparative judgements. Being prompted to consider trust in the police alongside other institutions may have led participants to contextualise their responses relative to their perceptions of those other organisations.

The disparity between the trust levels reported by the OECD and by An Garda Síochána present challenges in accurately evaluating how the general public perceives and expresses trust in law enforcement across Ireland. The surveys commissioned by An Garda Síochána, although carried

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<sup>12</sup> OECD, *Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results* (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 10 July 2024).

out by IPSOS, are not fully independent from the organisation. The garda surveys differentiated between trust and satisfaction. The satisfaction levels reported were between 15% and 20% lower than the trust levels.<sup>13</sup>

In the UK, different surveys have also yielded different results. For example, the 2023 Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accounting survey found that 51% of the population believed the police in England and Wales were 'doing a good job'.<sup>14</sup> In the same year, a Government survey found that 68% of the population had confidence in their local police service.<sup>15</sup> In 2024, a police college survey for England and Wales showed that 55% of people were satisfied with the police.<sup>16</sup>

Participating countries in OECD surveys could either manage their own data collection (through their national statistical office) or participate in centralised data collection coordinated by the OECD. While the majority of countries opted for the latter, Ireland's information was based on data collected by the Central Statistics Office (CSO).

The Policing and Community Safety Authority has cautioned against comparing different studies on public trust in the police, noting that factors such as differences in survey timing, measurement scales, and research methods can distort the findings.<sup>17</sup>

Focusing solely on trust levels of the general population does not provide insight into differing views among subgroups. Trust levels might vary depending on age, location, socio-economic status, or previous interaction with the national police service. For example, a 2025 study commissioned by the Policing and Community Safety Authority (with drafting assistance from the Irish Network Against Racism and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties) highlighted that there is growing research that members of the Traveller Community and Roma experience discrimination from the Gardaí.<sup>18,19</sup>

The rating for this indicator is based on the fact that, in 2023, Ireland reported a 70.40% level of trust in An Garda Síochána, which was 15.30 percentage points greater than the average levels of trust reported by all countries surveyed by the OECD that year. As a percentage deviation, trust in the Gardaí was 30.13% greater than the OECD average. Although Ireland deviated by more than 10% from the OECD average, which should lead to a red traffic light indication according to the criteria set out in the methodology chapter, the assessment is green because it is self-evident that higher levels of trust are a positive finding.

### Traffic Light Indicator: Green

<sup>13</sup> An Garda Síochána, 'Garda Public Attitudes Survey 2023' (AGS, 3 December 2024) <<https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/office-of-corporate-communications/press-releases/2024/december/peoples-perception-of-an-garda-siochana-work-in-their-community-remains-positive-garda-public-attitudes-survey-2023.html>> accessed 4 November 2025.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart Hoddinott et al, *Performance Tracker 2023: Public Services as the UK Approaches a General Election* (Chartered Institute for Public Finance and Accounting, 2023) 202.

<sup>15</sup> Office for National Statistics, 'Confidence in the Local Police' (UK Government, 17 October 2024) <<https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/crime-justice-and-the-law/policing/confidence-in-the-local-police/latest/>> accessed 4 November 2025.

<sup>16</sup> College of Policing, 'Trends: Trust in Police Fairness' (College of Policing, 22 April 2025) <<https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/improving-public-confidence-police/trends>> accessed 4 November 2025.

<sup>17</sup> Policing and Community Safety Authority 'Measuring Trust in the Police: an International Comparative Perspective' (24 July 2019) <[https://www.policingauthority.ie/assets/uploads/documents/Measuring\\_trust\\_in\\_the\\_police\\_an\\_international\\_comparative\\_perspective.pdf](https://www.policingauthority.ie/assets/uploads/documents/Measuring_trust_in_the_police_an_international_comparative_perspective.pdf)> accessed 4 November 2025.

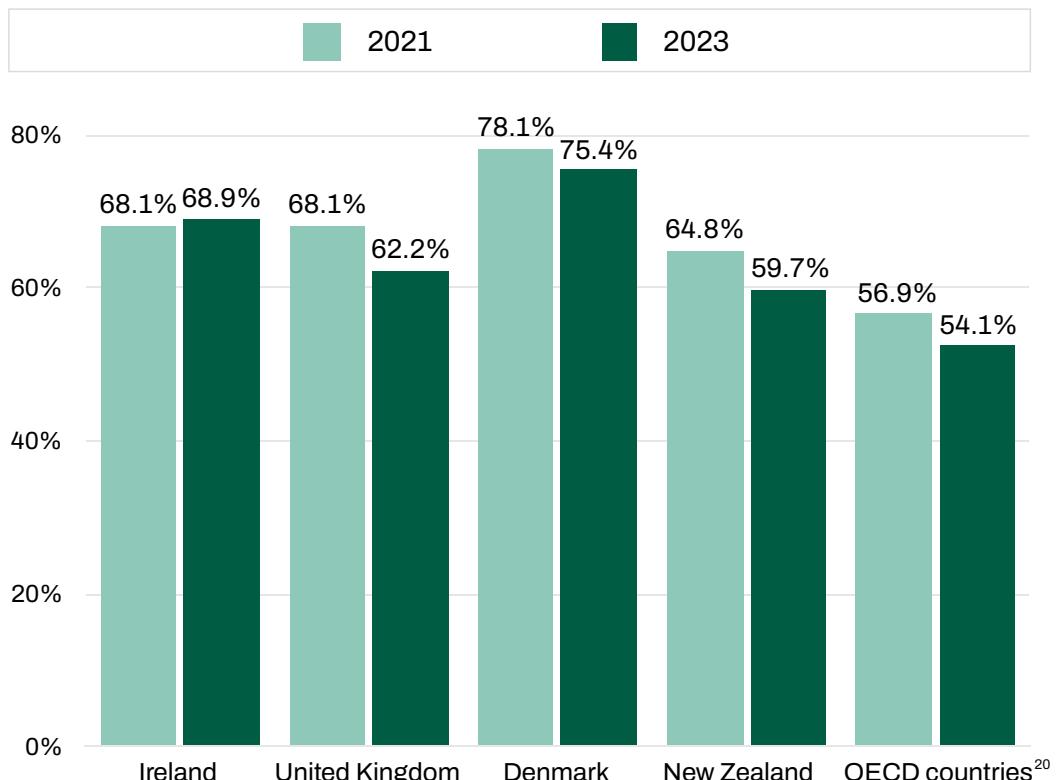
<sup>18</sup> Irish Network Against Racism and Irish Council for Civil Liberties, *Policing and Racial Discrimination in Ireland: A Community and Rights Perspective* (2024) 7.

<sup>19</sup> Sindy Joyce et al, *Irish Travellers' Access to Justice* (European Centre for the Study of Hate, 2022) <[https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/36509/1\\_ITAJ\\_Final.pdf](https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/36509/1_ITAJ_Final.pdf)> accessed 13 November 2025; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Travellers in Ireland: Key Results from the Roma and Traveller Survey 2019* (EU Publications Office, 2020) <[https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra\\_uploads/fra-2020-roma-and-travellers-survey-country-sheet-ireland\\_en.pdf](https://fra.europa.eu/sites/default/files/fra_uploads/fra-2020-roma-and-travellers-survey-country-sheet-ireland_en.pdf)> accessed 13 November 2025.

## Trust in the Courts and Judicial System

Figure 3 indicates that, in both 2021 and 2023, the trust level in the Irish courts and judicial system was higher than the average level of trust across all OECD countries. Ireland's trust level was also higher than in the United Kingdom and New Zealand, while Denmark's trust level was higher. Further, Ireland's trust level improved from 2021 to 2023, while the trust level for each of these individual jurisdictions and across the OECD reduced.

**Figure 3: Percentage of people who rated their level of trust in the courts and judicial system between 6 and 10, on a scale of 0-10**



Sources: Central Statistics Office Trust Survey,<sup>21</sup> OECD Survey of Trust in Public Institutions<sup>22</sup>

In 2021, 68.10% of the Irish population had trust in the Irish courts and judicial system. This figure increased to 68.90% in 2023, by 0.80 percentage points.

In 2021, the average level of trust in the courts across the OECD was 56.90%. That was 11.2 percentage points lower than the trust level reported for the Irish courts. The average trust level reduced in 2023 to 54.10%, which was 14.80 percentage points lower than that reported for Ireland.

As is evident from Figure 3, the United Kingdom and Ireland had the same level of public trust in their respective courts in 2021 (68.10%). Trust in the UK's courts reduced in 2023 by 5.90 percentage points, whereas Ireland's trust level increased by 0.80 percentage points.

<sup>20</sup> 30 OECD countries participated in the 2023 trust survey, and 22 OECD countries participated in 2022. OECD, *Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results* (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 10 July 2024).

<sup>21</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Trust Survey October 2023' (CSO, 10 July 2024) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-trsu/trustsurveyoctober2023/howtrustingarewe/#:~:text=Trust%20in%20the%20Garda%C3%AD%20and,%25%20and%2074.9%25%20respectively>> accessed 4 November 2025.

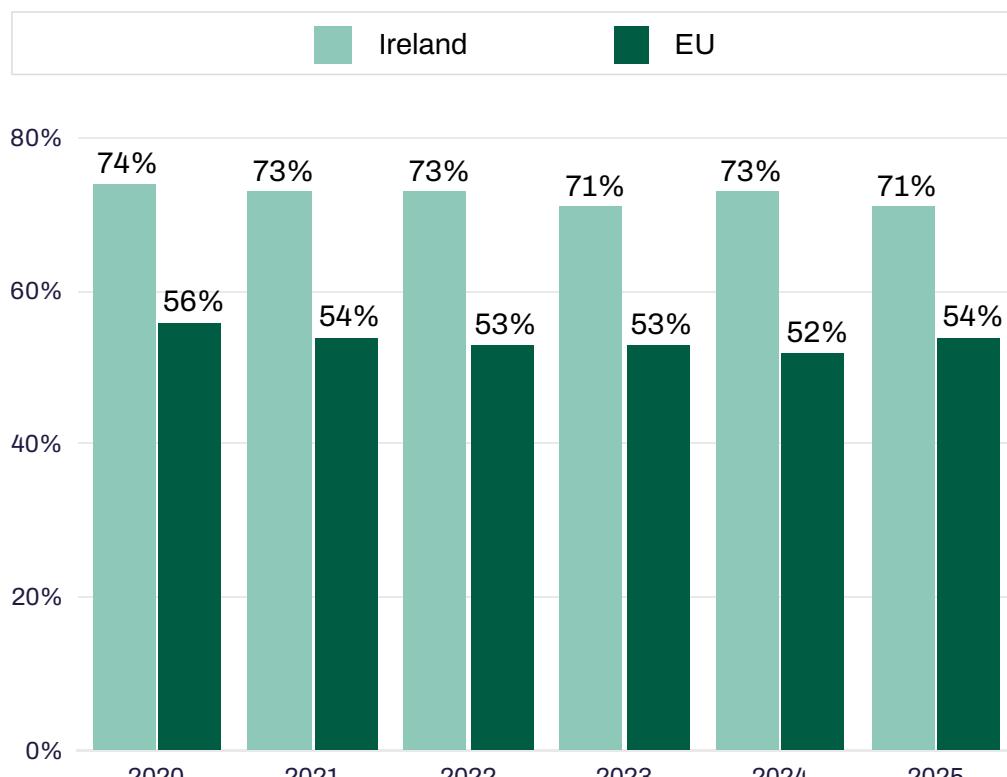
<sup>22</sup> OECD, *Survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions – 2024 Results* (Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 10 July 2024).

Trust in New Zealand's courts was 3.3 percentage points lower than Ireland in 2021 (at 64.80%). Its trust rating reduced by 5.10 percentage points in 2023 to 59.70%. That means its trust rating was 9.20 percentage points lower than that for Ireland in 2023.

Among the individual jurisdictions reviewed, Denmark scored the highest in both 2021 and 2023, with respective trust ratings of 78.10% and 75.40%. Trust in the Danish courts decreased from 2021 to 2023 by 2.70 percentage points.

Eurobarometer surveys are the official means through which EU institutions monitor public opinion across the EU on a variety of topics. One of the topics monitored is the perceived independence of courts and judiciary. Figure 4 presents data from these independence surveys. While the perception of independence is not a direct equivalent of trust, it can influence how trust is formed and maintained.

**Figure 4: Percentage of people who rated the independence of the judiciary and the courts in Ireland as high or relatively high**



Source: Eurobarometer<sup>23</sup>

According to Eurobarometer, between 71% and 74% of the Irish public rated the independence of the Irish judiciary and courts as either high or relatively high. The most recent data available are from 2025, with 71% of people rating the independence as high or relatively high.

For each year from 2020 to 2025, Ireland scored higher than the EU average. In 2020, Ireland was 18 percentage points greater than the EU average (74% for Ireland and 56% across the EU). In 2025, Ireland's independence rating was 17 percentage points greater than the EU average (71% for Ireland and 54% across the EU).

<sup>23</sup> Eurobarometer, *Flash Eurobarometers: Perceived Independence of the National Justice Systems in the EU Among the General Public* (May 2022) <<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2752>> accessed 4 November 2025.

## Analysis

Overall, public perceptions of judicial independence in Ireland appear to be strong, notwithstanding the limited dataset available. Levels of trust in the Irish courts and judicial system exceeded the OECD average in 2021 and 2023. While some OECD countries, such as Denmark, reported higher trust levels than Ireland, trust levels have risen in Ireland, whereas they have reduced in Denmark. Across the OECD as a whole, average trust in judicial systems decreased by 2.80 percentage points between 2021 and 2023, while it increased in Ireland by 0.80 percentage points. Not only did trust in judicial systems across the OECD reduce while Ireland's increased, it reduced from a level that was already lower than Ireland's, widening the gap by 3.60 percentage points.

## Analytical Boundaries

The data regarding trust in the courts and the judicial system are based on the same OECD survey as those that pertain to An Garda Síochána, which are discussed within the Trust in An Garda Síochána indicator. The same methodological limitations therefore apply.

At present, no general population study tracks long-term trends in public trust in the Irish courts or judicial system. Some research focusing on the experiences of particular groups, however, has produced findings that differ from those reported in those of the OECD surveys. For instance, and as discussed, a 2022 study of members of the Traveller Community indicated that many respondents expressed distrust in the courts and in their prospects for fair treatment.<sup>24</sup> These results suggest that levels of trust may vary across different socio-economic or demographic groups.

Eurobarometer data provide useful insights into public perceptions of the independence of the courts and the judiciary, but they are not fully comparable over time. That is because the methodology changed within the period observed. Changes in methodology (such as fluctuations in the number of interviews conducted in Ireland, ranging from 500 to 1,000 over the past five years) may limit the utility of year-on-year comparisons.

Public assessment of the courts, whether in terms of trust or perceived independence, do not necessarily correspond to actual levels of engagement with the judicial system.

High levels of public trust and perceived independence of the courts and judicial system in Ireland is a positive signal. These figures should not be interpreted in isolation, however, as they do not, on their own, indicate whether the justice system is functioning effectively.

The rating for this indicator is based on the fact that, in 2023, Ireland reported a 68.90% level of trust in the courts and judicial system. This was 6 percentage points greater than the average levels of trust reported by all countries surveyed by the OECD that year. As a percentage deviation, trust in the Irish courts was 9.50% than the OECD average. Although Ireland deviates by between 3% and 10% from the OECD average, which should lead to an amber traffic-light indication according to the criteria set out in the methodology chapter, the assessment is green because it is self-evident that higher levels of trust are a positive finding.

**Traffic Light Indicator:** Green

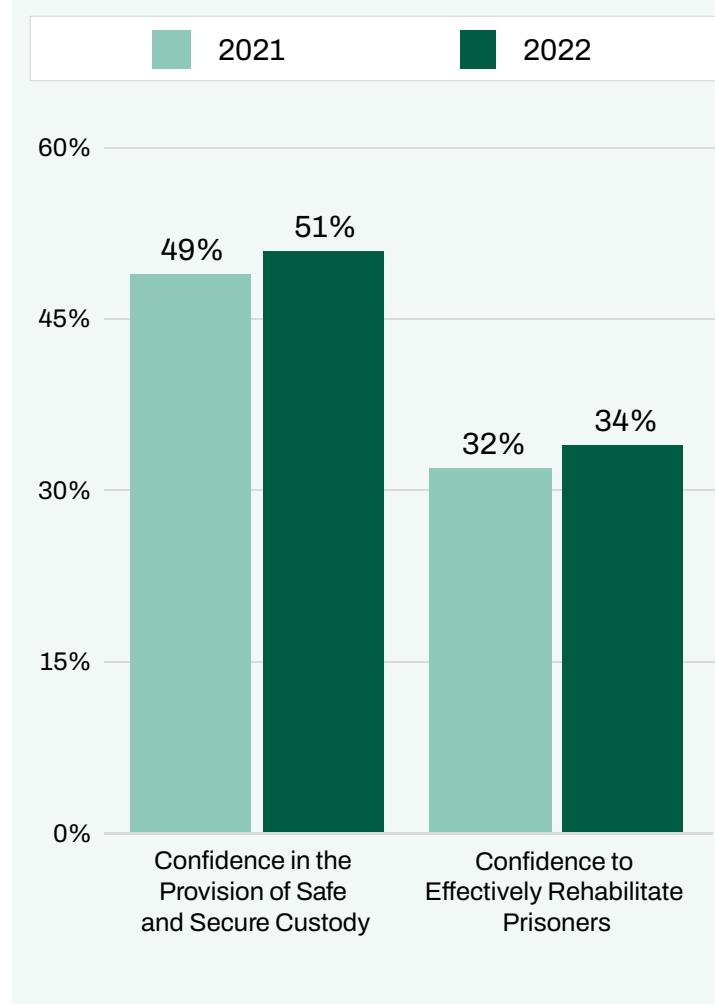
<sup>24</sup> Mary Rose Gearty et al, 'Irish Travellers Access to Justice: Are You the Fairest of them All?' (2024) 8(2) *Irish Judicial Studies Journal* 94.

## Confidence in the Effectiveness of the Prison Service

Data regarding the level of public trust in Irish prisons are not currently available. However, limited data are available in respect of public confidence in the effectiveness of the Irish Prison Service, which is an approximate indicator of trust.

Confidence in the effectiveness of the Prison Service refers to the extent to which members of the public are confident that the Prison Service provides safe and secure custody for offenders and is effective in rehabilitating offenders.

**Figure 5: Percentage of people who rated their confidence in aspects of the Prison Service's work as 'high' or 'very high'**



Source: *Criminal Justice Public Attitudes Survey 2021*<sup>25</sup> and *2022*<sup>26</sup>

The figures in Figure 5 were taken from Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration's *Criminal Justice Public Attitudes Surveys* (2021 and 2022). This involved in-person interviews with a representative sample of more than 1,500 respondents. Respondents were asked to rank their confidence, on a five-point scale, in the Department of Justice and in specific criminal justice agencies, including the Irish Prison Service. Where respondents were either 'confident' or 'very confident' in the Prison Service, they were recorded as having confidence in the agency.

In 2021, 49% of respondents indicated that they were confident that the Irish Prison Service provided safe and secure custody for offenders. This figure increased to 51% in 2022. Confidence levels in the Prison Service's ability to effectively rehabilitate prisoners were lower, at 32% in 2021 and 34% in 2022.

25 Department of Justice, *Criminal Justice Public Attitudes Survey 2021* (Department of Justice, 2021).

26 Department of Justice, *Criminal Justice Public Attitudes Survey 2022* (Department of Justice, 2022).

## Analysis

Due to the limited data that are currently available, it was difficult to fully analyse this indicator. Based on the information available, it would appear that approximately half of respondents expressed confidence in the Prison Service to provide safe and secure custody for offenders. The level of confidence reduced to one in three in respect of the agency's effectiveness at rehabilitating offenders.

As the two metrics measured are central to the Prison Service's functions, the reported confidence levels were low. More up-to-date data are required in respect of public trust and/or confidence in prisons, both domestically and at the European level. Accordingly, recommendations at the end of this publication call on the Council of Europe and the Department of Justice, in collaboration with the Irish Prison Service, to establish systematic and regular data collection mechanisms to measure public and stakeholder trust in prisons.

## Analytical Boundaries

The *Criminal Justice Public Attitudes Survey* data should be interpreted with an awareness of their methodological limitations. First, the findings are based on in-person interviews that explored general perceptions of the criminal justice system. Confidence in the Prison Service must be understood in the broader context of questions regarding sentencing and public understanding of justice. Notably, separate data revealed that 29% of respondents had a clear understanding of the Prison Service's responsibilities. This low level of understanding may have influenced confidence ratings.

Secondly, the survey was conducted twice, most recently in 2022. A limited sample of two years' data is insufficient to identify any discernible trends in public confidence over time.

Thirdly, there are no direct international comparators available. Neither the EU nor the Council of Europe compiles statistics in relation to public confidence (or trust) in prison services. Additionally, although criminal justice public attitude surveys have been conducted in the UK, these have focused on sentencing rather than on public confidence in the prison service.<sup>27</sup>

The rating for this indicator is based on the fact that it is not currently possible to benchmark Ireland against other jurisdictions due to a lack of relevant and comparable data.

Traffic Light Indicator: White 

<sup>27</sup> For example, Nicola Archer et al, *Public Knowledge of and Confidence in the Criminal Justice System and Sentencing: 2022 Research* (Sentencing Council, 2022).



# Policing







# Policing

## Policing Expenditure

Policing expenditure refers to the annual funding allocated to An Garda Síochána (for Garda operations, staffing, infrastructure, and related services) from Ireland's national budget.

The budget for An Garda Síochána is €2.59 billion in 2026. In 2019, the budget was €1.79 billion. This constitutes a budget increase of €800.66 million, or 44.72%, from 2019 to 2026.

**Figure 6: Ireland's policing budget from 2019 to 2026 compared with the rate of inflation during the same period**



Sources: Where Your Money Goes,<sup>30</sup> the Central Statistics Office Consumer Price Index,<sup>31</sup> the Central Bank of Ireland<sup>32</sup>

28 The rate of inflation for 2025 is based on the Consumer Price Index October 2025, which was the most up-to-date information available at the time of writing (December 2025). Central Statistics Office, *Consumer Price Index* (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpi/consumerpriceindexoctober2025/>> accessed 10 December 2025.

29 1.40% is the predicted headline inflation rate forecasted by the Central Bank of Ireland in its *Quarterly Bulletin (Quarter 3)* (18 September 2025) <<https://www.centralbank.ie/publication/quarterly-bulletins/quarterly-bulletin-q3-2025>> accessed 17 November 2025.

30 Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Where Your Money Goes: Justice' (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.wheremymoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

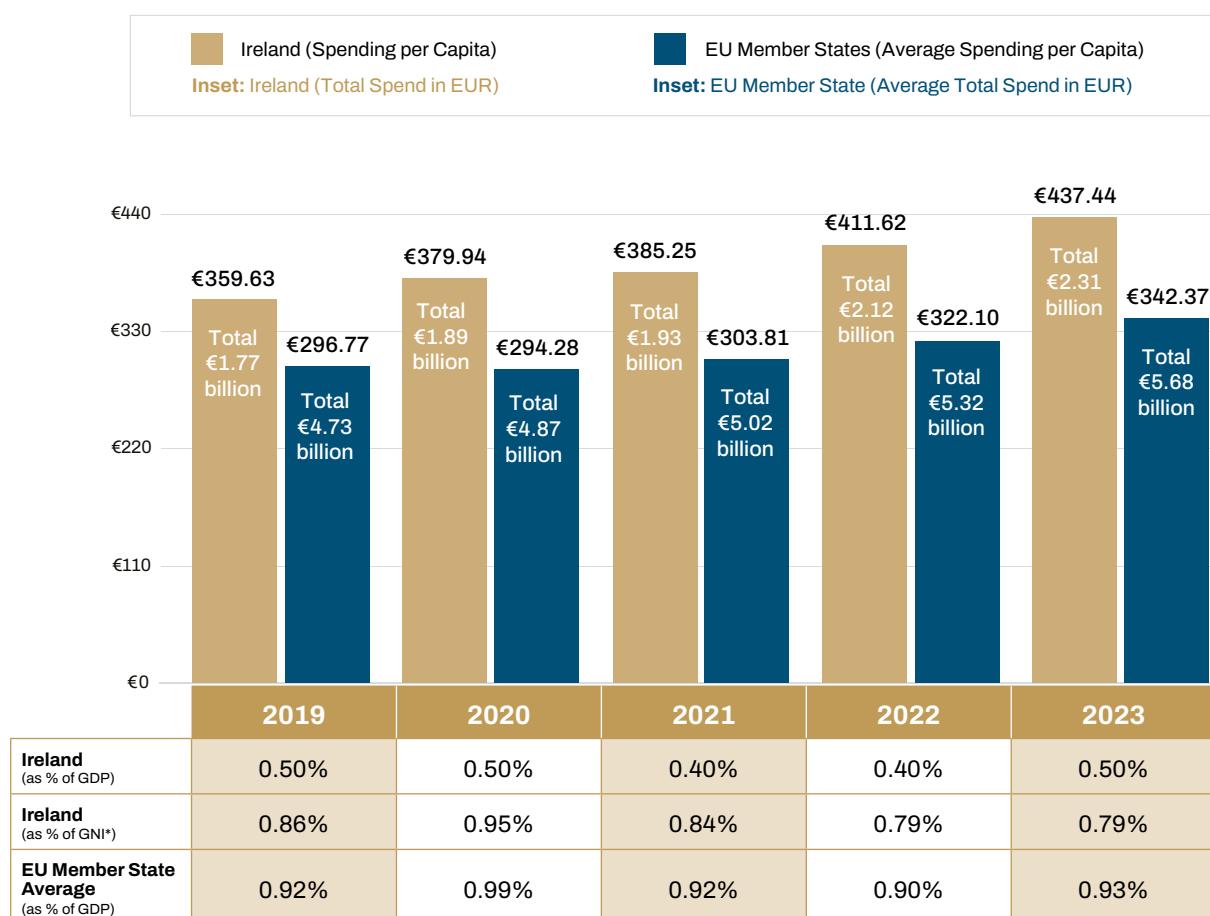
31 Central Statistics Office, *Consumer Price Index* (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/prices/consumerpriceindex/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

32 Central Bank of Ireland, 'Quarterly Bulletin (Quarter 3)' (18 September 2025) <<https://www.centralbank.ie/publication/quarterly-bulletins/quarterly-bulletin-q3-2025>> <[https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/projections/html/ecb.projections202509\\_ecbstaff~c0da697d54.en.html](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/press/projections/html/ecb.projections202509_ecbstaff~c0da697d54.en.html)> accessed 17 November 2025.

Figure 7 compares Ireland's general government expenditure on policing services with average spending across the 27 EU Member States (28 in 2019). It compares total spend, per capita spend, and spend as a percentage of GDP and GNI\*.

This Figure shows that Ireland's police spending per capita was higher than the EU average in each of the years examined. In 2023, for example, Ireland's per capita spend was €437.44. The average EU per capita spend that year was €342.37. That means that Ireland spent €95.07 more per capita than the EU average in 2023.

**Figure 7: Comparison between Ireland's general government expenditure on policing services with the average expenditure of EU Member States**



Sources: Eurostat,<sup>33</sup> the Central Statistics Office GNI\* and De-Globalised Results,<sup>34</sup> the Central Statistics Office's Population and Migration Estimates,<sup>35</sup> Census of Population 2022,<sup>36</sup> Eurostat<sup>37</sup>

33 Eurostat, 'General Government Expenditure on Police Services' (General Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG), 21 October 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov\\_10a\\_exp/default/Figure?lang=en&category=gov.gov\\_gfs10.gov\\_10a](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/Figure?lang=en&category=gov.gov_gfs10.gov_10a)> accessed 6 November 2025.

34 Central Statistics Office, 'GNI and De-Globalised Results' (Annual National Accounts 2023, 12 July 2024) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ana/annualnationalaccounts2023/gniandde-globalisedresults/>> accessed 25 July 2025.

35 Central Statistics Office, 'Population and Migration Estimates' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/populationandmigrationestimates/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

36 Central Statistics Office, 'Census of Population 2022' (Central Statistics Office, May 2023) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/censusofpopulation2022/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

37 Eurostat, 'Population on 1 January' (Eurostat, 14 October 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/Figure?lang=en&category=t\\_demo.t\\_demo.pop](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/Figure?lang=en&category=t_demo.t_demo.pop)> accessed 11 November 2025.

This budget allocation increased every year from 2019 to 2026. The annual rate of increase (set out in Figure 6) was generally higher than the rate of inflation, most notably in 2020. In 2021 and 2022 there was a deviation from this trend. The average annual rate of increase across the eight years was 5.19%.

As a percentage of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Ireland's police spending was also below the EU Member State average. In 2023, Ireland spent the equivalent of 0.50% of its GDP on policing services, while EU Member States spent an average of 0.93%.

When measured as a percentage of Ireland's adjusted Gross National Income (GNI\*), policing expenditure aligned more closely with the EU average. In 2023, for example, Ireland spent 0.79% of its GNI\* on policing services, compared with an EU average of 0.93% of GDP (a difference of 0.14 percentage points).

Figure 7 also demonstrates that, in total spending terms, Ireland spent less on policing services each year from 2019 to 2023 than the EU average. In 2023, Ireland spent €3.37 billion less than the EU average spend that year of €5.68 billion.

## Analysis

When Ireland's general government spending on policing services per capita is compared with EU spending, Ireland spent an average of €82.91 more per person between 2019 and 2023. This represents an annual average of 26.53% above the EU average per capita.

In 2023, the most recent year for which comparative data were available, Ireland's per capita spend was €95.07 higher than the EU average – a difference of 27.77%. The largest percentage gap occurred in 2020, when Ireland spent 29.11% more per person on policing services than the EU average (or €85.65 more person). The smallest percentage gap occurred in 2019, with Ireland spending 21.18% more per person than the EU average that year (or €62.86 more per person).

Ireland's per capita spend increased every year from 2019 to 2023. At EU level, per capita spending increased every year other than in 2020, when it decreased by €20.31 per person.

In terms of GDP share, Ireland allocated a lower proportion of expenditure to policing services each year compared with the EU average. When adjusted to GNI\*, the gap between Ireland and the EU average narrowed. Ireland's spending, expressed as a percentage of GNI\*, remained at 0.79% in both 2022 and 2023, down from 0.86% in 2019. Across the EU, policing expenditure as a share of GDP ranged between 0.90% and 0.99%, standing at 0.93% in 2023.

In total spending terms, Ireland spent less than the EU average during the period analysed. The focus of the analysis for this indicator, however, was on per capita spend and percentage spend of GNI\* / GDP. This is because Ireland's average population from 2019 to 2023 (5.07 million) was less than one-third of the average EU Member State population (16.42 million). This approach ensures that Ireland's spending levels were assessed in proportion to its smaller population size and national income, rather than absolute totals.

Overall, total spending on policing services increased both in Ireland and across the EU.

As already discussed, budget 2026 allocated funding of €2.59 billion to An Garda Síochána, which constitutes 42% of the State's justice budget of €6.17 billion for 2026.

## Analytical Boundaries

The comparison between spending on national police services across EU Member States is based on nominal figures and does not adjust for purchasing power parity. Consequently, differences in relative costs and living standards between countries are not reflected.

The figures set out in Figure 6 do not include funding allocated to the Policing and Community Safety Authority (Ireland's policing oversight body) or to Fiosrú (the Office of the Police Ombudsman, which handles public complaints about Garda members). As can be seen from the chart for the Justice Budget 2026 (page 17), €6.53 million has been allocated to the Policing Authority and €24.17 million to Fiosrú for 2026. This is separate to the €2.59 billion allocated to An Garda Síochána.

Additionally, these figures do not include any supplementary estimates (additional funding) that may have been approved each year. The figures do include capital-expenditure funding for long-term assets.

The total government expenditure figures set out in Figure 7 differ from the budgetary figures published on Ireland's 'Where Your Money Goes' website (see Figure 6). Figures in Figure 7 were taken from Eurostat and calculated according to the definitions set out in the European System of Accounts (ESA 2010).<sup>38</sup>

Figure 7 includes an analysis of the State's expenditure on policing services as a percentage of both GDP and GNI\*. Ireland's GDP is generally inflated due to the activities of multinational corporations. GNI\* adjusts for this and is a more accurate reflection of the income available to the domestic economy. There are methodological limitations with comparing Ireland's expenditure as a percentage of GNI\* with the EU average as a percentage of GDP.<sup>39</sup>

The Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation has previously recommended that there may be merit in exploring other resourcing options for An Garda Síochána, in addition to the traditional budgetary approach.<sup>40</sup> In a 2017 spending review, the Department proposed that a more granular approach to the funding and review of performance for specific policing priorities could ensure a more evidenced-based budgetary process.

Ireland's spending on national police services diverges from the EU average, irrespective of the basis of comparison. When measured as a percentage of GNI\*, Ireland spent 15.05% below the EU average in 2023. In contrast, on a per capita basis, Ireland spent 27.77% above the EU average. In both respects, Ireland's policing budget deviated by more than 10% from the EU average. Consequently, the rating for this indicator is red.

**Traffic Light Indicator:** Red



<sup>38</sup> See Eurostat, 'Manual on sources and methods for the compilation of COFOG statistics' (2019 edition) 26-27, <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/10142242/KS-GQ-19-010-EN-N.pdf>> accessed 4 November 2025.

<sup>39</sup> As argued in Patrick Honohan, 'Is Ireland Really the Most Prosperous Country in Europe?' (Economic Letter Vol 21 No.1, Central Bank of Ireland, 2021) <<https://www.centralbank.ie/docs/default-source/publications/economic-letters/vol-2021-no-1-is-ireland-really-the-most-prosperous-country-in-europe.pdf>> accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>40</sup> Eoin Dormer and Thomas Gavin, *Challenges for Investment in Police Expenditure: A Public Expenditure Perspective* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, July 2017).

## Number of Gardaí

Figure 8 compares the total number of uniformed members of An Garda Síochána with the total number of police officers from a selection of jurisdictions. The jurisdictions were selected for comparison as they are either EU Member States with comparable population sizes to that of Ireland or are common law jurisdictions with cultural similarities to Ireland.

In 2024, there were 14,191 uniformed members of An Garda Síochána. Numbers decreased by 166, or 0.81%, between 2019 and 2024.

The lowest number of Gardaí in Ireland in the period reviewed was 13,998 in 2023. The lowest number of Gardaí per 100,000 inhabitants was 264 in 2024. This latter value has been decreasing since 2020 when it was 291. In total, the number of Gardaí per 100,000 inhabitants has decreased by 27 (or 9.28%) from 2019 to 2024.

During the same six-year period, the number of police officers in Scotland per 100,000 inhabitants reduced. The number decreased from 316 in 2019 to 300 in 2024 (a total reduction of 16 or 5.06%). This represents a slower rate of reduction than in Ireland, with Scotland averaging a 1.03% decrease compared with Ireland's 1.92%.

The number of police officers in England and Wales per 100,000 inhabitants increased from 2019 to 2023. In 2024, this number reduced to 238 per 100,000 inhabitants from 242 the previous year. Overall, however, this number has increased by 28 (or 13.33%) from 2019 to 2024.

The number of police officers in Finland per 100,000 inhabitants increased each year, albeit at a slower rate than in England and Wales. Over the period reviewed, the Finnish police force increased by 6 officers per 100,000 inhabitants, representing a 4.55% increase.

Denmark's numbers were between 191 (in 2023) and 194 (in 2020) per 100,000 inhabitants. That is a difference of 3 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants between the lowest and highest years.

The average number of police officers per 100,000 inhabitants of these six jurisdictions was 243 in 2024. Ireland had, therefore, 21 more police officers per 100,000 than the average number. This is a percentage difference of 8.64%.

**Figure 8: Police officers per 100,000 inhabitants 2019 to 2024 and comparison with other jurisdictions**

| Police Officers (Uniformed Officers) per 100,000 Inhabitants    | 2019   | 2020   | 2021              | 2022              | 2023   | 2024   |
|---|--------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|--------|--------|
| <b>Total Police Officers (Ireland)</b>                          | 14,307 | 14,491 | 14,235            | 14,133            | 13,998 | 14,191 |
| <b>Ireland</b>  | 291    | 291    | 284               | 274               | 265    | 264    |
| <b>Scotland</b>   | 316    | 315    | 312               | 306 <sup>41</sup> | 298    | 300    |
| <b>Northern Ireland</b>   | 355    | 367    | 368 <sup>42</sup> | 368               | 350    | 328    |
| <b>England and Wales</b>  | 210    | 222    | 231 <sup>43</sup> | 236               | 242    | 238    |
| <b>Denmark</b>  | 191    | 194    | 193               | 192               | 191    | 192    |
| <b>Finland</b>  | 132    | 133    | 133               | 135               | 136    | 138    |
| <b>Average per 100,000 Inhabitants of the six jurisdictions</b> | 249    | 254    | 231               | 241               | 247    | 243    |

Sources: Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration,<sup>44</sup> the Central Statistics Office's Population and Migration Estimates,<sup>45</sup> Census of Population 2022,<sup>46</sup> Scottish Government Police Officer Quarterly Strength Statistics,<sup>47</sup> National Records of Scotland Mid-Year Population Estimates,<sup>48</sup> Scotland's Census,<sup>49</sup> Annual Reports of the Police Service of Northern Ireland,<sup>50</sup> Office for National Statistics Northern Ireland Population Mid-Year Estimate,<sup>51</sup> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency,<sup>52</sup> Office for National Statistics Population estimates for England and Wales,<sup>53</sup> UK Government Police Workforce, England and Wales Statistics,<sup>54</sup> Statistics Denmark,<sup>55</sup> Denmark in Figures 2019,<sup>56</sup> SNGWOFI 2022,<sup>57</sup> Politi HR Nøgletal 2024,<sup>58</sup> Poliisi Police of Finland Statistics<sup>59</sup>

<sup>41</sup> This figure is calculated based on the census that took place in Scotland in 2022.

<sup>42</sup> This figure is calculated based on the census that took place in Northern Ireland in 2021.

<sup>43</sup> This figure is calculated based on the census that took place in England and Wales in 2021.

<sup>44</sup> Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, 'Garda Workforce Strength 2006 to 30 April 2025' (Government of Ireland, 17 June 2024) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/publications/garda-workforce/>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>45</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Population and Migration Estimates' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/populationandmigrationestimates/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

<sup>46</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Census of Population 2022' (Central Statistics Office, May 2023) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/censusofpopulation2022/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

<sup>47</sup> Justice Directorate, 'Police Officer Quarterly Strength Statistics Scotland (Scottish Government, 31 March 2025) <<https://www.gov.scot/collections/police-officer-quarterly-strength-statistics-scotland/>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>48</sup> National Records of Scotland, 'Mid-2023 Population Estimates' (National Records of Scotland, 8 October 2024) <<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/mid-2023-population-estimates/#>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>49</sup> National Statistics Publication, 'Scotland's Census 2022 – Rounded Population Estimates' (Scotland's Census, 14 September 2023) <<https://www.scotlandsensus.gov.uk/2022-reports/scotlands-census-2022-rounded-population-estimates/>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>50</sup> Police Service of Northern Ireland, 'Previous Annual Statement of Accounts' (PSNI, no date) <<https://www.psni.police.uk/about-us/our-departments/corporate-services/financial-services-branch/annual-statement-accounts>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>51</sup> Office for National Statistics, 'Northern Ireland Population Mid-Year Estimate' (ONS, 8 October 2024) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/timeseries/nipop/pop>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>52</sup> Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 'Census 2021' (NISRA, no date) <<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/census-census-2021>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>53</sup> Office for National Statistics, 'Population Estimates' (Census 2021, no date) <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>54</sup> UK Home Office, 'Police Workforce England and Wales Statistics' (Gov.uk, 23 July 2025) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/police-workforce-england-and-wales>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>55</sup> Statistics Denmark, 'Population Figures' (Statistics Denmark, no date) <<https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/emner/borgere/befolkningsbefolkningssta>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>56</sup> Margarete Phil Bisgaard, 'Denmark in Figures 2019' (Statistics Denmark, no date) <<https://www.dst.dk/en/Statistik/nyheder-analyser-publ/Publikationer/VisPub?cid=28924#:~:text=Denmark%20in%20Figures%20is%20no,in%20Denmark%20in%20figures%202019>> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>57</sup> OECD/UCLG, 'Country Profiles of the World Observatory on Subnational Government Finance and Investment: Denmark Unitary Country' (OECD, 2022) <[https://www.sng-wofi.org/country\\_profiles/denmark.html](https://www.sng-wofi.org/country_profiles/denmark.html)> accessed 23 July 2025.

<sup>58</sup> Politi, 'Politi HR Nøgletal' (Politi, 2024) <<https://politi.dk/statistik/politiets-ansatte>> accessed 23 July 2025.

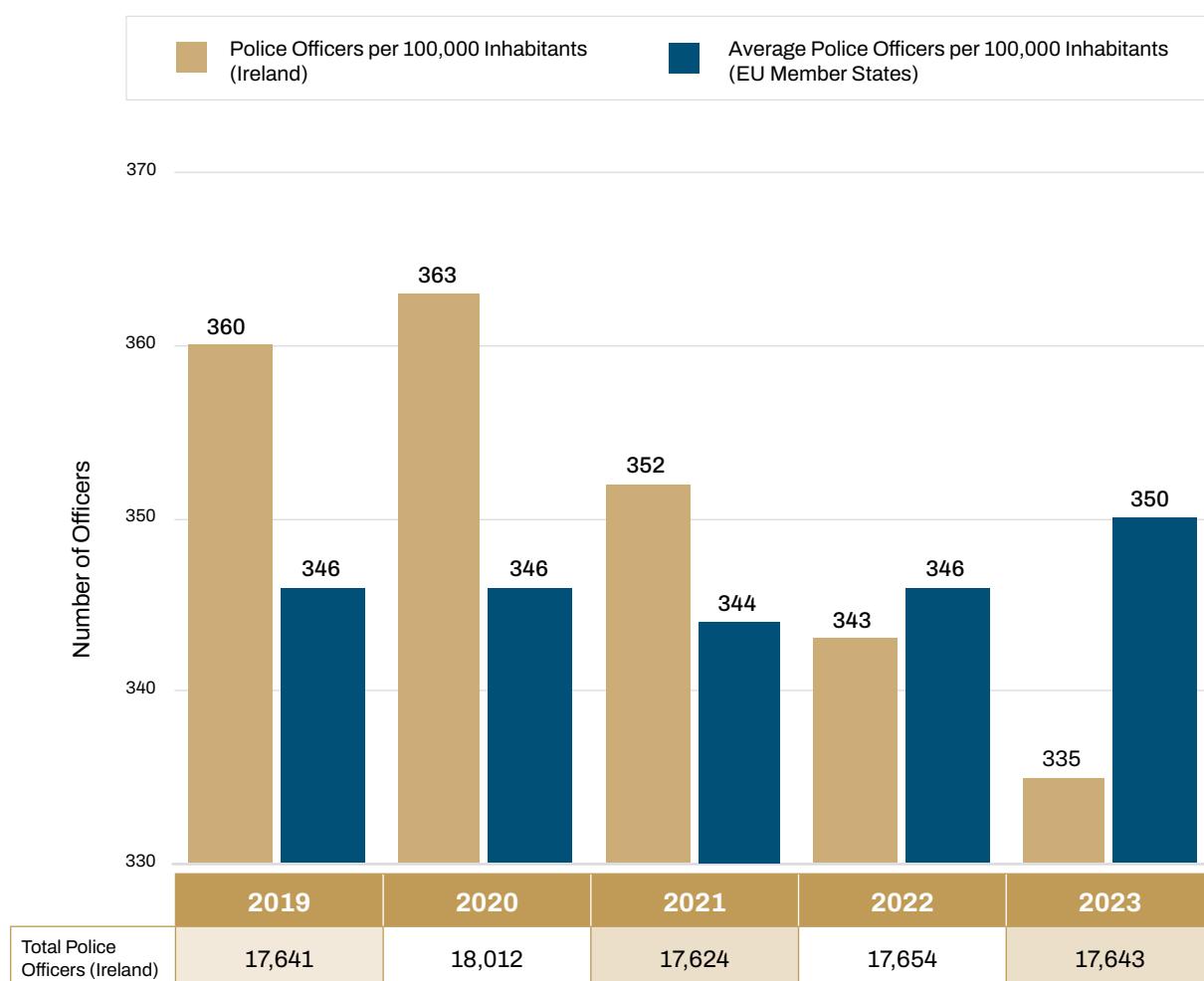
<sup>59</sup> Poliisi, 'External Environment and Statistics' (Police of Finland, 4 July 2025) <<https://poliisi.fi/en/operational-environment-and-statistics>> accessed 23 July 2025.

Figure 9 shows the total number of police officers in Ireland from 2019 to 2023, which are the figures reported by the CSO to Eurostat. ‘Police officers’ is the term used by Eurostat to describe this data set. These figures include uniformed members of An Garda Síochána and Garda Staff. Garda Staff are the civilian workforce who provide support functions, including professional and technical services. The figures also include staff at Forensic Science Ireland.

In 2023, Ireland reported a total of 17,643 ‘police officers’. Between 2019 to 2023, the highest number reported was 18,012, in 2020. The lowest number reported was 17,624, in 2021. Overall, the total number increased by two, from 17,641 in 2019 to 17,643 in 2023.

Figure 9 also compares the number of ‘police officers’ per 100,000 inhabitants in Ireland with the EU Member State average. In 2023, Ireland had 335 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants, which is the lowest number in the period reviewed. This was 15 less than the EU average of 350 police officers per 100,000 inhabitants (or 4.29% less than the average). In 2019, Ireland’s figure of 360 per 100,000 was above the EU average of 346 by 14 officers, which was 4.05% higher than the EU average.

**Figure 9: Policing numbers 2019 to 2023, including Garda Staff**



Source: Eurostat<sup>60</sup>

60 Eurostat, ‘Personnel in the Criminal Justice System’ (Eurostat, 23 April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim\\_just\\_job/default/Figure?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_just_job/default/Figure?lang=en)> accessed 16 July 2025.

Figure 10 sets out the net increase or decrease in the number of Gardaí each year between 2019 to 2024. It does this by compiling recruitment, retirement, and resignation numbers to the extent possible. It is clear that the highest net increase in the number of uniformed Gardaí was in 2024, with 227 additional Gardaí. Conversely, the largest decrease was in 2021, when there was a net decrease of 240 uniformed members. Across the six years, there was an overall net increase of 233 Gardaí.

The low recruitment number in 2021 would have been impacted by the closure of the Garda College during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Figure 10: Net increase or decrease in the number of uniformed members of An Garda Síochána, from 2019 to 2024**

| Net Increase or Decrease in Gardaí Numbers | 2019       | 2020       | 2021        | 2022       | 2023        | 2024       |
|--|------------|------------|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| <b>Recruitment</b>                         | 605        | 522        | 148         | 370        | 388         | 601        |
| <b>Retirement</b>                          | 339        | 250        | 293         | 340        | 319         | 234        |
| <b>Resignation</b>                         | 41         | 69         | 95          | 110        | 171         | 140        |
| <b>Net Increase / Decrease</b>             | <b>225</b> | <b>203</b> | <b>-240</b> | <b>-80</b> | <b>-102</b> | <b>227</b> |

Sources: Parliamentary Question on An Garda Síochána<sup>61</sup>, Parliamentary Question on An Garda Síochána<sup>62</sup>, An Garda Síochána Resources and People Development<sup>63</sup>, An Garda Síochána Monthly Report December 2024<sup>64</sup>

## Analysis

Ireland's total number of uniformed Gardaí decreased between 2019 to 2024 (by 0.81%). Due to population increase, the number of Gardaí per 100,000 inhabitants decreased from 291 to 264 (by 9.28%).

While An Garda Síochána recruited greater numbers of Gardaí in recent years, retirements and resignations offset this growth to a certain extent.<sup>65</sup> The most recent data available (from 2024) show that there was a net increase in the number of Gardaí of 227.

The available data from Eurostat (up to 2023) also show that the number of 'police officers' per 100,000 inhabitants reduced in Ireland (see Figure 9). Since then, efforts have been made to increase recruitment-and-retention numbers.

61 Dáil Deb 22 January 2025, Parliamentary Questions 1049-1050.

62 Dáil Deb 24 July 2024, Parliamentary Questions 1566.

63 An Garda Síochána, 'Human Resources and People Development: Garda Retirement Statistics Sworn Members', (An Garda Síochána, no date) <<https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/human-resources-and-people-development/retirement-departure-statistics-by-rank-grade-by-year-departure-type-for-civilian-staff-and-garda-members-.html>> accessed 19 November 2025.

64 An Garda Síochána, *Monthly Report for December 2024 to the Policing Authority* (December 2024) 3 <<https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/publications/general-reports/commissioner-s-monthly-reports-to-policing-authority-pre-2-april-2025-/commissioner-s-monthly-report-to-the-policing-authority-january-2025.pdf>> accessed 19 November 2025.

65 The Policing and Community Safety Authority, *Annual Report 2024*, <[https://www.policingauthority.ie/assets/uploads/documents/2025\\_06\\_05\\_Annual\\_Report\\_of\\_the\\_Policing\\_Authority\\_2024\\_Final.pdf](https://www.policingauthority.ie/assets/uploads/documents/2025_06_05_Annual_Report_of_the_Policing_Authority_2024_Final.pdf)> accessed 21 August 2025.

For example:

- The mandatory age of retirement was increased from 60 to 62
- The trainee allowance was increased to €354 per week
- The maximum age of entry was increased from 35 to 50, and
- The recruitment process has been streamlined.

In November 2025, the largest single intake of Garda trainees since 2014 entered the Garda College. Throughout 2025, a total of 794 trainees entered the College, which was the highest annual intake since 2018.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 introduced structural reforms, including a new governance framework to improve the internal management and external oversight of the force.

The average rate at which the number of police officers per 100,000 in England and Wales increased between 2019 to 2024 was 2.56%. The average rate at which the equivalent number in Ireland decreased during that period was 1.92%. This means that, while England and Wales continue to have fewer police officers per 100,000 inhabitants than Ireland, if current trends continue, by 2027 England and Wales will have more police officers per 100,000 inhabitants than Ireland (257 per 100,000 inhabitants in England and Wales compared with 249 in Ireland).

Ireland has a higher number of uniformed officers per 100,000 inhabitants than either Denmark or Finland. The most recent figures available show that, in 2024, Ireland had 72 more police officers per 100,000 inhabitants than Denmark; and 126 more than Finland.

In Northern Ireland, the PSNI was at its lowest number in 2024, with 6,394 officers. This constitutes a total reduction of 342 police officers from 2019 to 2024, or a percentage reduction of 5.08%. It appears that the reduction in 2024 was largely due to 'a significant reduction' in the PSNI's budget between 2023 and 2024.<sup>67</sup> In January 2025, however, the PSNI launched a recruitment campaign to increase its number to at least 7,000 officers.

At EU level, the average number of police officers per 100,000 inhabitants remained between 344 and 350 during the same period. From 2019 to 2021, Ireland was above the EU average. That year, Ireland had 352 'police officers' per 100,000, while the EU average was 344. Ireland has been below the EU average since 2022.

Another reference point is that Ireland ranked highly in the Global Peace Index (an annual report produced by the Institute for Economics & Peace), ranking second (below only Iceland) in 2025. Denmark ranked eighth, Finland tenth, and the United Kingdom ranked 30<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>66</sup> Department of Justice, 'Minister Jim O'Callaghan welcomes largest single intake to Templemore since 2014' (Government of Ireland, 18 November 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/press-releases/minister-jim-o-callaghan-welcomes-largest-single-intake-to-templemore-since-2014/#:~:text=Minister%20for%20Justice%2C%20Home%20Affairs,the%20highest%20number%20since%202018>> accessed 26 November 2025.

<sup>67</sup> Police Service of Northern Ireland, *Annual Report and Accounts 2024*, <<https://www.psni.police.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/Police%20Service%20of%20Northern%20Ireland%20-%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%20for%20the%20year%20ended%2031st%20March%202024.pdf>> accessed 24 July 2025.

## Analytical Boundaries

The total numbers of ‘police officers’ reported by Eurostat (Figure 9) differ from those reported by the Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration (Figure 8). This is because the numbers reported by the Department exclude Garda Staff (civilian members) and staff of Forensic Science Ireland. Eurostat defines ‘police officer’ as “[e]mployees of public agencies whose main tasks are: enforcement of laws and regulations, maintaining civil order, protecting people and property, and prevention, detection and investigation of crime”.<sup>68</sup> However, the figures Eurostat publishes for Ireland include Garda Staff. Consequently, there is no guarantee that administrative support staff are not included in the figures reported by other Member States. The Eurostat figures may also include people employed in police oversight bodies. In Ireland, we do not include employees of Fiosrú or the Policing Community and Safety Authority in the reporting of policing numbers.

In 2021, the *European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics* reported that the average number of police officers per 100,000 inhabitants across the EU was 337. This differs from the number reported by Eurostat for that year (344).<sup>69</sup> It is unclear why these figures differ from each other.

Over the past five years, the work of some uniformed Gardaí has changed.<sup>70</sup> For example, some Gardaí moved from more administrative-focused tasks to engaging in active police work. This should be taken into consideration when interpreting the data.

It is also important to note the post-conflict context in which the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) operates, which has led to significant investment and reforms to build public trust, ensure community representation, and maintain peace in a divided society.<sup>71</sup>

The PSNI’s Annual Reports are based on data taken from 31 March of each reporting year and, therefore, do not necessarily give a full account of the number of police officers in Northern Ireland for each calendar year.

The rating for this justice indicator is based on the finding that, in 2024, Ireland had 8.43% more police officers per 100,000 inhabitants than the average across the six jurisdictions reviewed. Eurostat data are used as the basis for this rating due to inconsistencies in definitions and difficulties in ensuring that the numbers being compared are equivalent.

### Traffic Light Indicator: Amber

<sup>68</sup> Eurostat, ‘Glossary: Police Personnel’ (Statistics Explained, no date) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Police\\_personnel](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Police_personnel)> accessed 22 July 2025.

<sup>69</sup> Marcelo F Aebi et al, *European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice Statistics – 2021* (Sixth edition, Goettingen University Press 2021) 43.

<sup>70</sup> As described in An Garda Síochána, *Transforming An Garda Síochána 2018-2024* (2024) <<https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/publications/general-reports/transforming-an-garda-siochana-2018-2024.pdf>> accessed 24 July 2025.

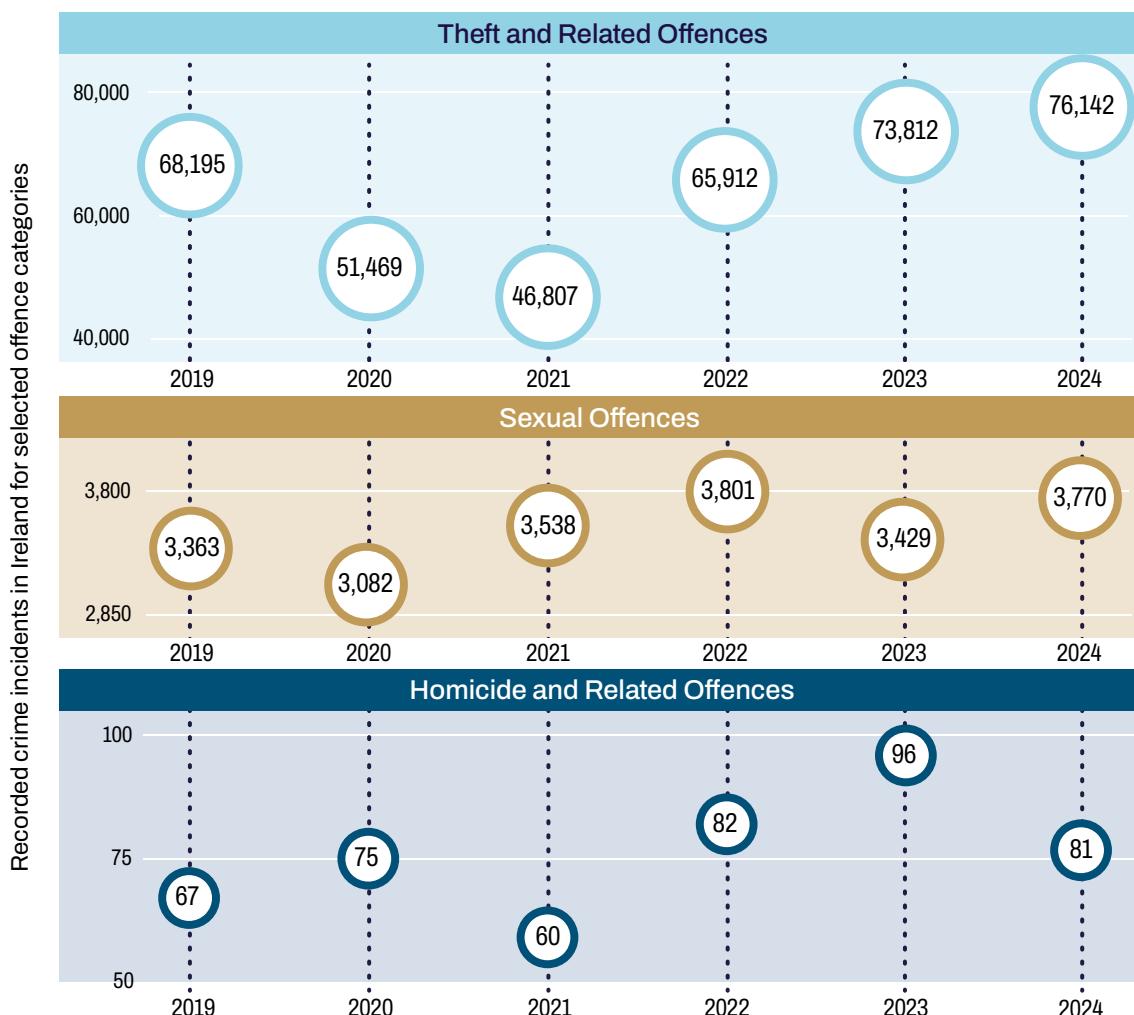
<sup>71</sup> Marinas Caparini and Juneso Hwang, ‘Police Reform in Northern Ireland: Achievements and Future Challenges’ (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 28 October 2019) <<https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2019/police-reform-northern-ireland-achievements-and-future-challenges>> accessed 24 July 2025.

## Recorded Crime Incidents

Recorded crime incidents are the number of individual criminal incidents that have been officially reported to, and accepted by, An Garda Síochána as valid crime incidents.

For the purposes of this indicator, the analysis is focused on a select number of offence categories: homicide and related offences,<sup>72</sup> sexual offences,<sup>73</sup> and theft and related offences.<sup>74</sup>

**Figure 11: The absolute number of recorded crime incidents in Ireland for selected offence categories from 2019 to 2024**



Source: The Central Statistics Office Recorded Crime Statistics<sup>75</sup>

From 2019 to 2024, the highest number of homicide-related offences recorded was 96 in 2023. In 2024, this number decreased to 81. The lowest number of incidents was 60, recorded in 2021. Over that six-year period, the number of homicide-related offences increased by a total of 14 incidents, from 67 to 81 (a 20.90% increase).

The lowest number of sexual offences recorded in the same period was 3,082, in 2020. The highest number of 3,801 incidents was recorded in 2022. From 2019 to 2024, the number of sexual offences increased by 407 from 3,363 to 3,770 (an increase of 12.10%).

72 Murder, manslaughter, infanticide, and dangerous driving leading to death.

73 Rape of a male or female, defilement of a boy or girl less than 17 years old, sexual offence involving mentally impaired person, aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault, and other sexual offences.

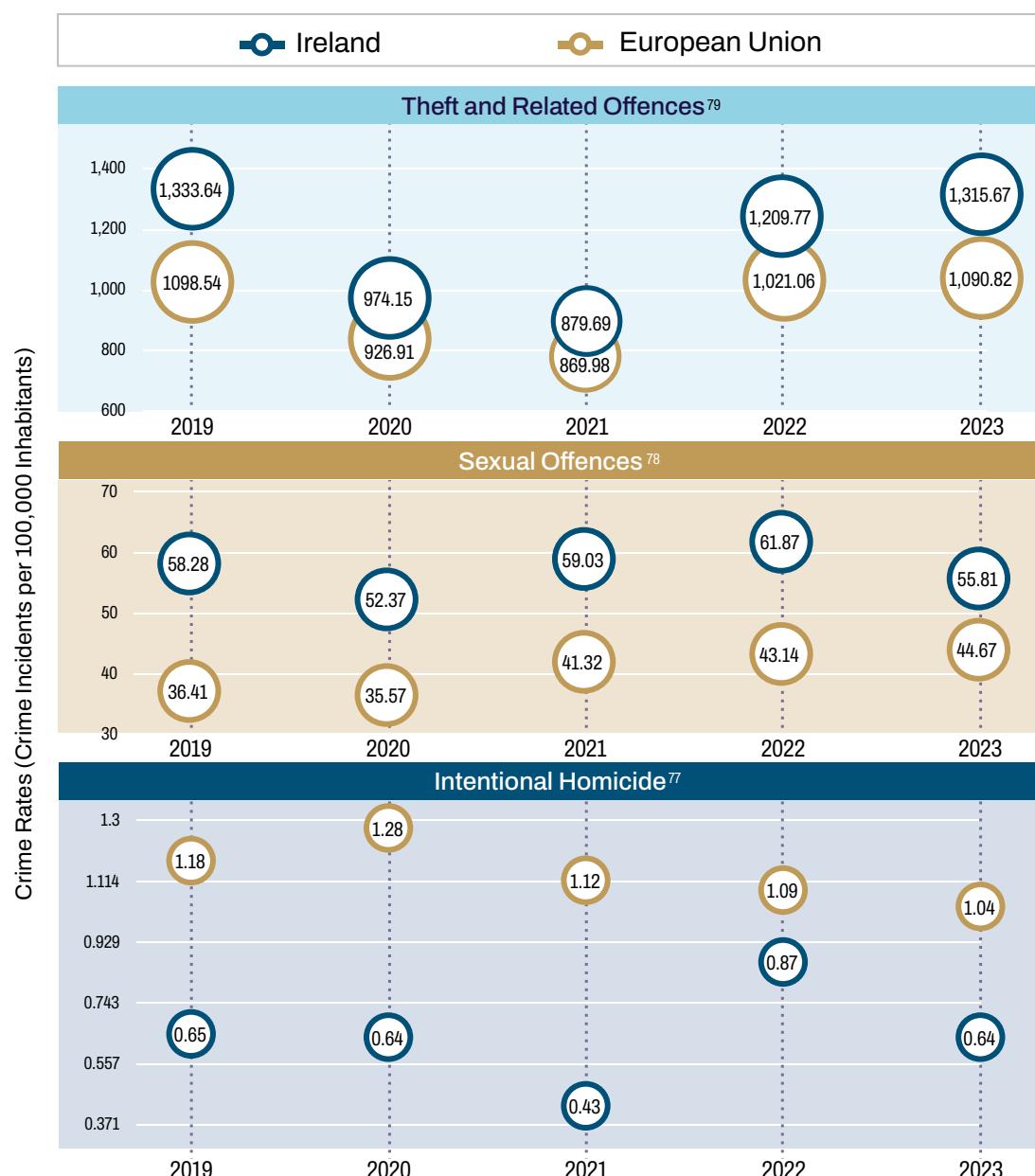
74 Theft / taking of vehicle and related offences, theft from person, theft from shop, and other thefts, handling stolen property.

75 Central Statistics Office, 'Recorded Crime' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/crimeandjustice/recordedcrime/>> accessed 18 July 2025. These statistics are compiled and published by the Central Statistics Office (CSO), based on data provided by An Garda Síochána.

In 2019, a total of 68,195 theft and related offences were recorded. Theft offences decreased by 16,726 in 2020; and decreased again in 2021 by 4,662 incidents. There was an overall increase in theft offences of 7,947 in the period reviewed from 68,195 to 76,142 (a percentage increase of 11.65%).

The above figures are the total number of recorded crime incidents each year. Crime rates, however, are the number of recorded crime incidents per 100,000 inhabitants. Crime rates are more useful than absolute numbers when comparing the level of offending in different jurisdictions. Figure 12, below, compares Irish crime rates for a select group of offence categories with the average crime rates for the same categories across Member States of the European Union.

**Figure 12: Crime rates in Ireland for selected offence categories from 2019 to 2023 compared with the average crime rates of EU Member States in the same period<sup>76</sup>**



Source: Eurostat<sup>80</sup>

<sup>76</sup> At the time of writing (November 2025), statistics for 2024 crime rates were not available.

<sup>77</sup> Intentional homicides.

<sup>78</sup> Sexual violence, rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, and child pornography.

<sup>79</sup> Theft and theft of a motorised vehicle or parts thereof.

<sup>80</sup> Eurostat, 'Police-Recorded Offences by Offence Category' (Eurostat, 23 April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim\\_off\\_cat/default/Figure?lang=en](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_off_cat/default/Figure?lang=en)> accessed 21 July 2025.

Figure 12 demonstrates that, each year from 2019 to 2023 (inclusive), the rate of intentional homicides in Ireland was below the average intentional homicide rate across EU Member States.

The rates of both sexual offences, and theft and related offences in Ireland were higher than the EU Member-State averages each year for the same period.

In 2020, the average EU rate of intentional homicides was at its highest during the five-year period considered (1.28 per 100,000 inhabitants). The highest rate in Ireland during the same period (0.87) was recorded in 2022. The highest homicide rate in Ireland (in 2022) was, therefore, 32.03% less than the highest EU average rate (in 2020). Further, the highest rate recorded in Ireland (0.87) is lower than the lowest EU average rate recorded (1.04 in 2023). The overall EU average rate of intentional homicides from 2019 to 2023 was 1.14. Ireland's average rate was 0.65, which is 43% lower than the EU average.

The highest average rate of sexual offences in EU Member States was recorded in 2023 (44.67 per 100,000 inhabitants). The highest rate in Ireland was recorded in 2022 (61.87).

That is a difference of 17.20 per 100,000 inhabitants; or a percentage difference of 38.50%.

Ireland's theft rates were above the EU average in each of the years reviewed. The highest rate in Ireland was 1,333.64 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2019, compared with the EU average of 1,098.54. Ireland's lowest rate of 879.69 in 2021 was above the EU average that year of 869.98 per 100,000 inhabitants. By 2023, Ireland's rate (1,315.67 per 100,000 inhabitants) remained higher than the EU average (1,090.82 per 100,000 inhabitants).

## Analysis

### Homicides and Related Offences

Ireland has a lower rate of homicide-related offences compared with the average homicide rates across the EU. Ireland's highest homicide rate in the review period (0.87 in 2022) was less than the lowest EU average homicide rate (1.04 in 2023).

Both in Ireland and across the EU, intentional homicide rates are decreasing. In Ireland, the rate decreased from 0.65 in 2019 to 0.64 in 2023. This is a decrease of 0.01 or 1.54%. At the EU level, the average rate decreased from 1.18 to 1.04. That is a difference of 0.14 or 11.86%. The rate of decrease is also greater at the EU level, decreasing by an average of 0.03 per 100,000 each year. In Ireland, the rate decreased by an average of 0.003 per 100,000 each year, or one-tenth of the reduction across the EU, on average.

The CSO published official statistics on recorded crime incidents from 2003 to 2024. From these available statistics, the highest number of recorded homicide-related incidents was 153 in 2007.<sup>81</sup> The lowest number was 60 in 2021.<sup>82</sup> In 2003, a total of 100 homicide-related incidents were recorded. By 2024, this number was 81. Overall, therefore, the number of homicide-related incidents in Ireland decreased by 19 or by 19%.

From 2019 to 2023, the highest homicide rate in Ireland was 0.87 in 2022. The highest number of homicide-rated incidents, however, was 96 recorded incidents, in 2023. This is because, as discussed in greater detail in the following section, the Eurostat rates are calculated based on

<sup>81</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Recorded Crime' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/crimeandjustice/recordedcrime/>> accessed 18 July 2025.

<sup>82</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Recorded Crime' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/crimeandjustice/recordedcrime/>> accessed 18 July 2025.

'intentional homicides'. The CSO classification of 'homicide and related offences' used in Figure 11 is a broader offence category. Using the figures from the broader CSO classification, the crime rates become 1.59 per 100,000 in 2022; 1.82 in 2023; and 1.51 in 2024.<sup>83</sup>

## **Sexual Offences**

Ireland has a higher rate of sexual offences compared with the average rate of sexual offences across the EU.

The Central Statistics Office has reported the number of recorded sexual-offence incidents since 2003. The number of recorded sexual offences in Ireland increased from 1,572 in 2003 to 3,770 in 2024. The highest number of recorded sexual-offence incidents occurred in 2022, with 3,801 incidents.<sup>84</sup> The lowest volume was in 2008, with 1,270 recorded incidents. In the CSO's *Sexual Violence Survey*, 40% of respondents in Ireland stated that they had experience of sexual violence at least once in their lifetime.<sup>85</sup>

The increase in the number of recorded sexual-offence incidents is a trend found across the EU, with statistics showing a 79.2% increase in offences relating to sexual violence and rape from 2013 to 2023.<sup>86</sup> Between 2022 and 2023, there was a 5.5% increase in the number of recorded sexual offences across the EU.

When sexual-offence rates were at their lowest level in Ireland (52.37 in 2020), they were more prevalent in Ireland than in EU Member States, on average. This was true even when the rate was at its highest across the EU (44.08 in 2023).

The overall average rate of sexual offences from 2019 to 2023 across the EU was 40.15 per 100,000 inhabitants. Ireland's equivalent average rate was 57.47, which was 17.32 (43.14%) higher than the EU average. These numbers should be seen in the context of the recent rise in the recording of sexual offences in Ireland within the past decade (as noted below).

## **Theft and Related Offences**

There was an overall decrease in the rate of theft offences, both in Ireland and across the EU, from 2019 to 2023. Eurostat data show that, while there was an overall decrease across the EU, on average (from 201,019 to 199,550), Ireland recorded an increase (up from 65,405 to 69,354).<sup>87</sup>

Ireland's theft rate was consistently above the EU average, peaking in 2019 at 1,333.64 per 100,000 inhabitants (21.4% higher than the EU average of 1,098.54). By 2023, Ireland's rate had decreased to 1,315.67, though it remained above the EU benchmark. The lowest rate in Ireland during this period was in 2021, at 879.69 per 100,000, compared with the EU average of 869.98.

Longer-term CSO data show that theft incidents ranged from a high of 78,460 in 2013 to a low of 46,807 in 2021. In 2024, incidents rose to 76,142, compared with 73,422 in 2003, representing a 3.70% increase over two decades. Both CSO and Eurostat data confirm decreases in 2020 and 2021. During those years, the Covid-19 pandemic occurred alongside the decrease. Both the rate and number of incidents increased in 2022, and again in 2023, with the number of incidents increasing further in 2024.

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<sup>83</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Census of Population 2022' (Central Statistics Office, May 2023) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/censusofpopulation2022/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

<sup>84</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Crime & Justice Data' (2025) <<https://data.cso.ie/Figure/CJQ06>> accessed 21 November 2025.

<sup>85</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Sexual Violence Survey' (2022) <<https://data.cso.ie/Figure/SVS01>> accessed 21 November 2025.

<sup>86</sup> Eurostat, 'Crime statistics: Highlights' (Eurostat, April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Crime\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Crime_statistics)> accessed 24 November 2025.

<sup>87</sup> Eurostat, 'Police-recorded offences by offence category' (Eurostat, 12 August 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim\\_off\\_cat\\_custom\\_19265171/default/Figure](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/crim_off_cat_custom_19265171/default/Figure)> accessed 24 November 2025.

## Analytical Boundaries

In 2008, Ireland introduced a new system for classifying crimes – the Irish Crime Classification System (ICCS). This replaced the ‘Headline/Non-Headline’ categorisation that had been in use since 2000. The ICCS was first applied by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in April 2008 when publishing Garda Recorded Crime Statistics, and it provided a more detailed and standardised framework for classifying offences. The main figures analysed under this indicator are from 2019 onwards, meaning that the ICCS applies. However, some statistics that predate the change to the ICCS are referenced.

Not all criminal incidents are reported to An Garda Síochána. Therefore, official recorded crime incidents may not reflect the actual level of criminal offending in a given year. The CSO’s Crime and Victimisation Survey (CVS) asks households about their experiences of crime, including theft, assault, fraud, and anti-social behaviour. The CVS may give a different depiction of the actual number of crimes committed in Ireland, as it captures unreported incidents.<sup>88</sup>

The categories of offences used by Eurostat differ from those used by the CSO. For example, homicide and related offences as reported by the CSO comprise murder, manslaughter, infanticide, and dangerous driving leading to death. Eurostat calculates homicide rates based on intentional homicide. For this reason, the figures in Figure 6 pertaining to Ireland are taken from Eurostat statistics, and are not calculated from the figures in Figure 5. To give an example of why this distinction matters, in 2023 there were more homicide related incidents in Ireland than in 2022 (96 and 82, respectively). However, there were fewer intentional homicides in 2023 than in 2022 (34 and 44, respectively).

National reporting practices differ across EU Member States. In Ireland, the CSO employs an incident-based approach, under which the predominant behaviour in a reported incident is recorded to minimise double-counting. A single reported event may involve the commission of multiple criminal offences, but it may be recorded as one incident. Other Member States do not necessarily follow the same counting rules and, therefore, cross-country comparisons should be interpreted with caution.

The theft figures in Figure 11 above (taken from the CSO) include the theft or taking of a vehicle (and related offences); theft from a person, shop, or vehicle; and handling stolen property. These figures do not include any fraud-related offences; robbery, extortion or high-jacking offences; or burglary and related offences. Consequently, this justice indicator does not capture enforcement activity by sectoral economic regulators, such as the Central Bank of Ireland or the Competition and Consumer Protection Commission.

The increase in recorded sexual offences in Ireland since 2019 has been influenced by an increase in reporting, including reporting of incidents that occurred many years earlier. In 2023, for example, offences that had taken place more than a decade previously accounted for 30% of all recorded sexual offences for that year. This reflects a relatively recent shift in Ireland as, in 2013, a total of 1,907 incidents were reported.<sup>89</sup>

One factor contributing to this change was the #MeToo movement, which gained traction online in late 2017 and early 2018. While its impact in Ireland was moderate, it nonetheless encouraged

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<sup>88</sup> Central Statistics Office, ‘Crime and Victimization Surveys’, <https://www.cso.ie/en/surveys/householdsurveys/crimeandvictimisationsurvey/> accessed 22 September 2025.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

more victims of sexual abuse to come forward.<sup>90</sup> As a result, a considerable proportion of offences reported since 2019 are ‘legacy cases’ – crimes committed years before they were formally reported. Eurostat has noted that the increase in sexual-offence rates across the EU can be attributed to heightened social awareness of sexual violence.<sup>91</sup>

The #MeToo movement also had a wider international effect, influencing reporting trends across the EU and internationally. For Ireland, there is additional context through the historic systemic sexual abuse that has taken place. In July 2025, for example, the Government established a Commission of Investigation into the Handling of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Schools.<sup>92</sup>

Further, the definition of what constitutes a sexual offence in Ireland is broad. The *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017* expanded the range of offences that fall under the umbrella of sexual offences. Among the new offences introduced by the 2017 act were several new child-abuse offences, a new offence of payment etc for sexual activity with prostitute, and new indecency offences.<sup>93,94</sup> The CSO has found that a proportion of the increase in recorded incidents was due to a doubling of reports by male victims.<sup>95</sup>

The ratings for this indicator are based on the following findings from 2023:

- Ireland recorded 38.46% fewer homicide offences than EU Member States, on average. Although Ireland deviates by more than 10% from the EU average, which should lead to a red traffic-light indication according to the criteria set out in the methodology chapter, the rating is green because it is self-evident that lower levels of homicide offences are a positive finding.
- Ireland recorded 26.61% more sexual offences than EU Member States recorded, on average.
- Ireland recorded 29.66% more theft-related offences than EU Member States recorded, on average.

#### Traffic Light Indicators:

- *Homicide and Related Offences*: Green
- *Sexual Offences*: Red
- *Theft & Related Offences*: Red

<sup>90</sup> Ro'ee Levy and Martin Mattsson, 'The Effects of Social Movements: Evidence from #MeToo' (23 May 2025) <<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3496903>> 33.

<sup>91</sup> Eurostat, 'Crime statistics: Highlights' (Eurostat, April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Crime\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Crime_statistics)> accessed 24 November 2025.

<sup>92</sup> Commission of Investigation into the Handling of Historical Child Sexual Abuse in Schools (13 October 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/commission-of-investigation-into-the-handling-of-historical-child-sexual-abuse-in-schools/publications/commission-of-investigation-into-the-handling-of-historical-child-sexual-abuse-in-schools/>> accessed 21 November 2025.

<sup>93</sup> Presentation by Tom O'Malley, 'Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017 – The Offence Provision' at the 8th Annual National Prosecutors' Conference (Dublin Castle Conference Centre, 25 November 2017) <[https://www.dppireland.ie/app/uploads/2017/11/PAPER\\_-\\_Tom\\_OMalley\\_BL.1.pdf](https://www.dppireland.ie/app/uploads/2017/11/PAPER_-_Tom_OMalley_BL.1.pdf)> accessed 25 November 2025.

<sup>94</sup> *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Act 2017*, s34.

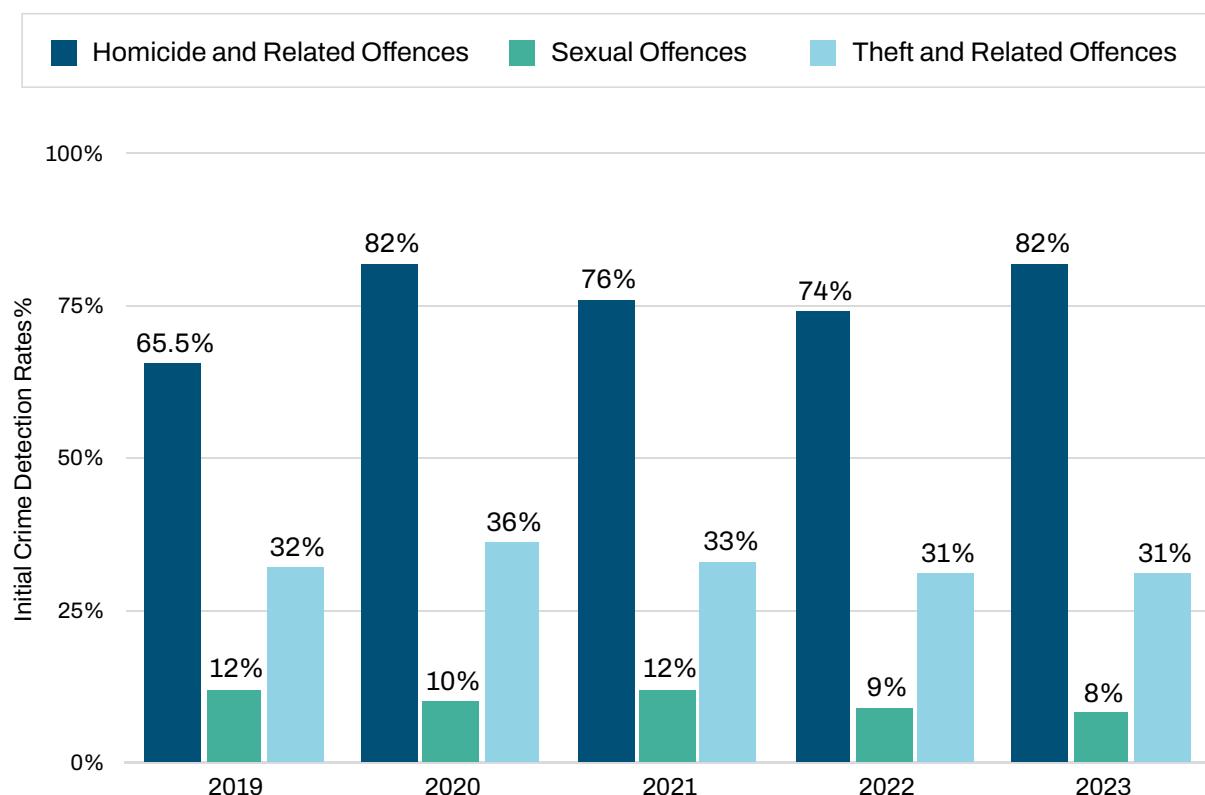
<sup>95</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Recorded Crime Victims 2024 and Suspected Offenders 2023: Key Findings' (18 June 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rcvo/recordedcrimevictims2024andsuspectedoffenders2023/keyfindings/>> accessed 24 November 2025.

## Crime Detection Rates

The crime detection rate refers to the proportion of recorded crime incidents, in respect of which at least one suspected offender has been identified as being responsible for the incident.<sup>96</sup> The rate is calculated by dividing the number of detected incidents by the total number of recorded incidents within a defined period of time.

For present purposes, this paper focuses its analysis on the detection rates for homicides and related offences, sexual offences, and thefts and related offences. Further, the analysis focuses on the initial detection of offences (that is, within eight months following the end of the calendar year in which the offences were committed).

**Figure 13: Initial detection rates of selected categories of offences in Ireland, 2019 to 2023**



Source: The Central Statistics Office Recorded Crime Detection<sup>97</sup>

From 2019 to 2023, the rate at which homicides and related offences were initially detected in Ireland were at their highest in both 2020 and 2023, at 82%. The detection rate was at its lowest in 2019 at 65.5%.

The detection rate for sexual offences was low during the same period, reaching a high of 12% in 2019 and 2021, and a low of 8% in 2023.

The detection rate for theft and related offences was between 31% and 36% during the period of analysis. The detection rate was at its lowest, however, in 2022 and 2023 – the most recent years for which these figures are available.

<sup>96</sup> According to the Central Statistics Office.

<sup>97</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Recorded Crime Detection 2023' (Central Statistics Office, 27 November 2024) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rcd/recordedcrimedetection2023/crimedetectionrates/>> accessed 25 July 2025.

**Figure 14: Comparison of initial and updated detection rates of selected categories of offences in Ireland, 2019 to 2022**

| Updated Crime Detection Rates        | 2019 <sup>98</sup> |         | 2020 <sup>99</sup> |         | 2021 <sup>100</sup> |         | 2022 <sup>101</sup> |         |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|---------------------|---------|
|                                      | Initial            | Updated | Initial            | Updated | Initial             | Updated | Initial             | Updated |
| <b>Homicide and Related Offences</b> | 65.50%             | 72.20%  | 82%                | 83%     | 76%                 | 87%     | 74%                 | 85%     |
| <b>Sexual Offences</b>               | 12%                | 20.10%  | 10%                | 20%     | 12%                 | 19%     | 9%                  | 16%     |
| <b>Theft and Related Offences</b>    | 32%                | 34.30%  | 36%                | 38%     | 33%                 | 35%     | 31%                 | 33%     |

Source: The Central Statistics Office Recorded Crime Detection<sup>102</sup>

Figure 14 compares the initial detection rates for selected offence categories with the updated rates recorded one year later. As shown, detection rates for each category increased over the subsequent year.

In 2019 and 2020, the largest differences between initial and updated detection rates were observed in sexual offences, with increases of 8.10 and 10 percentage points, respectively. In 2021 and 2022, the greatest differences were recorded for homicide-related offences, with increases of 11 percentage points in both years.

When expressed as percentage increases, sexual offences showed the highest increase between initial and updated detection figures across all years reviewed. The percentage increases were 67.50% in 2019, 100% in 2020, 58.33% in 2021, and 77.78% in 2022.

In contrast, theft-related offences recorded the smallest increases from initial to updated detection rates, both in absolute and percentage terms. The highest increase occurred in 2019, at 2.30 percentage points – equivalent to a 7.19% rise.

## Analysis

The low detection rate of sexual offences in Ireland is notable, particularly given the comparatively high incidence of such offences, as previously discussed. From 2019 to 2022, the updated detection rate was highest at 20.10%, in 2019. The updated rate was lowest in 2022, at 16%.

Detection rates for theft-related offences were higher than those for sexual offences. During the period under review, the highest updated detection rate for theft was 38% in 2020. Although this exceeds the highest updated detection rate for sexual offences (20.10% in 2019), it remains lower than the detection rate for homicide-related offences across all years.

<sup>98</sup> The updated rates for 2019 are based on statistics extracted on 2 September 2021.

<sup>99</sup> The updated rates for 2020 are based on statistics extracted on 2 September 2022.

<sup>100</sup> The updated rates for 2021 are based on statistics extracted on 1 September 2023.

<sup>101</sup> The updated rates for 2022 are based on statistics extracted on 2 September 2024.

<sup>102</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Recorded Crime Detection 2023' (Central Statistics Office, 27 November 2024) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-rcd/recordedcrimedetection2023/crimedetectionrates/>> accessed 25 July 2025.

Detection rates for homicide-related offences in Ireland were higher than for sexual offences and theft-related offences. The highest updated detection rate was recorded in 2021 at 87%, while the lowest was 72.20%, in 2019. As discussed under the Recorded Crime Incidents indicator, homicide-related offending is comparatively lower in Ireland.

## Analytical Boundaries

The context in which sexual offences are generally committed (that is, in private settings) means that investigations are largely dependent on victims' accounts. Further, it has been noted that many victims of sexual offences who report their experiences to An Garda Síochána do not remain engaged in the investigative process through to the prosecution stage, for a variety of reasons.

The low detection rate for sexual offences has been described by the Dublin Rape Crisis Centre as being 'dispiriting and demoralising' for victims,<sup>103</sup> which may discourage future victims from engaging with the justice system.

It is also important to consider the low detection rate of sexual offences in the context of the recent rise in the reporting of sexual offences, as already discussed in the previous indicator. Because sexual-offences reporting has increased in recent years, specialist detection units within An Garda Síochána to deal with this type of offending are relatively new. With time and additional experience gained, the detection rate of sexual offences may improve.

'Initial' detection rates are recorded eight months following the end of the calendar year in which the crime in question occurred. These initial rates are updated yearly, based on data provided by An Garda Síochána, and are then referred to as 'updated' detection rates. To enable a more accurate year-on-year comparison, initial detection rates have been used in Figure 13. Figure 14 highlights the differences between the initial and updated detection rates.

Data reporting could be improved by separating the reported detection rates for historical crime incidents from contemporary crime incidents. Historical cases often have different evidence availability that may skew overall detection figures. Reporting distinct detection rates would provide a clearer indication of trends, and of the impact of policy interventions.

Neither the European Union nor the Council of Europe publishes detection rates. The OECD has not published an international comparison of detection rates since 2006. The United Nations' Survey on Crime Trends does not record percentages of detected crimes. However, it does record the detection of homicides and related offences in absolute numbers.<sup>104</sup>

In a 2004 article on the feasibility of an international comparison of detection rates, the authors concluded that the detection rates of crimes in different jurisdictions cannot be compared because there are many external, organisational, and technical factors that affect the detection rates.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Dublin Rape Crisis Centre as reported by Paul Reynolds, 'CSO figures showing 80% of sex offences unsolved is 'demoralising' – DRCC on RTÉ', RTÉ News (November 2024) <<https://www.rte.ie/news/ireland/2024/1127/1483271-crime-detection-figures/>> accessed 31 July 2025.

<sup>104</sup> Office on Drugs and Crime, 'The 2018 United Nations Survey of Crime Trends and Operation of Criminal Justice Systems' (2018 UN-CTS) (United Nations, no date) <<https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/statistics/cts-data-collection.html>> accessed 25 July 2025.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Smit, Ronald Meijer, Peter-Paul Groen, 'Detection Rates: An International Comparison' (2004) 10(2-3) *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research* 225. Some of the factors the authors listed include the time period after which detection is measured, the stage at which a case is counted as 'detected' (for example, if there is a lead or if there is a charge against a perpetrator), or if crimes with multiple perpetrators are marked as resolved when one or more perpetrators are detected.

Eurostat warns, generally, against comparing crime-related statistics across jurisdictions,<sup>106</sup> and the European Parliamentary Research Service has agreed, on the basis that the reporting and recording of crime varies from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.<sup>107</sup> In England and Wales, for example, detection rates are no longer recorded. Instead, crime outcomes are recorded.<sup>108</sup>

The rating for this indicator is based on the fact that it is not possible to compare detection rates across different jurisdictions.

**Traffic Light Indicator:** White



<sup>106</sup> Eurostat, 'Information on Data' <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/crime/information-data>> accessed 31 July 2025.

<sup>107</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service, *Understanding Crime Statistics* (European Parliament, April 2025).

<sup>108</sup> The crime outcomes in England and Wales are 'charged / summonsed', 'evidential difficulties (suspect identified; victim supports action)', 'evidential difficulties (victim does not support action)', and 'investigation complete – no suspect identified'. See UK Home Office Official Statistics, 'Crime Outcomes in England and Wales 2024 to 2025' (5 August 2025) <<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2024-to-2025/crime-outcomes-in-england-and-wales-2024-to-2025>> accessed 31 July 2025.



# Courts







# Courts

## Courts Expenditure

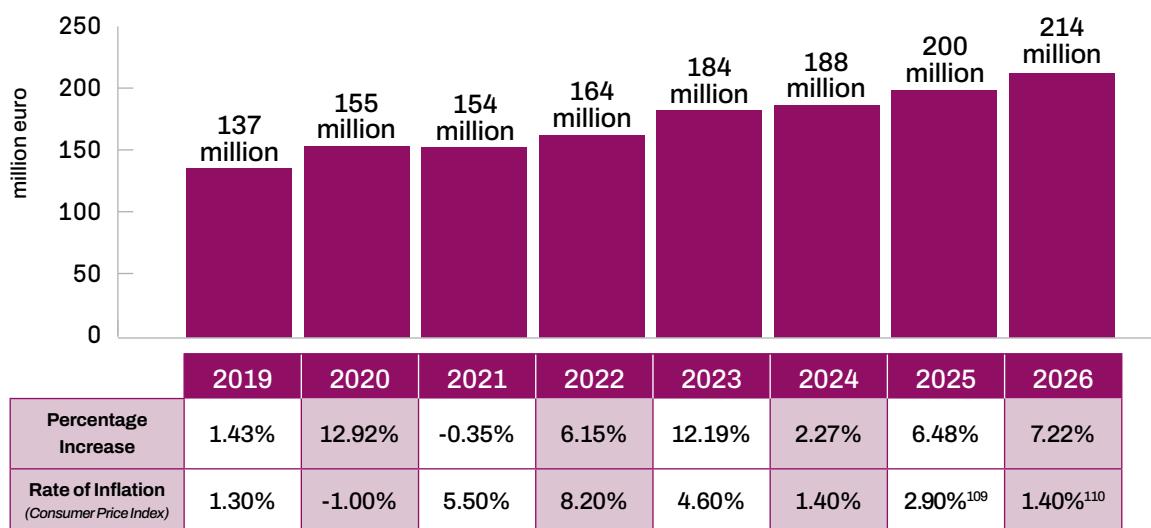
Court expenditure refers to the annual budget for the Courts Service.<sup>109 110</sup>

The Courts Service's budget for 2026 is €214 million. This is an increase of €77.31 million, or 56.46%, on the 2019 budget.

The annual funding allocated to the Irish courts increased each year from 2019 to 2026, other than in 2021, when the budget decreased by 0.35%.

The average amount by which the courts' funding increased during that period was 6.04%. The average rate of inflation during the same period was 3.04%. On average, therefore, the budget increased by three percentage points more than inflation.

**Figure 15: Funding allocated to the Irish courts from 2019 to 2026 compared with the rate of inflation during the same period**



Sources: Where Your Money Goes,<sup>111</sup> Central Statistics Office Consumer Price Index,<sup>112</sup> Central Bank of Ireland<sup>113</sup>

Figure 15 sets out the budget of the Courts Service from 2019 to 2026 and compares the annual percentage increase in the budget with the rate of inflation. This budget does not include funding for judges' salaries but does include capital expenditure.

<sup>109</sup> The rate of inflation for 2025 is based on the Consumer Price Index October 2025, which was the most up-to-date information available at the time of writing (December 2025). Central Statistics Office, *Consumer Price Index* (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpi/consumerpriceindexoctober2025/>> accessed 10 December 2025.

<sup>110</sup> 1.40% is the predicted headline inflation rate forecasted by the Central Bank of Ireland in its *Quarterly Bulletin (Quarter 3)* (18 September 2025) <<https://www.centralbank.ie/publication/quarterly-bulletins/quarterly-bulletin-q3-2025>> accessed 17 November 2025.

<sup>111</sup> Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Where Your Money Goes: Justice' (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.wheremymoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

<sup>112</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Consumer Price Index' (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/prices/consumerpriceindex/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

<sup>113</sup> Central Bank of Ireland, *Quarterly Bulletin (Quarter 3)* (18 September 2025) <<https://www.centralbank.ie/publication/quarterly-bulletins/quarterly-bulletin-q3-2025>> accessed 17 November 2025.

**Figure 16: Funding allocated to the Irish courts from 2019 to 2023 including spend on judicial salaries**

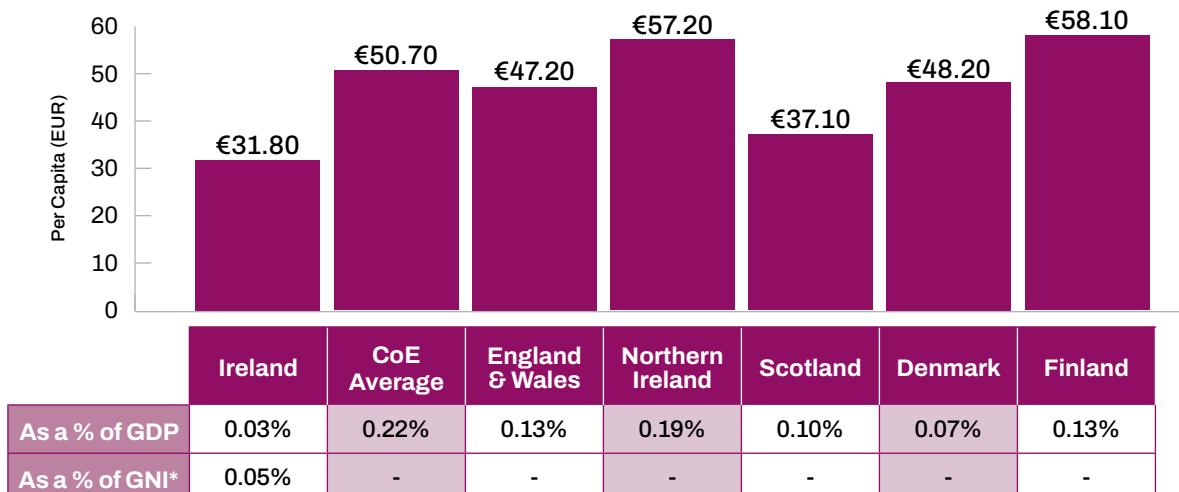
|                         | 2019                  | 2020                  | 2021                  | 2022                  | 2023                  | 2024                  |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Courts' Budget (EUR)    | 136.93 million        | 154.63 million        | 154.09 million        | 163.56 million        | 183.50 million        | 187.67 million        |
| Judicial Salaries (EUR) | 28.06 million         | 29.87 million         | 30.89 million         | 33.28 million         | 36.58 million         | 40.98 million         |
| <b>Total (EUR)</b>      | <b>164.99 million</b> | <b>184.50 million</b> | <b>184.98 million</b> | <b>196.85 million</b> | <b>220.08 million</b> | <b>228.65 million</b> |

Sources: Where Your Money Goes,<sup>114</sup> Finance Accounts of the Department of Finance<sup>115</sup>

Figure 16 includes both the annual budget of the Courts Service and the annual payments charged separately to the Exchequer (and managed by the Department of Finance) in respect of judicial salaries. From 2019 to 2024, the annual spend on judicial salaries increased each year, with the highest spend in 2024 (€40.98 million). The lowest figure was €28.06 million in 2019. Overall, this figure increased by €12.93 million from 2019 to 2024.

As discussed within the Caseload per Judge indicator, the number of judges in Ireland is increasing (see Figure 24) leading to an increase in the amount spent on judicial salaries.

**Figure 17: 2022 implemented court's budget per capita and as % of GDP compared with the CoE average and selected CoE Member States**



Sources: European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report 2024 (Parts 1 and 2),<sup>116</sup> Central Statistics Office Measuring Ireland's Progress 2022<sup>117</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Where Your Money Goes: Justice' (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.wheremymoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

<sup>115</sup> Department of Finance, 'Finance Accounts' (Department of Finance, 31 October 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-finance/finance-accounts/>> accessed 6 November 2025.

<sup>116</sup> Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 1 General Analyses* (Council of Europe, September 2024) 24. <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-work/evaluation-of-judicial-systems>> accessed 30 July 2025.

<sup>117</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Measuring Ireland's Progress' (Central Statistics Office, 23 February 2024) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-mip/measuringirelandsprogress2022/economy/#:~:text=Ireland%20Gross%20Domestic%20Product%2C%20Gross,2012%20to%2071.8%25%20in%202021>> accessed 30 July 2025.

Figure 17 shows that, in 2022, Ireland's per capita spending on its courts was below the Council of Europe average. Ireland spent €31.80 per person (based on Council of Europe data), compared with an average of €50.70. This represents a difference of €18.90 per person, or 37.28% less than the Member State average.

Northern Ireland's per capita expenditure was higher than Ireland's at €57.20. That is 79.87% more than Ireland's per capita expenditure. Ireland also spent less per person on its courts that year than England and Wales (€47.20), Scotland (€37.10), Denmark (€48.20), and Finland (€58.10).

Expressed as a percentage of GDP, Ireland's court per capita expenditure of 0.03% was again below the Council of Europe average of 0.22%. Similarly, Ireland was below the equivalent spend percentages of England and Wales (0.13%), Northern Ireland (0.19%), Scotland (0.10%), Denmark (0.07%), and Finland (0.13%) that year.

When Ireland's expenditure is expressed as a percentage of its GNI\*, it is still below the Council of Europe average (expressed as a percentage of GDP) and that of each of the comparator Member States as outlined in Figure 17. Ireland spent 0.05% of its GNI\* on the courts in 2022, which is 22.73% (or less than a quarter) of the Council of Europe average of 0.22%.

**Figure 18: Funding allocated to the Irish courts per capita from 2019 to 2026 compared with the rate of inflation during the same period**

|   | 2019   | 2020   | 2021   | 2022   | 2023   | 2024   | 2025                 |
|---|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------------------|
| <b>Per Capita Spend</b>                                   | €27.82 | €31.07 | €30.75 | €31.77 | €34.74 | €34.88 | €36.61               |
| <b>Rate of Increase</b>                                   | 0.10%  | 11.66% | -1.02% | 3.31%  | 9.37%  | 0.40%  | 4.95%                |
| <b>Per Capita Spend<br/>(including Judicial Salaries)</b> | €33.52 | €37.07 | €36.91 | €38.23 | €41.67 | €42.50 | -                    |
| <b>Rate of Increase</b>                                   | 0.63%  | 10.57% | -0.42% | 3.57%  | 9.00%  | 1.99%  | -                    |
| <b>Rate of Inflation<br/>(Consumer Price Index)</b>       | 1.30%  | -1.00% | 5.50%  | 8.20%  | 4.60%  | 1.40%  | 2.90% <sup>118</sup> |

Sources: Where Your Money Goes,<sup>119</sup> Central Statistics Office Consumer Price Index,<sup>120</sup> Central Statistics Offices Population and Migration Estimates,<sup>121</sup> Census of Population 2022<sup>122</sup>

<sup>118</sup> The rate of inflation for 2025 is based on the Consumer Price Index October 2025, which was the most up-to-date information available at the time of writing (December 2025). Central Statistics Office, *Consumer Price Index* (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpi/consumerpriceindexoctober2025/>> accessed 10 December 2025.

<sup>119</sup> Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Where Your Money Goes: Justice' (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.whereyourmoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

<sup>120</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Consumer Price Index' (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/prices/consumerpriceindex/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

<sup>121</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Population and Migration Estimates' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/populationandmigrationestimates/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

<sup>122</sup> Central Statistics Office, 'Census of Population 2022' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/censusofpopulation2022/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

In 2025, per capita spending on the Irish courts (excluding judicial salaries) was €36.61 per person. This amount had increased by €8.79 on 2019 per capita spending (a 31.60% increase). Across the period reviewed (2019 to 2025), the per capita spend increased every year other than in 2021, when it decreased by €0.37 per person on the 2020 spend. The largest increase of 11.66% occurred in 2020.

When judicial salaries are included, the pattern is similar, with spending increasing from €33.52 per person in 2019 to €42.50 per person in 2024. That is a percentage increase of 26.79%.

Inflation peaked at 8.20% in 2022, outpacing the growth in court spending that year. In contrast, in 2020 and 2023, increases in per capita spending exceeded inflation, suggesting stronger relative spending. Smaller increases in 2024 and 2025, alongside lower inflation rates, point to a stabilisation phase following earlier volatility.

## Analysis

In 2022, Ireland allocated a budget of €197 million (including judicial salaries), which equates to a spend of €38.23 per capita. This is below the Council of Europe average of €50.70 by a difference of €12.39 (or 24.44%). It is also below all other jurisdictions selected for comparison in Figure 10, above, excluding Scotland, which spent less at €37.10 per capita.

An expenditure of €197 million in the courts (including judicial salaries) by the State is the equivalent of 0.04% of GDP or 0.05% of GNI\*. Both of these percentage figures are below the Council of Europe average of 0.22% for 2022. They are also below the equivalent of each comparator jurisdiction set out in Figure 17, including Scotland. An expenditure rate of 0.05% of GNI\* in the courts places Ireland last in terms of budget allocation by Council of Europe Member States in 2022.<sup>123</sup>

The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) is a body of the Council of Europe. It noted that across all Council of Europe Member States “the proportion of GDP dedicated to the judicial system is notably low” when compared to expenditure in other services.<sup>124</sup> Ireland’s expenditure on its judicial system is lower than the average of Member States, whether expressed as a percentage of its GDP or its GNI\*.

The Court Service’s budget has increased each year since 2022, as can be seen in Figure 15. The most recent data available indicate that in 2025 Ireland spent €36.61 per capita on the courts (excluding judicial salaries).

## Analytical Boundaries

The comparison between spending on courts across Council of Europe Member States is based on nominal figures and does not adjust for purchasing power parity. Consequently, differences in relative costs and living standards between countries are not reflected.

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<sup>123</sup> Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 1 General Analyses* (Council of Europe, September 2024) 24 <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-work/evaluation-of-judicial-systems>> accessed 30 July 2025.

<sup>124</sup> Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 1 General Analyses* (Council of Europe, September 2024) 24 <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-work/evaluation-of-judicial-systems>> accessed 30 July 2025.

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The monetary figures set out in Figure 15 relate to the budget allocated to “manage the courts and support the judiciary”.<sup>125</sup> In other words, they are the Courts Service annual gross budget, as reported in the Courts Service annual reports. These figures do not include funding allocated for judicial salaries, which are funded from expenditure that comes directly from the Exchequer, which is managed by the Department of Finance. Additionally, they do not include any supplementary estimates (additional funding) that may have been approved each year. The costs associated with quasi-judicial proceedings (in, for example, the Workplace Relations Commission, or the International Protection Appeals Tribunal) are not included in the budget of the Courts Service. It is possible that other jurisdictions may include equivalent expenditure as part of their reported court expenditure. The Courts Service budgets include capital expenditure for long-term assets.

The population figures used to calculate per capita spend on the courts in Figure 18 are based on estimated population figures reported by the CSO. However, the population figure used for the 2022 calculation is based on the 2022 census of the Irish population.

The Council of Europe (through CEPEJ) utilises “implemented courts’ budget” to determine the extent of Council of Europe Member States’ spend on their courts per capita. The Council of Europe (CEPEJ) states that this budget *includes* funding allocated for judicial salaries. According to the Council, the full monetary amount of this budget in 2022 for Ireland was €163.63 million (or 48.8% of €335.30 million).<sup>126</sup> This number is more in line with the Courts Service’s gross annual budget for 2022 (€163.56 million) than with a budget that includes funding for judicial salaries (€197.28 million).<sup>127</sup> It is unclear why this discrepancy arises and whether, therefore, the figures in Figure 15 represent a fair comparison of Ireland with other Council of Europe Member States.

Figure 17 includes an analysis of the State’s expenditure on the courts as a percentage of both GDP and GNI\*. As already referenced, there are methodological difficulties in comparing Ireland’s spend based on its GNI\* with the Council of Europe average, which is based on GDP data.

Eurostat data have not been utilised for comparative purposes for this indicator. This is because Eurostat figures for general government spending on ‘law courts’ include spending not only on the administration and operation of the courts, but also, among other things, on the operation of parole and probation systems, administrative tribunals, ombudsmen, and other related services.<sup>128</sup> In 2023, for example, Eurostat reported Ireland’s expenditure as being €831.35 million, whereas the Courts Service’s budget for that same year was €184 million.

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<sup>125</sup> This expenditure is voted on and approved by Dáil Éireann during the annual Budget process after agreement has been reached between the relevant Government Department and the Department of Public Expenditure, Infrastructure, Public Service Reform and Digitalisation.

<sup>126</sup> Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 1 General Analyses* (Council of Europe, September 2024) 24 <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-work/evaluation-of-judicial-systems>> accessed 30 July 2025. Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 2 Country Profiles* (Council of Europe, 2024) 90 <<https://rm.coe.int/fiche-pays-parte-2-en/1680b21e99>> accessed 30 July 2025.

<sup>127</sup> €197 million is based on data from the website of the Government of Ireland; Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, ‘Where Your Money Goes: Justice’ (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.whereyourmoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025; Courts Services, *Courts Service Annual Report 2022* (Courts Services, 2022) <<https://www.courts.ie/annual-report>> accessed 30 July 2025); and the Government of Ireland, *Finance Accounts 2022* (Department of Finance, 2022) <<https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/finance-accounts-2022.pdf>> accessed 30 July 2025.

<sup>128</sup> See Eurostat, *Manual on sources and methods for the compilation of COFOG statistics* (2019 edition, EU Publications Office, September 2019) 204 <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/10142242/KS-GQ-19-010-EN-N.pdf>> accessed 4 November 2025.

There may be issues with the budgetary figure that is used to measure Ireland's courts expenditure, as already noted. However, even when funding for judicial salaries is factored into the amount allocated towards the courts by the State, Ireland spends less on its courts compared with other Council of Europe Member States.

The rating for this indicator is based on the fact that, in 2022, Ireland spent 37.28% of the average per capita court expenditure of Council of Europe States. 2022 was the most recent year for which comparative data are available. As discussed, the State increased spending on the courts in every year reviewed. Ireland's 2024 per capita spend (including judicial salaries) was 16.17% less than the Council of Europe average for 2022, which would also lead to a red rating for this indicator.

**Traffic Light Indicator:** Red



## Average Case Disposition Time

The case disposition time is the length of time between the commencement (initial filing) and resolution (decision) of a matter (either civil or criminal) before the Irish courts. It can also be referred to as the duration of proceedings.

The following Figure shows how long, on average, cases took to progress through the Irish courts between 2019 and 2024 (inclusive) in days.

**Figure 19: Average case disposition times in Ireland 2019 to 2024 (expressed in days)**

|   | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024 |
|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| <b>Civil Matters</b><br>(Excluding Supreme Court)         | 719  | 532  | 663  | 699  | 675  | 501  |
| <b>Criminal Matters</b><br>(Excluding Supreme Court)      | 504  | 390  | 506  | 507  | 527  | 503  |
| <b>Supreme Court</b><br>(from Grant of Leave to Disposal) | -    | 392  | 364  | 434  | 329  | 371  |
| <b>All Matters</b>  | 590  | 442  | 525  | 541  | 538  | 486  |

Source: Annual Reports of the Courts Service<sup>129</sup>

As discussed within the analytical boundaries below, the figures in Figure 19 are based on available data. Data pertaining to first-instance civil matters are not available from 2021 onwards (see Figure 20).

In 2024, civil matters took an average of 501 days (approximately 17 months) to progress through the courts. In 2019, the average case disposition time for civil matters was 719 days (approximately 24 months). The average length of civil proceedings therefore reduced by approximately seven months in the period reviewed. This represents a 30.34% reduction in the case disposition time of civil matters.

The average length of criminal proceedings in 2024 was similar to civil proceedings at 503 days (approximately 17 months). In 2019, the average length was 504 days. This means that the average disposition time for criminal matters reduced by one day from 2019 to 2024. The shortest average case disposition time for criminal matters was 390 days in 2020. The highest was 527 days in 2023.

The average duration from the grant of leave to appeal to the Supreme Court's disposal of the appeal was 371 days (just over 12 months). This was down from 392 days in 2020, a reduction of 21 days over the five-year period.

The average length of proceedings, irrespective of matter type or court jurisdiction, was 486 days (approximately 16 months). In 2019, the average time was 590 days. This means that the overall average disposition time in the Irish courts reduced by 104 days (approximately three and a half months) from 2019 to 2024.

<sup>129</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>) accessed 6 November 2025.

Figure 20, below, separates the average times presented in Figure 19 by court level and by matter type. It therefore illustrates the average time (in days) that it took a case to progress through each court between 2019 and 2024 (inclusive) and further distinguishes between civil and criminal matters.<sup>130</sup>

**Figure 20: Average disposition times in Ireland 2019 to 2024 by court and matter type (expressed in days)**

| CIVIL MATTERS   |                      |      |      |      |      |                    |
|---|----------------------|------|------|------|------|--------------------|
|   | 2019                 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024               |
| <b>District Court</b>   | 144                  | 150  | -    | -    | -    | -                  |
| <b>Circuit Court</b>  | 725                  | 740  | -    | -    | -    | -                  |
| <b>High Court</b>   | 785                  | 660  | 797  | 871  | 796  | 630 <sup>131</sup> |
| <b>Court of Appeal</b>  | 1,220 <sup>132</sup> | 579  | 529  | 527  | 553  | 371 <sup>133</sup> |
| CRIMINAL MATTERS  |                      |      |      |      |      |                    |
|   | 2019                 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024               |
| <b>District Court</b><br>( <i>Summary Offences</i> )                | 277                  | 310  | 371  | 369  | 397  | 360                |
| <b>District Court</b><br>( <i>Indictable dealt with Summarily</i> ) | 375                  | 359  | 419  | 440  | 441  | 403                |
| <b>Circuit Court</b> ( <i>Criminal</i> )                            | 672                  | 499  | 732  | 569  | 622  | 627                |
| <b>Special Criminal Court</b>                                       | 506                  | 295  | 423  | 464  | 386  | 422                |
| <b>Central Criminal Court</b>                                       | 487                  | 506  | 668  | 738  | 888  | 691                |
| <b>Court of Appeal</b>  | 705                  | 371  | 420  | 461  | 426  | 413                |
| SUPREME COURT   |                      |      |      |      |      |                    |
|   | 2019                 | 2020 | 2021 | 2022 | 2023 | 2024               |
| <b>Appeals</b><br>( <i>from Grant of Leave to Disposal</i> )        | -                    | 392  | 364  | 434  | 329  | 371                |

Source: Annual Reports of the Courts Service<sup>134</sup>

<sup>130</sup> The Courts Service no longer reports the average disposition times of civil matters in the District Court or the Circuit Court.

131 From 2024, the Courts Service measures the median disposition time (in days) for the High Court, rather than the average.

132 2018 (1,101) and 2019 are outliers in the average length of proceedings at the Court of Appeal. The expansion of the Court of Appeal in 2019 accounts for the additional demand therein.

133 The 2024 value for the Court of Appeal (Civil) does not include Article 64 appeals, unlike previous years. However, the final six Article 64 appeals remaining were resolved in 2024. Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) 119 <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>)

134 The Courts Service's 2024 Annual Report does not include disposition data in relation to the Court of Appeal. Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=) accessed 6 November 2025

Figure 20 demonstrates that, in 2024, the highest case disposition time was 691 days (23 months) for criminal matters before the Central Criminal Court. In contrast, summary offences in the District Court had the shortest average disposition time at 360 days (12 months).

This Figure also shows that the disposition time of 1,220 days (approximately 40 months) for civil matters in the Court of Appeal in 2019 was the longest among all courts and across all years reviewed (where data are available). This had reduced to 371 days (12 months) by 2024.

On the other end of the spectrum, the shortest case disposition times reported during the period of analysis were 144 days for civil matters (approximately four months) and 277 days (approximately nine months) for criminal matters in the District Court, both in 2019.

When 2019 is excluded, the average duration of civil proceedings before the Court of Appeal from 2020 to 2024 was 512 days (approximately 17 months). This average increases to 630 days (21 months) when 2019 is included. Both of these figures for civil matters are above the equivalent average for criminal matters in the same court, which was 466 days (16 months).

To analyse this information in a broader context, it is important to consider the average disposition times of other jurisdictions. Every two years, the Council of Europe's European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) publishes data comparing the length of proceedings across Council of Europe Member States. The most recent data available are from 2022; they are set out in the following Figure and compared against 2020 data.

**Figure 21: Council of Europe average estimated disposition times compared to actual disposition times in Ireland for 2020 and 2022 (expressed in days)**

|   | 2020                  |                     | 2022                  |                     |
|---|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|
|   | CoE Estimated Average | Ireland Actual Time | CoE Estimated Average | Ireland Actual Time |
| <b>Combined Average of Civil Matters and Administrative Matters (Excluding Supreme Court)</b> | 325                   | 532                 | 222                   | 699                 |
| <b>Criminal Matters (Excluding Supreme Court)</b>   | 131                   | 396                 | 115                   | 520                 |
| <b>All Matters</b>  | 228                   | 442                 | 168                   | 541                 |

Sources: The Council of Europe's European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice,<sup>135</sup> Annual Reports of the Courts Service<sup>136</sup>

<sup>135</sup> Council of Europe, 'Dynamic Database of European Judicial Systems' (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice CEPEJ, 2025) <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-stat>> accessed 25 July 2025.

<sup>136</sup> The Courts Service's 2024 Annual Report does not include disposition data in relation to the Court of Appeal. Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>)> accessed 6 November 2025.

Figure 21 compares Ireland's actual average disposition times with the average estimated disposition times of Council of Europe Member States. The estimated disposition time is "the theoretical time needed for a pending case to be resolved, considering the current pace of work".<sup>137</sup> The Council of Europe did not report estimated disposition times for Ireland as the necessary data for the calculations had not been provided to the Council of Europe (through CEPEJ).

Based on these data, in 2020, civil proceedings took an additional 207 days (approximately seven months) to resolve in Ireland (532 days) than they were projected to take on average across the Council of Europe (325 days).

In 2022, civil proceedings took 699 days in Ireland, while they were projected to last 222 days in Member States, on average. That means civil proceedings in Ireland took approximately 477 days (approximately 16 months) longer to resolve in the Irish courts than they were predicted to take across Council of Europe Member States.

In relation to the disposition times of criminal matters, the Irish courts took 396 days, on average, to resolve matters in 2020. This was 265 days longer than the estimated average disposition time across the Council of Europe (131 days). In 2022, Ireland's average disposition time for criminal matters was 520 days. The estimated Council of Europe average for that year was 114.67 days (405.33 days less than Ireland's disposition time).

The overall average disposition times of the Irish courts (calculated from the data set out in Figure 20 above) were also higher than the overall estimated disposition times reported by the Council of Europe. In Ireland, the overall average disposition times were 460 days in 2020 and 571 days in 2022. The Council of Europe's estimated times were 227.84 days in 2020 and 168.34 days in 2022.

## Analysis

While average case disposition times in Ireland have reduced in recent years, litigation generally takes longer than in other European jurisdictions. For example, civil proceedings in Ireland lasted 699 days in 2022, which was approximately 16 months longer than the average across Council of Europe Member States.

As of 2024, the average length of proceedings in the Irish courts decreased to 502 days, down from 564 in 2023. This improvement was largely due to shorter disposition times for civil matters, which decreased from 675 days in 2023 to 501 days in 2024. Both the High Court and the Court of Appeal contributed to these efficiency gains. Criminal matters also showed reductions in disposition times between 2023 and 2024.

The Court of Appeal (civil matters) recorded the highest efficiency gains, with case disposition times reducing from 1,220 days in 2019 to 371 days in 2024. The length of civil proceedings in the High Court also reduced, decreasing from a peak of 871 days in 2022 to 630 days in 2024.

The Central Criminal Court, while still facing the longest disposition times in 2024, reduced its average disposition time from 888 days in 2023 to 691 days in 2024.

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<sup>137</sup> Council of Europe, 'Dynamic Database of European Judicial Systems' (European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice CEPEJ, 2025) <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-stat>> accessed 25 July 2025.

Overall, the data highlight efficiency gains in appellate and civil courts, while disposition times are longer in the criminal courts, particularly in the Central Criminal Court.

Looking across the years reviewed, the average length of proceedings was lower in 2020 at 460 days. The introduction of remote hearings and disruptions to normal court operations during the Covid-19 pandemic may have contributed to this temporary reduction, with some proceedings not progressing until 2021 or later. Considering the pandemic's impact, all criminal matters (except those in the Central Criminal Court) show a decrease in average length of proceedings in 2024 compared with 2021.

In the Caseload per Judge indicator, Figure 24 sets out the number of judges in the Irish courts to the extent possible. Comparing the figures in Figure 24 with the available data on case disposition times highlights the following observations:

- The appointment of two additional judges to the Court of Appeal in 2024 coincided with a notable reduction in case disposition times between 2023 and 2024, across both civil and criminal matters,
- Similarly, the addition of six judges to the High Court in 2024 was accompanied by a decrease in average case disposition times compared with 2023, again for both civil and criminal cases,
- The appointment of six additional Circuit Court judges in 2020 led to shorter case durations compared with 2019, although this trend was temporarily disrupted in 2021,
- At the District Court level, the appointment of eight additional judges in 2024 coincided with improved disposition times for criminal matters, with measurable reductions observed between 2023 and 2024.

## **Analytical Boundaries**

Significant data that are required to conduct a comprehensive assessment of Ireland's performance under this indicator are not currently available. From 2021 onwards, information regarding the average disposition times for civil matters in both the District Court and Circuit Court is not available.

The average disposition time at the Court of Appeal in 2019 appears anomalous, compared with following years. The *Courts Act 2019*, which came into force in late 2019, increased the number of judges assigned to the Court of Appeal by six.

The Council of Europe (through CEPEJ) reports disposition times in a different manner to the Courts Service. It calculates the average length of proceedings by reference to the ratio between pending and resolved cases, rather than basing it on an average of the exact number of days that cases take to conclude. In other words, the Council of Europe's disposition times are based on a theoretical calculation to predict disposition times. They are not a record of actual disposition times. Ireland does not report the average length of proceedings in first- and second-instance

courts to the Council of Europe, which is at variance with Council of Europe recommendations.<sup>138</sup> For this reason, it is not possible to compare estimated disposition times for Ireland with the Council of Europe's estimated disposition times. As an alternative comparator, the actual average length of proceedings as reported by the Court Service has been used. Comparing estimated figures with actual figures is not methodologically perfect.

Further, the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) reports administrative cases separately. The comparison in Figure 21 is therefore limited, and its results should be interpreted with caution.

Caution should also be exercised in relation to the 2020 figures, given that the Covid-19 pandemic may have impacted the operation of the courts in different jurisdictions to a different degree. For example, Figure 19 indicates that disposition times in the Irish courts reduced in 2020, particularly in respect of criminal matters. Fewer criminal cases proceeded to trial in Ireland in 2020 due to the inability to convene juries during the pandemic.

Careful consideration is advised when comparing the average disposition times across courts within Ireland. These figures do not take into account the complexity of matters or the reasons for adjournments, for example. More granular information regarding case types and complexity level would be required to make comparison across courts a more meaningful exercise.

Similarly, direct comparison between the durations of civil and criminal proceedings should be approached with care. Civil proceedings can take longer to progress for a variety of reasons. For example:

- Multiple parties may be involved in a dispute,
- Parties may institute multiple motions and applications,
- Proceedings may be part of a broader dispute,
- Efforts may be made to engage in settlement negotiations, and
- Parties may seek multiple adjournments.

There is generally a greater sense of urgency in criminal matters, given, for example, that the accused's right to liberty is often at stake.

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<sup>138</sup> Pim Albers, 'Best practices on the prevention of the unreasonable length of proceedings: experiences from the CEPEJ' (Council of Europe, 2022) <<https://rm.coe.int/best-practices-on-the-prevention-of-the-unreasonable-length-of-proceed/1680790b44>> accessed 16 July 2025.

The Government published its Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity in September 2025. Recommendation 52 of this Plan aims to empower Court Presidents to delegate tasks to court officers to free up judicial time.<sup>139</sup> The enactment of the *Court Proceedings (Delays) Act 2024* is another relevant development. Once commenced, the Act will provide for a compensation mechanism to enable people to apply for compensation where their case has not been resolved within a reasonable time. Further, a new case-management system is due to be introduced by the Courts Service; this may address some of the data shortages that have been highlighted.<sup>140</sup>

The rating for this indicator is based on the finding that for 2022 Ireland's overall average case disposition time (541 days) was 222.02% higher than the Council of Europe's average estimated case disposition time (168 days). Indeed, Ireland's average case disposition time was more than three times longer than the Council of Europe average estimate. This rating should be interpreted with regard to the limitations inherent in comparing an actual national figure with an estimated European benchmark. Ireland does not currently provide the Council of Europe with the data required to produce an Ireland-specific estimated average case disposition time, which affects the precision of this comparison.

**Traffic Light Indicator: Red**



<sup>139</sup> The Government of Ireland, *Action Plan on Competitiveness and Productivity*, (Government of Ireland, September 2025) <<https://enterprise.gov.ie/en/publications/publication-files/action-plan-on-competitiveness-and-productivity.pdf>> accessed 22 September 2025.

<sup>140</sup> As part of the Courts Services' Corporate Strategy, a new Unified Case Management System (UCMS) is being introduced in Ireland. This system was trialled in 2023 for the High Court and is now being rolled out across the Circuit Courts. By 2027, the UCMS will have been rolled out across all courts within the State and will be expanded for court users by way of a "UCMS Portal" and for members of the judiciary via "UCMS Judiciary". This will ensure clearer and more transparent access to digital court data and improve general knowledge about the operation of the courts.

## Caseload per Judge

Caseload per judge is the average number of cases a judge is handling within a given period.

Figures 22 and 23 indicate that, from 2023 to 2024, the average caseload per judge has increased in the Superior Courts and has decreased in the lower courts.

The increase in caseload was highest in the High Court. In 2023, a High Court judge was responsible for approximately 444 cases that year. This increased to 474 cases in 2024 (an increase of 30 cases or 6.76%). On a per-day basis, these numbers equate to a daily increase from 2.09 cases in 2023 to 2.24 cases in 2024.

At the District Court level, each judge was responsible for an average of 6,764 cases in 2024, representing a decrease of 466 cases compared with the 2023 (a 6.45% reduction).

**Figure 22: Average annual caseloads in 2023 and 2024 per matter type and court level**

|                        | Civil Law Cases per Judge |       | Criminal Law Cases per Judge |       | All Cases per Judge |       |
|------------------------|---------------------------|-------|------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-------|
|                        | 2023                      | 2024  | 2023                         | 2024  | 2023                | 2024  |
| <b>District Court</b>  | 2,078                     | 1,891 | 5,152                        | 4,873 | 7,230               | 6,764 |
| <b>Circuit Court</b>   | 629                       | 560   | 694                          | 721   | 1,323               | 1,281 |
| <b>High Court</b>      | 385                       | 419   | 59                           | 55    | 444                 | 474   |
| <b>Court of Appeal</b> | 20                        | 16    | 169                          | 177   | 189                 | 193   |
| <b>Supreme Court</b>   | 18                        | 23    | 4                            | 6     | 22                  | 29    |

Source: Annual Reports of the Courts Service<sup>141</sup> and data from Figure 24

<sup>141</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>)> accessed 6 November 2025.

**Figure 23: Average daily caseloads in 2023 and 2024 per matter type and court level  
(based on 212 working days)**

|                        | Civil Law Cases per Judge per Day |      | Criminal Law Cases per Judge per Day |       | All Cases per Judge per Day |       |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------|------|--------------------------------------|-------|-----------------------------|-------|
|                        | 2023                              | 2024 | 2023                                 | 2024  | 2023                        | 2024  |
| <b>District Court</b>  | 9.80                              | 8.92 | 24.30                                | 22.99 | 34.10                       | 31.91 |
| <b>Circuit Court</b>   | 2.97                              | 2.64 | 3.27                                 | 3.40  | 6.24                        | 6.04  |
| <b>High Court</b>      | 1.82                              | 1.98 | 0.28                                 | 0.26  | 2.09                        | 2.24  |
| <b>Court of Appeal</b> | 0.09                              | 0.08 | 0.80                                 | 0.83  | 0.89                        | 0.91  |
| <b>Supreme Court</b>   | 0.08                              | 0.11 | 0.02                                 | 0.03  | 0.10                        | 0.14  |

Sources: Annual Reports of the Courts Service,<sup>142</sup> OECD Report on Modernising Staffing and Court Management Practices in Ireland<sup>143</sup> and data Figure 22

Figure 24 indicates the number of judges in the Irish courts. The figures from 2019 are the actual number of judges as of December 2019, and as reported by the Courts Service in its annual report for that year. The figures for 2025 are the actual number of judges as of November 2025 and as published on the Courts Service's website. The figures for the intervening years are the maximum of judges permitted under legislation.

**Figure 24: Number of judges in each Court from 2019 to November of 2025**

|                 | 2019<br>(Actual) | 2020<br>(Maximum<br>Permitted) | 2021<br>(Maximum<br>Permitted) | 2022<br>(Maximum<br>Permitted) | 2023<br>(Maximum<br>Permitted) | 2024<br>(Maximum<br>Permitted) | 2025<br>(Actual) |
|-----------------|------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Supreme Court   | 9                | 10                             | 10                             | 10                             | 10                             | 10                             | 9                |
| Court of Appeal | 15               | 16                             | 16                             | 16                             | 16                             | 18                             | 19               |
| High Court      | 40               | 40                             | 45                             | 45                             | 45                             | 51                             | 50               |
| Circuit Court   | 40               | 46                             | 46                             | 46                             | 46                             | 46                             | 46               |
| District Court  | 63               | 64                             | 64                             | 64                             | 64                             | 72                             | 71               |
| <b>Total</b>    | <b>167</b>       | <b>176</b>                     | <b>181</b>                     | <b>181</b>                     | <b>181</b>                     | <b>197</b>                     | <b>195</b>       |

Sources: Annual Reports of the Courts Service,<sup>144</sup> Dáil Éireann Debates, Courts Service website

<sup>142</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>) accessed 6 November 2025.

<sup>143</sup> OECD, *Modernising Staffing and Court Management Practices in Ireland* (OECD, 2023) <[https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/01/modernising-staffing-and-court-management-practices-in-ireland\\_b2470f48/8a5c52d0-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/01/modernising-staffing-and-court-management-practices-in-ireland_b2470f48/8a5c52d0-en.pdf)> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>144</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019- 2024) <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>) accessed 6 November 2025.

## Analysis

As already highlighted, the average caseload in the District Court decreased from 2023 to 2024. In 2024, an additional eight District Court judges were appointed (see Figure 24), which is the reason for reduction in individual caseload. If the number of judges had remained the same across both years (64), the average annual caseload would have increased from 5,152 in 2023 to 5,482 in 2024.

The average caseload in the Circuit Court also decreased from 2023 to 2024. This is even though the number of Circuit Court judges remained unchanged between both years (at 46). Expressed as a percentage, the annual caseload in the Circuit Court decreased by 3.17%. This is less than the decrease in caseload at the District Court level, which was 6.45%.

The average caseload in the Supreme Court increased by seven cases per year, representing a 31.82% increase. This was the highest percentage increase across all court levels. The higher percentage increase is explained by the fact that the Supreme Court handles the lowest number of cases compared with other courts; therefore, even a modest numerical increase translates into a comparatively higher percentage change. At the Court of Appeal, for example, the annual caseload per judge increased by 30 cases, which represented a 6.76% increase.

Also in the High Court, the average number of civil matters per judge increased from 2023 to 2024 (by 8.83%), while the number of criminal matters decreased (by 6.78%).

Average caseloads across Member States are not compared by either the Council of Europe or Eurostat. Based on data published by the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) in 2024, Ireland had the lowest number of judges per 100,000 inhabitants of all Council of Europe Member States.<sup>145</sup> This 2023 finding was again highlighted in the 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard.

## Analytical Boundaries

Calculating average caseloads does not take into account the relative complexity of cases. The Superior Courts handle fewer cases than the lower courts, however, the matters before them are generally more complex, often involving constitutional issues, significant points of law, and appeals from lower courts. As a result, cases may require more time, meaning that lower numerical caseloads in the Superior Courts do not necessarily indicate lighter workloads.

The figures set out in Figures 22 and 23, above, give an indication of the average workload of judges in Ireland. However, these figures do not take into account the existing backlog of cases (or pending cases). Rather, they have been calculated using the number of new cases that were initiated in the courts in 2023 and 2024. The actual workload was, therefore, likely to be higher than these figures suggest. Information regarding pending cases in the Irish courts is not currently available. A backlog of pending cases arises in the courts when the number of cases initiated exceeds the number of cases that are resolved by the courts within a defined period (generally a calendar year). Figures are not available on the extent of the backlog of pending cases in the Irish courts, or how long cases have been in the system.

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<sup>145</sup> Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 1 General Analyses* (Council of Europe, September 2024) 24 <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-work/evaluation-of-judicial-systems>> accessed 30 July 2025.

A further limitation is presented by the fact that the number of actual sitting days of each court is not publicly available at present. As an alternative, the standard work year of Ireland's judiciary (212 days) – devised by the OECD in 2023 – has been used for these calculations.<sup>146</sup> The absence of information regarding the actual number of sitting days hinders accurate calculation of judges' average caseloads.

As already noted, the average caseload figures for 2020 to 2024 are based on the maximum number of judges permitted under legislation, rather than on the actual number of serving judges in those years. This approach was necessary because the Courts Service no longer provides a breakdown of judges by court in its annual reports. As a result, actual caseloads may be higher in years during which vacancies occurred.

The average caseload of judges in the Special Criminal Court has not been calculated because cases in this court are heard by panels of judges that are drawn from the High Court, the Circuit Court, and the District Court. The average caseload of judges drawn from these courts to sit on the Special Criminal Court would therefore be higher than Figures 22 and 23 suggest.

The Supreme Court and Court of Appeal always sit as panels of judges. The High Court sits as a panel in certain instances. Consequently, the caseload calculations for these courts are indicative of workload, rather than being a direct measure of the number of cases heard by individual judges.

In recent years, legislation has been enacted to increase the number of judges in Ireland. For example:

- The *Courts Act 2019* increased the number of judges assigned to the Court of Appeal by six,
- The *Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2021* increased the maximum number of High Court judges by five, and
- The *Criminal Justice (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2023* provided for an additional two Court of Appeal judges, an additional six High Court judges, and an additional eight judges at the Circuit Court.

In 2023, an OECD report, which was commissioned by the Department of Justice, estimated that an increase of between 36 and 108 judges was needed in Ireland.<sup>147</sup> This report fed into the work of the Judicial Planning Working Group, which similarly recommended that between 60 and 108 additional judges should be appointed in a phased approach from 2024 to 2028.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> OECD, *Modernising Staffing and Court Management Practices in Ireland* (OECD, 2023) <[https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/01/modernising-staffing-and-court-management-practices-in-ireland\\_b2470f48/8a5c52d0-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/01/modernising-staffing-and-court-management-practices-in-ireland_b2470f48/8a5c52d0-en.pdf)> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>147</sup> OECD, *Modernising Staffing and Court Management Practices in Ireland* (OECD, 2023) <[https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/01/modernising-staffing-and-court-management-practices-in-ireland\\_b2470f48/8a5c52d0-en.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2023/01/modernising-staffing-and-court-management-practices-in-ireland_b2470f48/8a5c52d0-en.pdf)> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>148</sup> Department of Justice, Report of the Judicial Planning Working Group (December 2022) 71.

The *Judicial Appointments Commission Act 2023*, which came into force in 2024 and 2025, reformed how judges are selected and appointed within the State. The act established a new, independent Judicial Appointments Commission responsible for selecting and recommending candidates for judicial office based on merit, transparency, and diversity. In 2025, the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration announced the first judicial appointments that had been made through the Commission.<sup>149</sup>

At the time of writing (December 2025), the *Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025* had been signed into law, but not yet promulgated in Iris Oifigiúil or published on the electronic *Irish Statute Book*. The purpose of the bill is to “provide for an increase in the maximum numbers of judges in the District Court, the Circuit Court, the High Court and the Court of Appeal”.<sup>150</sup>

As it was not possible to compare average caseloads at the European Union or Council of Europe level, the rating for this indicator is white.

**Traffic Light Indicator:** White



<sup>149</sup> Department of Justice, Home Affairs, and Migration, ‘Press Release: Minister Jim O’Callaghan announces first judicial nominations following establishment of the Judicial Appointments Commission’ (Department of Justice, Home Affairs, and Migration, 8 July 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/press-releases/minister-jim-o-callaghan-announces-first-judicial-nominations-following-establishment-of-the-judicial-appointments-commission/>> accessed 15 July 2025.

<sup>150</sup> Government of Ireland, *Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2025: Explanatory Memorandum* (2025) <<https://data.oireachtas.ie/ie/oireachtas/bill/2025/64/eng/memo/b6425d-memo.pdf>> accessed 19 November 2025.

## Case Clearance Rates

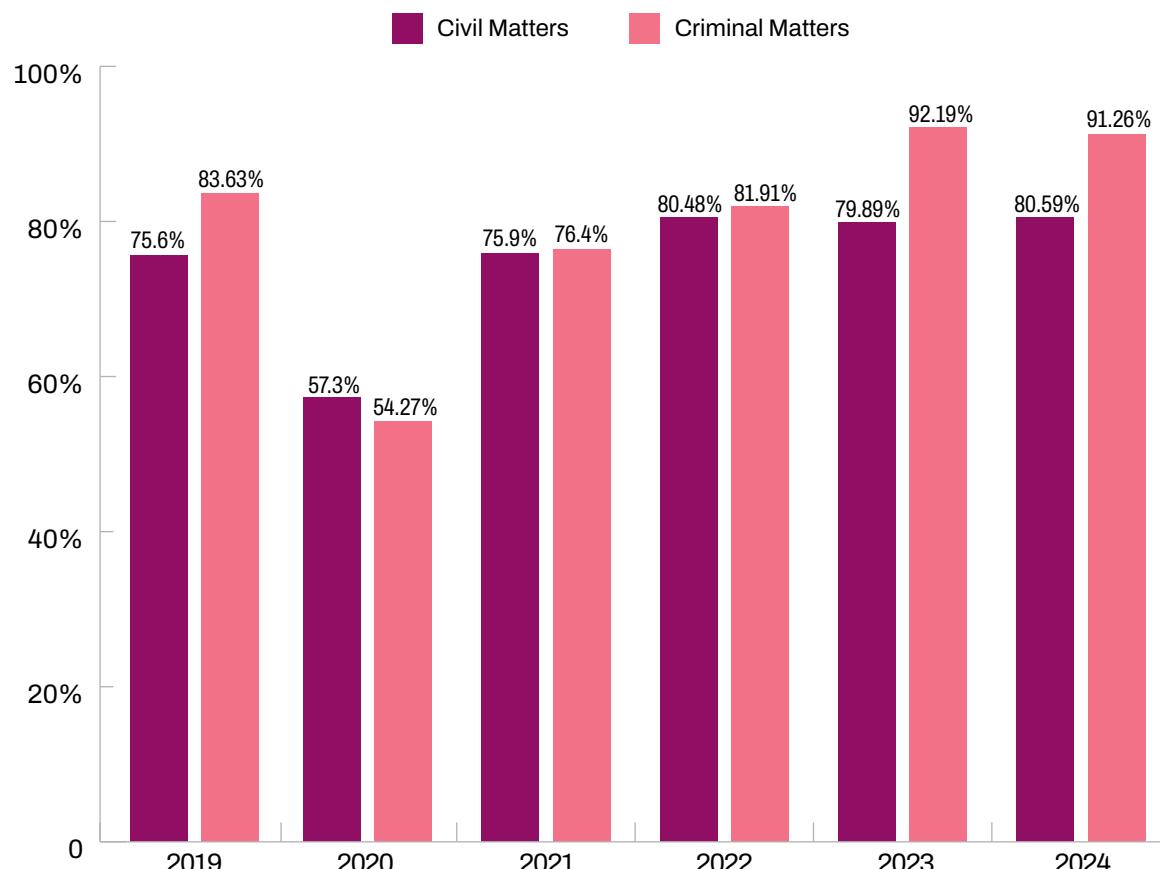
Case clearance rates measure how effectively and efficiently the courts manage their caseloads. The rate is calculated by expressing the number of outgoing (resolved) cases as a percentage of the number of incoming (new) cases in a given year.

A case clearance rate of less than 100% indicates that the courts are resolving fewer cases than the number of new cases initiated. This adds additional cases to the following year's caseload, creating a backlog of pending cases.

The case clearance rate is related to, but can be distinguished from, average disposition time. The case clearance rate measures how many cases are resolved by a court compared with how many cases are initiated before it. The average disposition time tracks how long it takes to resolve a case.

Figure 25 sets out the average annual case clearance rates of the Irish courts from 2019 to 2024, disaggregated into civil and criminal matters. In 2024, some 183,787 new civil matters were initiated across all levels of the Irish courts system. Of these, 148,120 were resolved. That constitutes an overall clearance rate of 80.59%. This clearance rate increased by 6.60% from 2019, when the clearance rate was 75.60%.

**Figure 25: Annual case clearance rates 2019 to 2024**



Sources: Annual Reports of the Courts Service,<sup>151</sup> 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard<sup>152</sup>

<sup>151</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) 62 <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>)> accessed 6 November 2025.

<sup>152</sup> European Commission, *2025 EU Justice Scoreboard* (2025) <[https://commission.europa.eu/document/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/document/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e_en)> accessed 25 July 2025.

There were 390,158 new criminal matters initiated in the Irish courts in 2024. Of these, 356,045 were resolved. Expressed as a percentage, the 2024 clearance rate for criminal matters was, therefore, 91.26%. Overall, the clearance rate for criminal matters increased from 83.63% in 2019 to 91.26% in 2024.

All of the clearance rates set out in Figure 25 are below 100%, meaning that, on average, the backlog of cases in the Irish courts increased year on year from 2019 to 2024.

To gain greater insight into the efficiency of each court, Figures 26 and 27 disaggregate the clearance rates by jurisdiction as well as by matter type.

**Figure 26: Annual case clearance rates of civil matters by court level from 2019 to 2024**

|                        | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    |
|------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>District Court</b>  | 77.18%  | 72.33%  | 75.56%  | 79.04%  | 80.93%  | 81.57%  |
| <b>Circuit Court</b>   | 70.17%  | 44.43%  | 77.98%  | 88.29%  | 72.94%  | 73.91%  |
| <b>High Court</b>      | 76.61%  | 42.88%  | 72.43%  | 78.10%  | 82.87%  | 81.23%  |
| <b>Court of Appeal</b> | 71.68%  | 64.94%  | 135.96% | 116.40% | 113.23% | 123.54% |
| <b>Supreme Court</b>   | 107.69% | 122.53% | 113.85% | 111.52% | 84.00%  | 103.46% |

Source: Annual Reports of the Courts Service<sup>153</sup>

From 2019 to 2024, the case clearance rate of civil matters increased in all courts other than the Supreme Court. The Court of Appeal's rate increased by the largest amount, increasing from 71.68% in 2019 to 123.54% in 2024 (an increase of 72.35%). This was also the highest clearance rate in 2024.

In 2024, both the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court had clearance rates that exceeded 100% of their civil caseloads, resolving more cases than were initiated during the year. By contrast, all other courts recorded clearance rates below 100%, resulting in an accumulation of pending civil matters carried forward into 2025.

The case clearance rates of civil matters across all court levels – with the exception of the Supreme Court – decreased in 2020. The Supreme Court's clearance rate was at its highest in 2020 at 122.53%.

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<sup>153</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) 63 <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>)> accessed 6 November 2025.

**Figure 27: Annual case clearance rates of criminal matters by court level from 2019 to 2024**

|                               | 2019    | 2020    | 2021    | 2022    | 2023    | 2024    |
|-------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| <b>District Court</b>         | 74.17%  | 50.93%  | 74.83%  | 78.78%  | 89.20%  | 88.30%  |
| <b>Circuit Court</b>          | 196.64% | 95.58%  | 97.26%  | 114.42% | 123.32% | 123.01% |
| <b>Special Criminal Court</b> | 128.57% | 22.79%  | 122.07% | 82.61%  | 157.14% | 69.18%  |
| <b>Central Criminal Court</b> | 56.76%  | 49.23%  | 36.56%  | 70.64%  | 112.75% | 118.79% |
| <b>Court of Appeal</b>        | 69.65%  | 122.35% | 87.85%  | 92.58%  | 68.38%  | 63.06%  |
| <b>Supreme Court</b>          | 120.00% | 81.81%  | 131.43% | 84.84%  | 109.75% | 86.44%  |

Source: Annual Reports of the Courts Service<sup>154</sup>

In 2024, both the Circuit Court and the Central Criminal Court had clearance rates above 100% for criminal matters. All other courts' clearance rates were below 100%. The clearance rates of each of the Circuit Court, Special Criminal Court, Court of Appeal, and Supreme Court decreased from 2019 to 2024. The biggest decrease was in the Circuit Court, with its clearance rate decreasing from 196.64% in 2019 to 123.01% in 2024.

The Court of Appeal's clearance rate for criminal matters was at its lowest across the six years reviewed in 2024 at 63.06%. This is a decrease of 9.46% on the rate in 2019, which was 69.65%.

The Circuit Court's clearance rate was above 100% in most years reviewed, other than in 2020 (95.58%) and 2021 (97.26%).

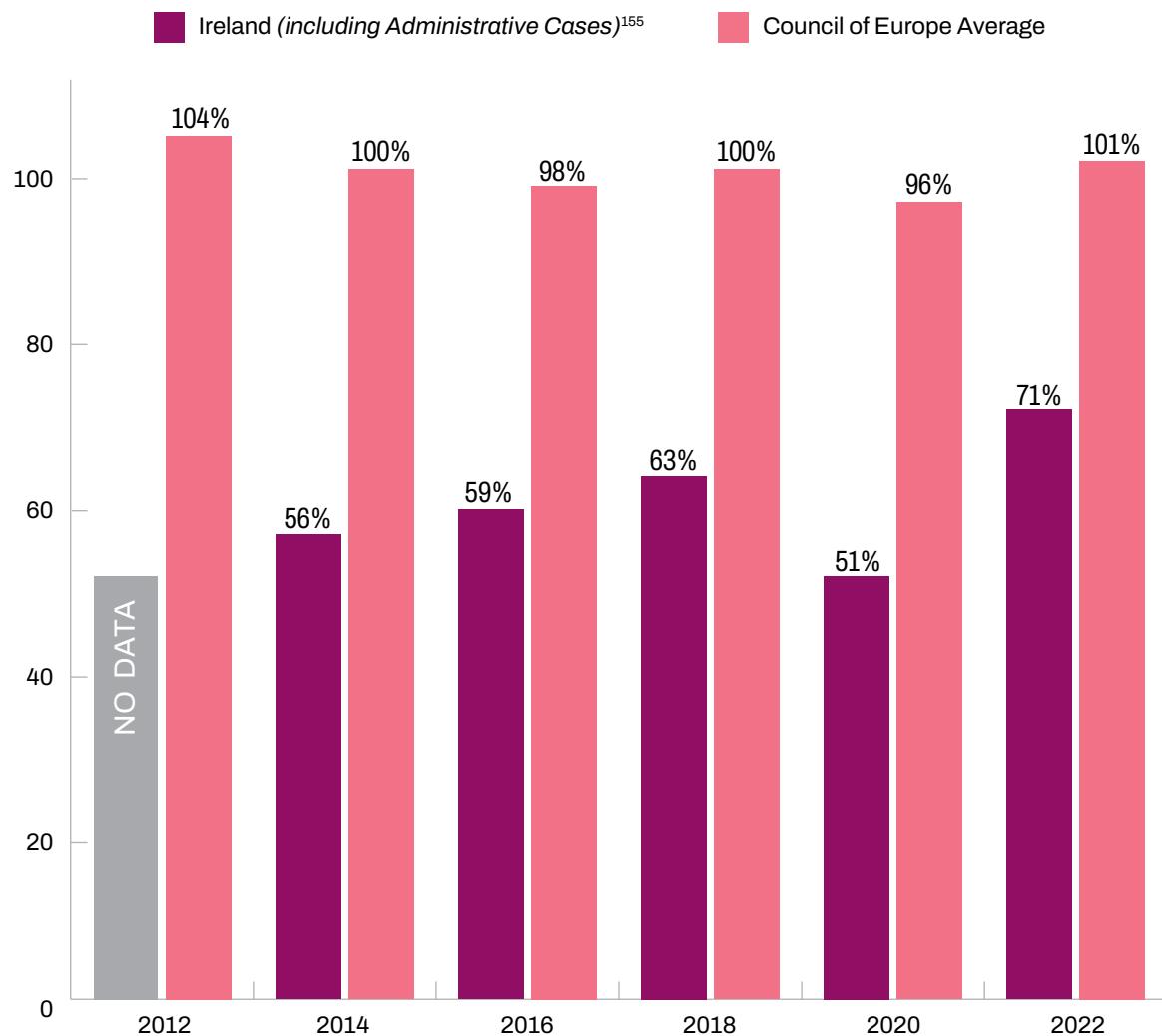
The lowest clearance rate for criminal matters was in the Special Criminal Court in 2020, when the rate was 22.79%.

In 2020, the clearance rate decreased in all courts other than in Court of Appeal, where the rate increased by 75.66%.

<sup>154</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Reports* (Courts Service, 2019-2024) 63 <[https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content\\_type=annual-reports&year=>](https://www.courts.ie/publications?keyword=&office=&content_type=annual-reports&year=>) accessed 6 November 2025.

Figure 28 compares Ireland's case clearance rates in first instance civil and commercial courts with the Council of Europe average over time (every second year from 2012 to 2022). These figures clearly demonstrate that Ireland's annual clearance rate has been below the Council of Europe each year.

**Figure 28: Annual clearance rate of first instance courts (civil and commercial matters) from 2012 to 2022**



Source: European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report 2024 (Part 1)<sup>156</sup>

In 2022, Ireland's average case clearance rate in first-instance courts (civil matters) was 71%, which was 30 percentage points below the Council of Europe Average.

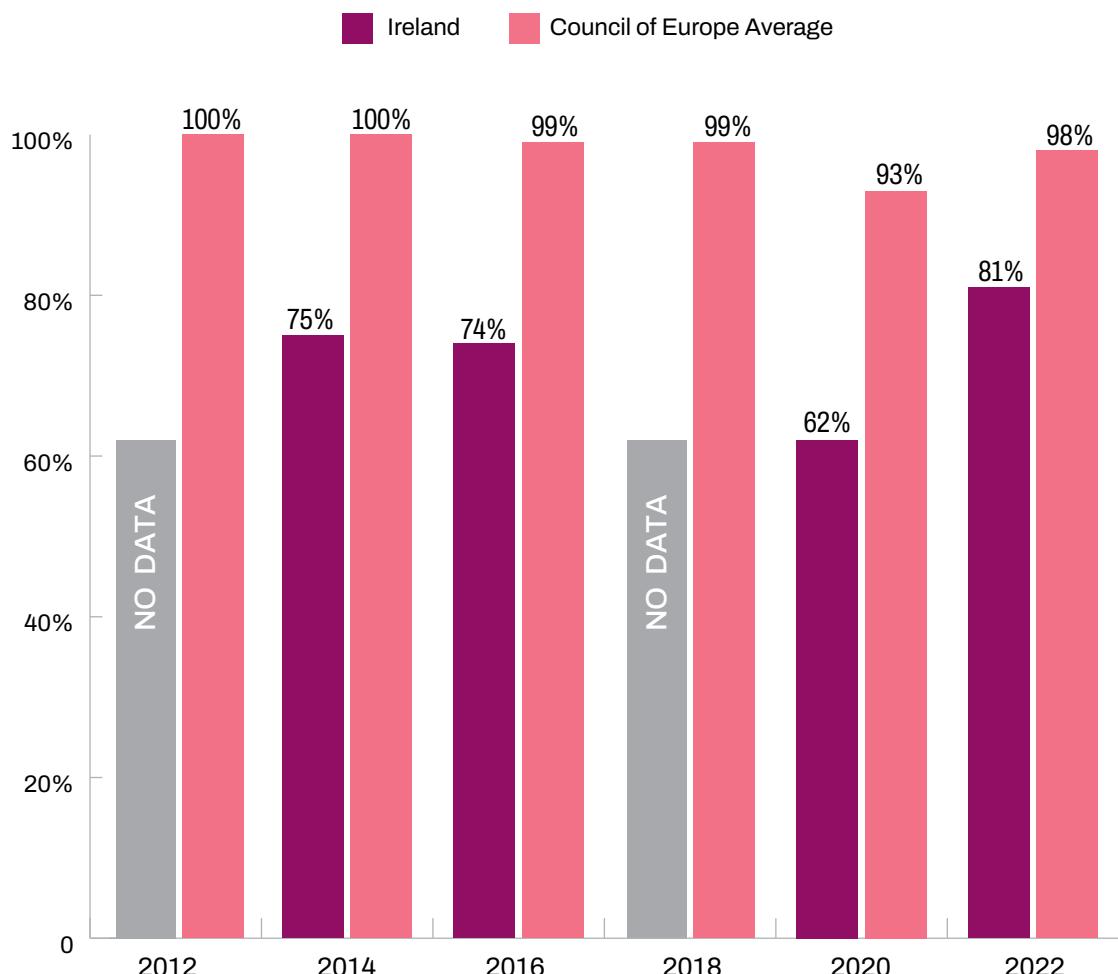
Across the years reviewed, Ireland's overall average case clearance rate was 60%. This was 39.9% below the Council of Europe equivalent average of 99.83%.

<sup>155</sup> Because Ireland's data do not separate administrative matters from civil matters, the reported figures also include administrative cases.

<sup>156</sup> Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 1 General Analyses* (Council of Europe, September 2024) 118 <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-work/evaluation-of-judicial-systems>> accessed 30 July 2025.

Figure 29 compares the case clearance rates for criminal matters from 2012 to 2022 with the Council of Europe average. Data for Ireland are not available for first instance criminal clearance rates in 2012 or 2018. From the data available, the clearance rates for criminal cases in Ireland ranged from a low of 62% (in 2020) to a high of 81% (in 2022). The average criminal case clearance rate for Ireland from 2012 through 2022 was 73%.

**Figure 29: Annual clearance rate of first instance courts (criminal matters) from 2012 to 2022**



Source: European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report 2024 (Part 1)<sup>157</sup>

As with civil and commercial cases, these clearance rates illustrate that the rate in Ireland in first-instances courts was lower than that of the Council of Europe's in each year analysed. The largest difference was in 2020, where the clearance rate for Ireland was 31 percentage points lower than the European average. Overall, the average case clearance rate for Ireland (73%) was 25 percentage points lower than the Council of Europe's average of 98%.

<sup>157</sup> Council of Europe, *European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report: 2024 Evaluation Cycle (2022 data) Part 1 General Analyses* (Council of Europe, September 2024) 118 <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cepej/cepej-work/evaluation-of-judicial-systems>> accessed 30 July 2025.

## Analysis

As overall case clearance rates in Ireland have been below 100%, the backlog of cases within the courts system increased, year on year. In order to address the backlog, clearance rates would need to be above 100% for several consecutive years.

The largest disparity between civil and criminal clearance rates was evident in the Circuit Court, where civil matters averaged a clearance rate of 71.29%, compared with 125.04% for criminal matters. Many civil matters are settled before hearing, some without court approval, meaning that the official clearance rates for civil matters are not completely reflective of the actual resolution of civil disputes. This may affect the case clearance rate in the lower courts to a greater extent.

From 2019 to 2024, the Supreme Court was the only court to maintain average case clearance rates above 100% for both civil (107.18%) and criminal (102.38%) matters. Its civil clearance rate peaked in 2020 at 122.53%, while other courts recorded their lowest rates that year, likely due to the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The lowest case clearance rate across all courts for criminal matters during the reviewed period was 22.79% in the Special Criminal Court in 2020. This is notable when compared to that Court's rates for 2019 and 2021, which were 128.57% and 122.07%, respectively. Again, the Covid-19 pandemic may have played a role in the low clearance rate in 2020.

Across the EU, most Member States (18 of 27) cleared more than 100% of cases in courts of first instance in both 2023 and 2024. This includes Cyprus and Greece, which had previously reported case clearance rates below 70%.<sup>158</sup>

Figure 27 highlights that the Council of Europe average case clearance rate of first-instance courts (civil and commercial matters) ranged from 96% in 2020 to 104% in 2012, averaging out at 99.83%. This indicates that most jurisdictions have been keeping pace with or reducing case backlogs. From 2012 to 2022, available data show that Ireland's clearance rates for first-instance courts (civil and commercial matters) have remained below the Council of Europe benchmark. Ireland's rate was lowest in 2020, most likely due to the pandemic and related restrictions (at 51%), though the Council of Europe average remained high that year at 96%.

Ireland's first-instance clearance rates for criminal cases were lower than those of the Council of Europe across all years analysed. The Council of Europe average case clearance rate of 98% indicates that, although backlogs exist across Member States, new cases are being added to the backlog at a low rate. In contrast, Ireland's average case clearance rate of 73% suggests that, on average, 27% of criminal cases in the courts of first instance remained unresolved each year from 2014 to 2022.

The 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard identified Ireland as having the lowest clearance rate among Member States,<sup>159</sup> though methodological limitations affect the extent to which this assessment can be relied on, as discussed below.

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<sup>158</sup> Figure 9. European Commission, *The 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard* (EU 2025) 11 <[https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e\\_en?filename=2025%20EU%20Justice%20Scoreboard\\_template.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e_en?filename=2025%20EU%20Justice%20Scoreboard_template.pdf)> accessed 25 November 2025.

<sup>159</sup> European Commission, *The 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard* (EU 2025) 11 <[https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e\\_en?filename=2025%20EU%20Justice%20Scoreboard\\_template.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e_en?filename=2025%20EU%20Justice%20Scoreboard_template.pdf)> accessed 25 November 2025.

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## Analytical Boundaries

Most civil matters initiated in the Irish courts do not proceed to trial and, therefore, are not resolved by the courts.<sup>160</sup> Matters are often settled, for example, or they may be withdrawn. The annual Courts Services reports do not report on the number of settlements across the jurisdictions of the civil courts, making it more difficult to ascertain which courts might have higher or lower actual clearance rates. It would be helpful if these figures were recorded and published.

The numbers of cases that are recorded as ‘resolved’ in the Courts Service’s annual reports may include cases that were commenced in previous years.<sup>161</sup>

While the EU Justice Scoreboard ranks Ireland the lowest among EU Member States in relation to how efficiently the courts resolve civil matters, it is important to note that the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) methodology separates administrative matters from civil matters. As the Irish courts do not do this, the data that the Council of Europe use for the Irish courts include administrative cases, which would affect Ireland’s rating. Indeed, the Council noted that for Ireland “the number of resolved cases is expected to be underreported due to the methodology”.<sup>162</sup>

Information regarding the backlog of cases within the Irish courts is not currently reported on. Additionally, information on how long cases have remained unresolved within the justice system is unavailable.

When interpreting the comparison of Ireland’s case clearance rates in first-instance courts (civil and commercial matters) against the Council of Europe average, it should be noted that Ireland’s reported figures include administrative matters within the broader category of civil and commercial cases. In many other jurisdictions, administrative cases are recorded separately and excluded from civil clearance statistics. This difference in classification reduces the comparability of Ireland’s data with that of other Member States. It is also worth noting that Ireland is a common law jurisdiction, whereas the majority of Council of Europe jurisdictions follow the civil law tradition. Case clearance rates are influenced by the underlying legal system, including how cases are initiated, processed, and resolved.

The rating for this indicator is based on the finding that, in 2022, the clearance rate of Ireland’s courts of first instances was 29.70% below the Council of Europe average for civil matters and 17.35% below the Council of Europe average for criminal matters. It is important to reiterate that some of Ireland’s courts have case clearance rates above 100%. Furthermore, the majority of civil matters in Ireland are settled prior to hearing, and comprehensive statistics on the number of such settlements are not currently available.

**Traffic Light Indicator:** Red

<sup>160</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Report 2024* (Courts Service, 2025) 64 <<https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/5a87d7d6-b27d-407f-bf9d-fb3b8e47627e/Courts%20Service%20Annual%20Report%202024.pdf/pdf/1>> accessed 6 November 2025.

<sup>161</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Report 2024* (Courts Service, 2025) <<https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/5a87d7d6-b27d-407f-bf9d-fb3b8e47627e/Courts%20Service%20Annual%20Report%202024.pdf/pdf/1>> accessed 6 November 2025.

<sup>162</sup> European Commission, *The 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard* (EU 2025) 11 <[https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e\\_en?filename=2025%20EU%20Justice%20Scoreboard\\_template.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/51b21eff-a4b0-4e73-b461-06bd23b43d4e_en?filename=2025%20EU%20Justice%20Scoreboard_template.pdf)> accessed 25 November 2025.





## Prisons







## Prisons

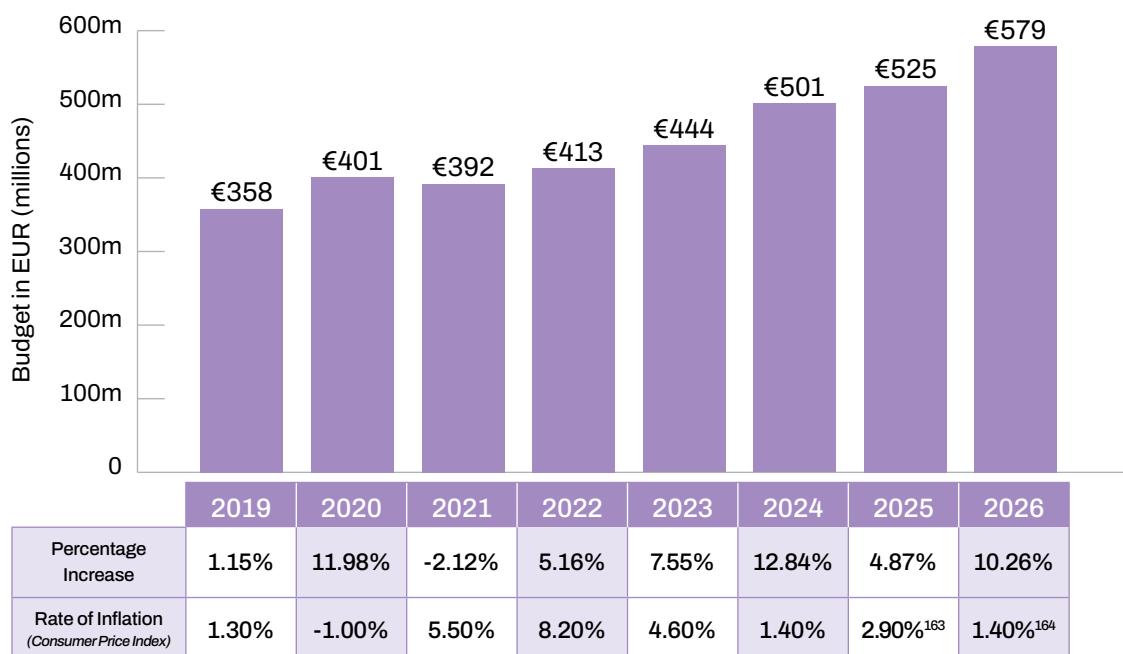
### Prison Expenditure

Prison expenditure refers to the annual funding allocated to the Irish Prison Service from Ireland's national budget.

The Prison Service's budget is €579 million in 2026. This budget has increased each year from 2019 to 2026, with the exception of 2021, when the budget decreased (by €8.49 million or by 2.12%). Over the eight years reviewed, the budget has increased by a total of €221.06 million from 2019 to 2026 (a percentage increase of 61.75%).

In 2020 and from 2023 onwards, the percentage increase in the budget has been higher than the rate of inflation. In 2020, the budget increased by 11.98% during a period of deflation (inflation was at -1.00%). The budget for 2026 increased by 10.26% on 2025 compared to a forecasted inflation rate of 1.40%. In 2019, 2021, 2022, the percentage by which the budget increased was lower than the rate of inflation.

**Figure 29: Ireland's prison budget from 2019 to 2026 compared with the rate of inflation during the same period**



Sources: Where Your Money Goes,<sup>165</sup> the Central Statistics Office Consumer Price Index,<sup>166</sup> the Central Bank of Ireland<sup>167</sup>

<sup>163</sup> The rate of inflation for 2025 is based on the Consumer Price Index October 2025, which was the most up-to-date information available at the time of writing (December 2025). Central Statistics Office, Consumer Price Index (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-cpi/consumerpriceindexoctober2025/>> accessed 10 December 2025.

<sup>164</sup> 1.40% is the predicted headline inflation rate forecasted by the Central Bank of Ireland in its Quarterly Bulletin (Quarter 3) (18 September 2025) <<https://www.centralbank.ie/publication/quarterly-bulletins/quarterly-bulletin-q3-2025>> accessed 17 November 2025.

<sup>165</sup> Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Where Your Money Goes: Justice' (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.whereyourmoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

<sup>166</sup> Central Statistics Office, Consumer Price Index (Central Statistics Office, 2025) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/prices/consumerpriceindex/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

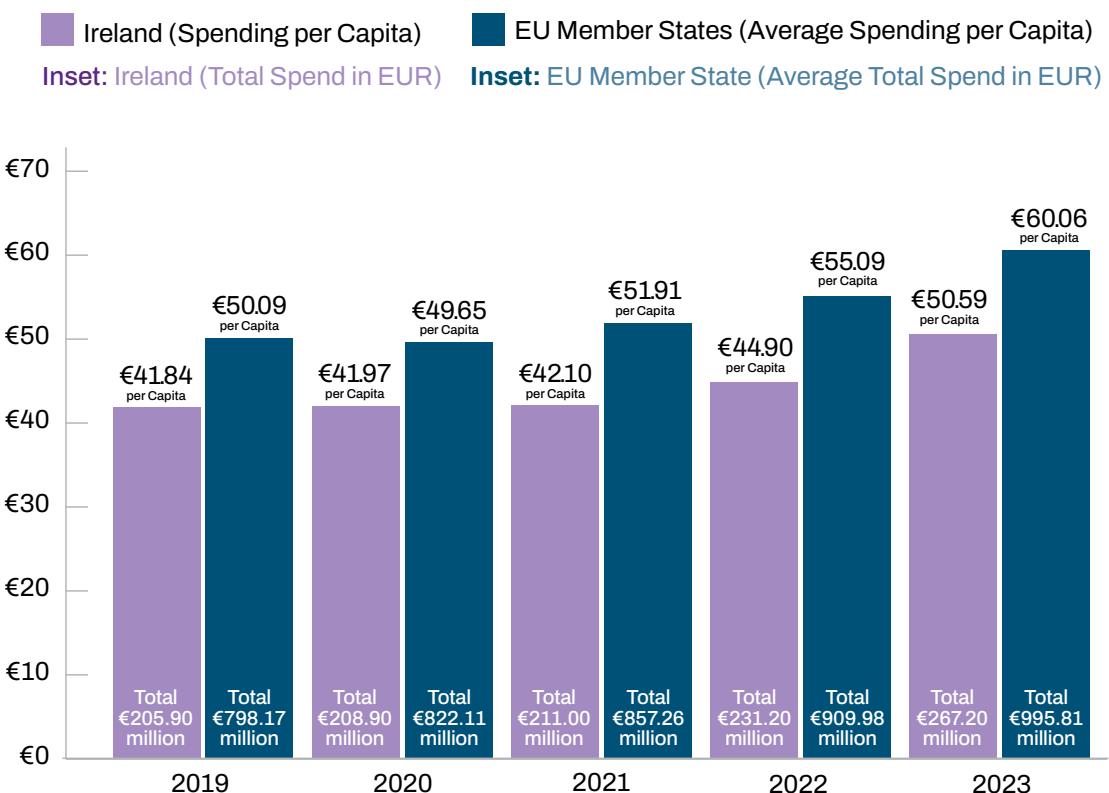
<sup>167</sup> Central Bank of Ireland, Quarterly Bulletin (Quarter 3) (18 September 2025) <<https://www.centralbank.ie/publication/quarterly-bulletins/>>

Figure 30 shows that each year from 2019 to 2023, Ireland's general government expenditure on prisons was below the average expenditure across EU Member States. In 2023, Ireland's expenditure was €267.20 million, while the EU average was €995.81 million. That means that, on average, Ireland spent €728.61 million less on its prisons than EU Member States.

Figure 30 also demonstrates that the amount by which Ireland was below the EU average increased each year from 2019 to 2023. In 2019, Ireland spent €592.27 million less than the EU average spend. By 2023, this gap had increased to €728.61 million, which is an increase of €136.34 million. However, the percentage gap decreased from 2019 (when it was 74.20%) to 2023 (when it was 73.17%).

Ireland's per capita spend in 2023 of €50.59 was below the EU average spend per person of €60.06. This means that in 2023 Ireland spent €9.47 less per person than EU Member States did on average. In every year reviewed Ireland's per capita spend was below the EU average.

**Figure 30: Comparison between Ireland's general government expenditure on prisons with the average of EU Member States**



Sources: Eurostat,<sup>168</sup> the Central Statistics Office GNI\* and De-Globalised Results,<sup>169</sup> the Central Statistics Office's Population and Migration Estimates,<sup>170</sup> Census of Population 2022,<sup>171</sup> Eurostat<sup>172</sup>

quarterly-bulletin-q3-2025> accessed 17 November 2025.

168 Eurostat, 'General Government Expenditure on Prisons' (General Government Expenditure by Function (COFOG), 21 October 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov\\_10a\\_exp/default/Figure?lang=en&category=gov.gov\\_gfs10.gov\\_10a](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/Figure?lang=en&category=gov.gov_gfs10.gov_10a)> accessed 6 November 2025.

169 Central Statistics Office, 'GNI and De-Globalised Results' (Annual National Accounts 2023, 12 July 2024) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-ana/annualnationalaccounts2023/gniandde-globalisedresults/>> accessed 25 July 2025.

170 Central Statistics Office, 'Population and Migration Estimates' (Central Statistics Office, no date) <<https://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/population/populationandmigrationestimates/>> accessed 22 July 2025.

171 Ibid.

172 Eurostat, 'Population on 1 January' (Eurostat, 14 October 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/Figure?lang=en&category=t\\_demo.t\\_demo\\_pop](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tps00001/default/Figure?lang=en&category=t_demo.t_demo_pop)> accessed 11 November 2025.

## Analysis

While Ireland's total prison expenditure increased at a higher rate than the EU average, the most meaningful measure is per capita spending. Per capita spending in Ireland increased each year reviewed, but it remained below the EU average. Ireland's per capita spend increased from €41.84 in 2019 to €50.59 in 2023, while the EU average rose from €50.09 to €60.06. The gap between Irish and EU per capita spending reduced from a difference of 16.47% in 2019 to 15.77% in 2023. The average rate at which Ireland's per capita spending increased across the five years was 4.99%, while the EU average increased at an average rate of 5.62%.

The average annual amount by which the funding allocation to the Prison Service increased during the period, from 2019 to 2026, was 6.46%. The average annual rate of inflation during the same period was 3.04%. On average, therefore, the prison budget increased by 3.42 percentage points more than inflation.

Ireland's prison expenditure has increased in recent years. As reported by Eurostat, total spending rose from €205.90 million in 2019 to €267.20 million in 2023, an increase of 29.77% over five years. The sharpest rises occurred between 2021 and 2022 (an increase of 9.57%) and between 2022 and 2023 (an increase of 15.57%).

EU Member States also increased overall spending on average, albeit at a slower pace. Average total expenditure grew from €798.17 million in 2019 to €995.81 million in 2023, a rise of 24.76%. Ireland's growth rate therefore outpaced the EU average, narrowing the gap in overall expenditure.

## Analytical Boundaries

The comparison between spending on prison services across EU Member States is based on nominal figures and does not adjust for purchasing power parity. Consequently, differences in relative costs and living standards between countries are not reflected.

The monetary figures contained in Figure 29 do not include any supplementary estimates (additional funding) that may have been approved each year. These figures do include capital expenditure funding for long-term assets.

The total government expenditure figures set out in Figure 28 differ from the budgetary figures published on Ireland's 'Where Your Money Goes' website (see Figure 28).<sup>173</sup> The former are calculated according to the definition set out in the European System of Accounts (ESA 2010).<sup>174</sup> The ESA provides that expenditure on 'Prisons' includes the "[a]dministration, operation or support of prisons and other places for the detention or rehabilitation of criminals such as prison farms, workhouses, reformatories, borstals, asylums for the criminally insane, etc".<sup>175</sup> There is a notable difference between these two figures. For example, the 2023 figures differ by €176.58 million.

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<sup>173</sup> Department of Public Expenditure NDP Delivery and Reform, 'Where Your Money Goes: Justice' (Government of Ireland 2025) <<https://www.wheremymoneygoes.gov.ie/en/justice/2026/>> accessed 13 November 2025.

<sup>174</sup> See Eurostat, *Manual on sources and methods for the compilation of COFOG statistics* (2019 edition) 26-27 <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/10142242/KS-GQ-19-010-EN-N.pdf>> accessed 4 November 2025.

<sup>175</sup> Eurostat, *Manual on sources and methods for the compilation of COFOG statistics* (2019 edition) 204 <<https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3859598/10142242/KS-GQ-19-010-EN-N.pdf>> accessed 4 November 2025.

The reason for the degree of this variance is unclear, and caution is therefore advised when interpreting the figures in Figure 29.

While Ireland's lower level of expenditure is noteworthy (particularly in light of issues such as overcrowding, limited rehabilitation services, and infrastructural strain),<sup>176</sup> it should be interpreted with caution. Ireland has comparatively shorter prison sentences (discussed in greater detail in the Average Prison Sentence Length indicator) and may experience lower rates of serious offending (as discussed in the Recorded Crime Incidents indicator), which can influence both prison population dynamics and resource needs. As such, direct comparisons with other jurisdictions, though informative, require careful contextualisation to account for structural, systemic, and policy differences.

The rating for this indicator is based on the finding that in 2023 Ireland spent 15.76% less on prisons per capita than the equivalent EU Member State average that year.

**Traffic Light Indicator: Red**



<sup>176</sup> See for example, 'Council of Europe anti-torture Committee (CPT) holds high-level talks in Ireland on longstanding prison and health issues' (11 November 2025) <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/cpt/-/council-of-europe-anti-torture-committee-cpt-holds-high-level-talks-in-ireland-on-longstanding-prison-and-health-issues>> accessed 27 November 2025.

## Prison Occupancy Rates

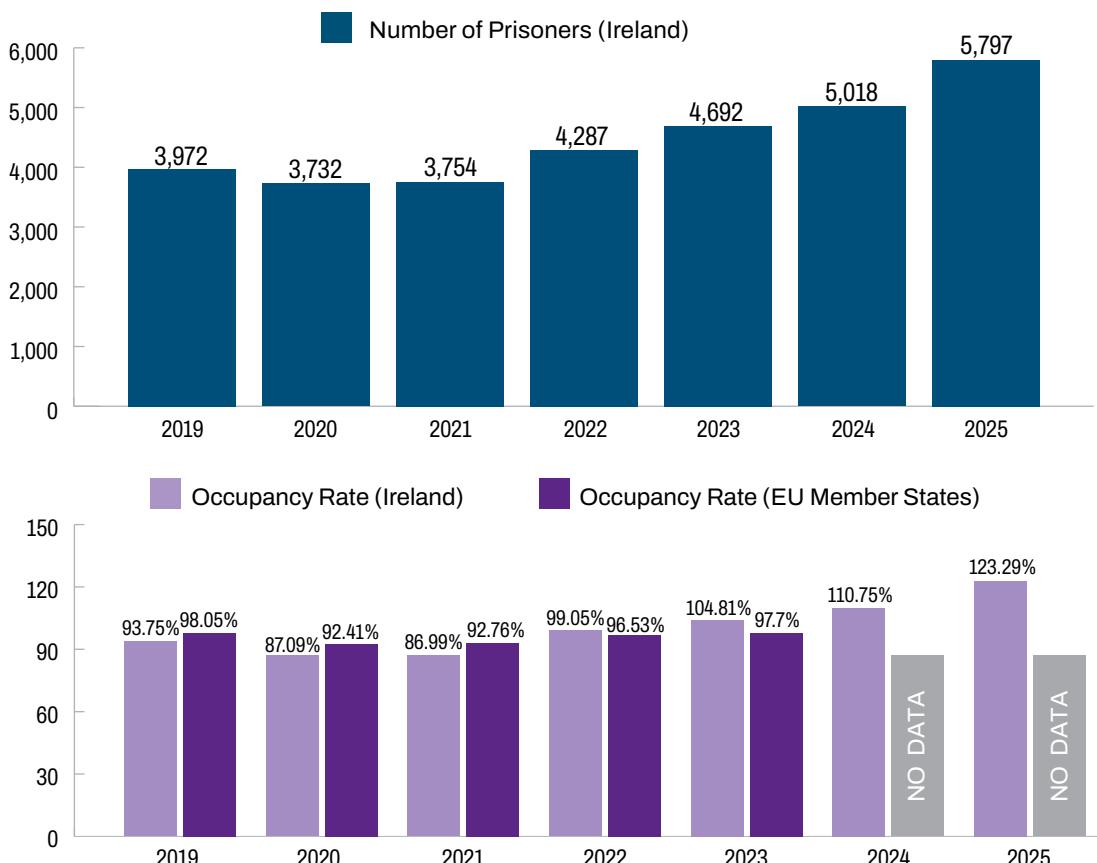
The number of prisoners refers to the number of people incarcerated in Irish prisons and those persons detained on remand.

The occupancy rate is the number of prisoners expressed as a percentage of the capacity of Ireland's prisons.

The number of prisoners in Ireland has been increasing since 2020. In the seven-year period considered (2019 to 2025), the population increased from 3,972 to 5,797. This is an increase of 1,825, or 45.95%.

The occupancy rate decreased between 2019 to 2021, a reduction of 6.76 percentage points. However, from 2021 through to 2025 (as of 10 December 2025), the occupancy rate increased from 86.99% to 123.298%.

**Figure 31: The number of prisoners and the occupancy rates of Irish prisons from 2019 to 2025 compared with the average occupancy rate of EU Member States**



Sources: December Monthly Notices of the Irish Prison Service,<sup>177</sup> World Prison Brief,<sup>178</sup> Eurostat,<sup>179</sup> Daily Prisoner Population on Friday 10th December<sup>180</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Irish Prison Service, 'Monthly Information Note – December 2025' (Irish Prison Service, 2025) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/monthly-information-note/>> accessed 25 July 2025.

<sup>178</sup> World Prison Brief, 'Republic of Ireland' (Institute for Crime and Justice Policy Research, 2025) <<https://www.prisonstudies.org/country/ireland-republic>> accessed 25 July 2025.

<sup>179</sup> Eurostat, 'Prison Capacity and Number of Persons Held' (Eurostat, 23 April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/CRIM\\_PRIS\\_CAP\\_custom\\_17577631/default/Figure](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/CRIM_PRIS_CAP_custom_17577631/default/Figure)> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>180</sup> Irish Prison Service, 'Prisoner Population on Wednesday 10 December 2025' (Irish Prison Service, January 2025) <[https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/09-December-2025.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/09-December-2025.pdf)> accessed 10 December 2025.

From 2019 to 2021, the occupancy rate of Irish prisons was below the average occupancy rate across all EU Member States. In 2019, for example, Ireland's occupancy rate was 93.75%, while the EU average was 98.05%. In other words, Ireland's prison occupancy rate was 4.30 percentage points lower than the EU average rate that year.

Since 2022, Ireland's occupancy rate (99.05%) exceeded the EU average occupancy rate. The most recent figures from 2023 show that Ireland's occupancy rate was 7.11 percentage points higher than the EU average.

More up-to-date data for comparison purposes are available from the Council of Europe (from 2024), which are set out in a comparison in Figure 32.

**Figure 32: Prison density per 100 places in Ireland and selected Council of Europe Member States in 2024**

| Prison Occupancy Rates 2024 | Ireland | COE Average | Denmark | Slovakia | Scotland | England and Wales |
|-----------------------------|---------|-------------|---------|----------|----------|-------------------|
| Occupancy Rate              | 105.4%  | 87.3%       | 93.9%   | 84.1%    | 100.3%   | 98.3%             |

Source: SPACE Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics<sup>181</sup>

The figures set out in Figure 31 are taken from the 2025 SPACE I Report of the Council of Europe (based on 2024 data). In that report, Ireland stated that there was "moderate overcrowding" in its prisons, at a 105.4% occupancy rate.<sup>182</sup> The average occupancy rate reported was 87.3%. The prison systems of Scotland (100.3%) and England and Wales (98.3%) reported operating at, or near, full capacity. Six jurisdictions were described as being heavily overcrowded.<sup>183</sup>

## Analysis

Figure 31 indicates that the number of people in prison in Ireland exceeded the number of official prison spaces since 2023. As of 10 December 2025, the occupancy rate had reached 123.29%.

While the average EU occupancy rate decreased from 98.05% in 2019 to 97.70% in 2023, the occupancy rate in Ireland increased during the same period. The average annual rate at which the EU occupancy rate decreased was 0.02%. Conversely, the rate at which Ireland's occupancy rate increased was 3.12%. When data from 2024 and 2025 (as of 10 December) are factored into the calculation, this rate of increase was 4.91%.

In other words, Ireland's prison occupancy rate has been rising in recent years, in contrast to the overall downward trend observed across the European Union. The pace of increase in Ireland was several times greater than the rate at which the average occupancy level decreased elsewhere in Europe.

<sup>181</sup> Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics SPACE I and SPACE II Annual Reports* (July 2025) <<https://wp.unil.ch/space/space-i/annual-reports/>> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>182</sup> Council for Penological Co-operation, 'Increasing Overcrowding in European Prisons' (Council of Europe, 18 July 2025) <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/prison/-/increasing-overcrowding-in-european-prisons>> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>183</sup> Council of Europe, 'Increasing Overcrowding in European Prisons' (Prisons and Community Sanctions and Measures, 18 July 2025) <<https://www.coe.int/en/web/prison/-/increasing-overcrowding-in-european-prisons>> accessed 24 July 2025.

According to Eurostat's 2023 data, the prison occupancy rates in 11 of the 27 EU Member States exceeded 100%.<sup>184</sup> The highest prison occupancy rate that year was in Cyprus at 226.18%, though Cyprus has a much lower prison capacity at 424 spaces. Cyprus was followed by France (122.90%), Italy (119.08%), Belgium (113.22%), and Sweden (112.59%).<sup>185</sup> Ireland ranked tenth among Member States with an occupancy rate of 104.81%.

In the Council of Europe report, Croatia, Sweden, Hungary, Azerbaijan, Finland, Türkiye, and North Macedonia also reported moderate overcrowding in their respective prisons. Six Member States reported "severe overcrowding" in their prisons: Slovenia (134%), Cyprus (132%), France (124%), Italy (118%), Romania (116%), and Belgium (113%).<sup>186</sup>

In addition to the 2024 figures set out in Figure 31, the following occupancy figures were reported to Dáil Éireann that year:

4,690 male prisoners occupying 4,329 spaces, representing an occupancy rate of 108%.<sup>187</sup>

251 female prisoners occupying 202 spaces, equating to a 124% occupancy rate.<sup>188</sup>

According to the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (OIP), in 2024 the highest occupancy rate was in Limerick Women's Prison. That facility opened in October 2023, providing additional accommodation for 54 female inmates. However, by November 2024, it was operating at 144% of its official capacity level with 80 persons in custody.<sup>189</sup>

## Analytical Boundaries

According to the Council of Europe, in countries where prison occupancy rates exceed 90%, risks to the health and safety of those incarcerated begin to emerge.<sup>190</sup> Given that the most recent data indicated that Ireland's prisons have been above 100% capacity since 2023 (see Figure 22, above), these risks are likely to be a reality among Irish inmates. The occupancy levels in Ireland in 2024 were such that the Office of the Inspector of Prisons considered it "in excess of the number that can safely be accommodated".<sup>191</sup>

The Scottish Prison Service has highlighted that the pressure of high occupancy means that resources that would be better used for rehabilitation is instead focused into prisoner safety and security.<sup>192</sup>

<sup>184</sup> Eurostat, 'Prison Occupancy Statistics' (Eurostat, April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison\\_occupancy\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison_occupancy_statistics)> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>185</sup> Eurostat, 'Prison Occupancy Statistics' (Statistics Explained, April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison\\_occupancy\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison_occupancy_statistics)> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>186</sup> Eurostat, 'Prison Occupancy Statistics' (Statistics Explained, April 2025) <[https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison\\_occupancy\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Prison_occupancy_statistics)> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>187</sup> Jim O'Callaghan, Dáil deb 7 October 2025 col 405.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Office of the Inspector of Prisons, *Annual Report 2024* (2024) 2 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/OIP-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>> accessed 17 November 2024.

<sup>190</sup> Council of Europe, *Whitepaper on Prison Overcrowding* (2016) <<https://rm.coe.int/white-paper-on-prison-overcrowding-cm-2016-121-add3-e/16807c886b>> accessed 24 July 2025.

<sup>191</sup> Office of the Inspector of Prisons, *Annual Report 2024* (2024) 3 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/OIP-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>> accessed 17 November 2024.

<sup>192</sup> Scottish Prison Service, *Annual Reports and Accounts 2023 – 2024* (2024) 10 <<https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2024-09/SPS%20Annual%20Report%20and%20Accounts%202023-24.pdf>> accessed 26 November 2025.

For 2026, capital funding of €67.9 million has been allocated to the Irish Prison Service. This is part of the Minister for Justice's commitment to provide 1,595 additional prison spaces by 2031.<sup>193</sup> While additional spaces are needed in the short-term, the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) has cautioned that providing additional prison spaces will not resolve the issue of overcrowding in Irish prisons in isolation.<sup>194</sup> Similarly, in its 2024 Report, the OIP recommended that the Minister for Justice "take urgent action to place an enforceable upper limit on the number of persons that can be committed to ... all ... prisons in Ireland".<sup>195</sup>

There are some differences between the data gathered by Eurostat and those reported by the Council of Europe in SPACE I. For example, for the year 2023, Eurostat reported a prison population for Ireland of 4,731, whereas SPACE I reported a population of 4,342 (that is a difference of 389 spaces). This is likely accounted for by the collection of data at different times.

For each of the years 2019 to 2023, the prison occupancy rate was directly calculated from official data sourced from Eurostat on official capacity numbers and the actual numbers of persons held in prison. For 2024, the prison occupancy rate was taken from the World Prison Brief. For 2025, the rate was calculated using daily prisoner population information published on the Irish Prison Service's website as of 10 December 2025.

It is important to acknowledge that both prison capacity and prison occupancy figures may vary throughout a given year. There may be times in a calendar year during which some cells and beds are not available for use. For example, according to the Irish Prison Service, the bed capacity of Irish prisons was 4,702 as of 10 December 2025.<sup>196</sup> The stated official capacity was 4,675 beds on 10 October 2025<sup>197</sup> – a difference of 27.

Equally, the prison population is in a constant state of flux, with new admissions and discharges regularly taking place. Consequently, the occupancy rates in Figure 32 are indicative rather than representing an exact calculation.

The rating for this indicator is based on the finding that in 2023 Ireland's occupancy rate was 7.11% more than the EU average occupancy rate.

### Traffic Light Indicator: Amber

<sup>193</sup> Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, 'Press release: Minister Jim O'Callaghan secures record allocation of over €6.17 billion for the Justice Sector in Budget 2026' (Government of Ireland, 8 October 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/press-releases/minister-jim-o-callaghan-secures-record-allocation-of-over-617-billion-for-the-justice-sector-in-budget-2026/>> accessed 14 November 2025.

<sup>194</sup> IPRT, IPRT Statement on Budget 2026 (8 October 2025), <<https://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/budget-2026-provides-a-welcome-increase-in-probation-funding-however-additional-prison-spaces-will-not-solve-our-prison-overcrow/>> accessed 17 November 2025.

<sup>195</sup> Office of the Inspector of Prisons, *Annual Report 2024* (2024) 58 <<https://www.oip.ie/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/OIP-Annual-Report-2024.pdf>> accessed 5 December 2025.

<sup>196</sup> Irish Prison Service, 'Prisoner Population on Wednesday 10 December 2025' (Irish Prison Service, January 2025) <[https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/09-December-2025.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/09-December-2025.pdf)> <[https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/10-December-2025.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/10-December-2025.pdf)> accessed 10 December 2025.

<sup>197</sup> Irish Prison Service, 'Prisoner Population on Friday 10 October 2025' (Irish Prison Service, January 2025) <[https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/09-October-2025.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/09-October-2025.pdf)> <[https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/10-October-2025.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/10-October-2025.pdf)> accessed 10 December 2025.

## Remand Rates

The remand rate is the percentage of the prison population who are detained despite not yet serving a final sentence.

For the purposes of the Council of Europe SPACE Reports, remand detention is broader than pre-trial detention. Pre-trial detention which refers to the detention of a person without bail, pending the outcome of their trial and without them having received a conviction. In the SPACE Reports, remand numbers also include:

- Detainees who have been found guilty but who have not yet received a final sentence,
- Sentenced inmates who have appealed or are within the statutory limit to appeal, and
- Detainees who are awaiting final sentencing and who have commenced serving a prison sentence in advance.

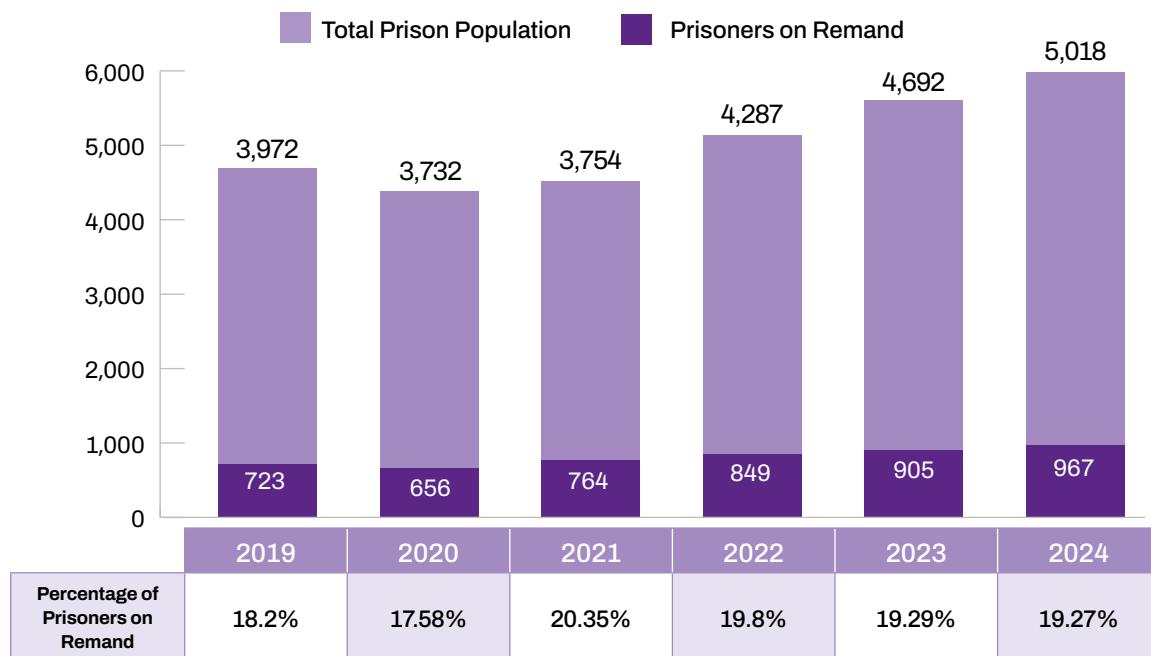
Figure 33 illustrates that in 2024, of the 5,018 inmates in Irish prisons, 967 of these were being held on remand. As a percentage of the prison population, that is 19.27%. Overall, the total number of remand detainees has increased from 723 in 2019 to 967 in 2024. That is an increase of 244 prisoners, or a 33.75% increase.

The number of remand prisoners was at its lowest during the period of analysis in 2020 at 656. The 2024 figure of 967 remand prisoners is the highest among the years reviewed.

From 2019 to 2024, the lowest pre-detention rate was 17.58% in 2020, while the highest was 20.35% in 2021. The average rate for that six-year period was 19.08%.

While the number of remand prisoners increased during the period of review, Ireland has a moderate percentage of remand prisoners when compared with other jurisdictions.

**Figure 33: Number of prisoners detained on remand in Irish prisons, 2019 to 2024**



Source: December Monthly Notices of the Irish Prison Service<sup>198</sup>

<sup>198</sup> Irish Prison Service, *Monthly Information Note – December 2024* (2024) <[https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/DECEMBER-2024.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/DECEMBER-2024.pdf)> accessed 25 November 2025.

**Figure 34: Comparison between the percentage of remand prisoners in Ireland with the European average 2019 to 2024**

| Percentage of Prisoners on Remand | 2019          | 2020          | 2021          | 2022          | 2023          | 2024          |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|
| Ireland                           | 20.40%        | 20.60%        | 20.50%        | 22.90%        | 20.60%        | 20.90%        |
| Scotland                          | 20.50%        | 19.30%        | 26.20%        | 30.00%        | 28.90%        | 27.00%        |
| England and Wales                 | 11.30%        | 11.00%        | 14.60%        | 16.10%        | 17.30%        | 18.30%        |
| Slovakia                          | 15.30%        | 15.50%        | 15.40%        | 14.00%        | 14.60%        | 14.60%        |
| New Zealand <sup>199</sup>        | 36.65%        | 35.10%        | 37.40%        | 41.00%        | 43.43%        | -             |
| <b>Council of Europe Average</b>  | <b>25.90%</b> | <b>25.70%</b> | <b>28.90%</b> | <b>28.90%</b> | <b>30.10%</b> | <b>29.40%</b> |

Sources: December Monthly Notices of the Irish Prison Service,<sup>200</sup> SPACE Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics<sup>201</sup>

On an annual basis, the Council of Europe reports the average percentage of prisoners who are held on remand across Council of Europe states. Remand figures in the SPACE I report include pre-trial detainees, those appealing or who may appeal, and those convicted but not yet sentenced.

As Figure 34 demonstrates, from 2019 to 2023 Ireland had lower remand rates than the equivalent Council of Europe average rate.

The difference was at its greatest in 2023, when Ireland had a remand rate of 19.29% compared with the Council of Europe average of 24.7% (a difference of 5.41%). The difference was at its lowest in 2021, when the Council of Europe average rate was 21.70% and Ireland's average rate was 20.35%. This constitutes a difference of 1.35%.

Overall, for the period reviewed, the average remand rate across Council of Europe Member States was 23.12%. For Ireland, the average remand rate was 19.04%, which is 4.08% less.

<sup>199</sup> New Zealand data from UN-ODC, 'Crime Survey statistics' (no date) <<https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-prisons-persons-held>> accessed 20 November 2025.

<sup>200</sup> Irish Prison Service, *Monthly Information Note – December 2024* (2024) <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/monthly-information-note/>> accessed 25 November 2025.

<sup>201</sup> Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics SPACE I and SPACE II Annual Reports* (July 2025) <<https://wp.unil.ch/space/space-i/annual-reports/>> accessed 24 July 2025.

Figure 35 compares the number and percentages of remand prisoners in Ireland with those of Scotland, New Zealand and Slovakia. These jurisdictions have been selected for comparison because Scotland and New Zealand are common law jurisdictions of comparable size to Ireland, and Slovakia is an EU Member State of comparable population size.

**Figure 35: Comparison between pre-trial detention rates in Ireland with those in Scotland (SCT), New Zealand (NZ), and Slovakia (SK) 2019 to 2023**

| Year | Country     | Remand Prisoners | Total Prison Population | Remand Rate |
|------|-------------|------------------|-------------------------|-------------|
| 2019 | IRELAND     | 723              | 3,972                   | 18.20%      |
|      | SCOTLAND    | 1,525            | 8,198                   | 18.60%      |
|      | NEW ZEALAND | 3,612            | 9,859                   | 36.64%      |
|      | SLOVAKIA    | 1,631            | 10,481                  | 15.56%      |
| 2020 | IRELAND     | 656              | 3,732                   | 17.58%      |
|      | SCOTLAND    | 1,634            | 7,339                   | 22.26%      |
|      | NEW ZEALAND | 3,000            | 8,542                   | 35.12%      |
|      | SLOVAKIA    | 1,657            | 10,447                  | 15.86%      |
| 2021 | IRELAND     | 764              | 3,754                   | 20.35%      |
|      | SCOTLAND    | 1,862            | 7,504                   | 24.81%      |
|      | NEW ZEALAND | 2,909            | 7,772                   | 37.43%      |
|      | SLOVAKIA    | 1,430            | 10,051                  | 14.23%      |
| 2022 | IRELAND     | 849              | 4,287                   | 19.80%      |
|      | SCOTLAND    | 1,804            | 7,422                   | 24.31%      |
|      | NEW ZEALAND | 3,262            | 7,964                   | 40.96%      |
|      | SLOVAKIA    | 1,447            | 9,887                   | 14.64%      |
| 2023 | IRELAND     | 905              | 4,692                   | 19.29%      |
|      | SCOTLAND    | 1,797            | 7,856                   | 22.87%      |
|      | NEW ZEALAND | 3,930            | 9,050                   | 43.43%      |
|      | SLOVAKIA    | 1,419            | 9,724                   | 14.59%      |

Sources: December Monthly Notices of the Irish Prison Service,<sup>202</sup> UN Crime Trends Survey<sup>203</sup>

202 Irish Prison Service, *Monthly Information Note – December 2024* (2024) <[https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents\\_pdf/DECEMBER-2024.pdf](https://www.irishprisons.ie/wp-content/uploads/documents_pdf/DECEMBER-2024.pdf)> accessed 25 November 2025.

203 UN-ODC, 'Crime Survey statistics' (no date) <<https://dataunodc.un.org/dp-prisons-persons-held>> accessed 20 November 2025.

In 2023, 1,797 prisoners (of a total of 7,856 prisoners) were held on remand in Scottish prisons. That constitutes a remand rate of 22.87%. The number of prisoners on remand in Scotland decreased in recent years from a high of 1,862 in 2021. The average proportion of prisoners on remand in Scotland from 2019 to 2023 was 22.57%, which was 3.5% higher than the equivalent for Ireland.

New Zealand has both a higher remand rate and a higher total prison population than Ireland. In 2023, New Zealand had 3,930 prisoners on remand, an increase of 1,021 from 2021 where the number was 2,909. In 2019, New Zealand had 3,613 remand prisoners, which is approximately five times as many as Ireland for the same year (723). In 2023, New Zealand had 3,930 prisoners on remand, which was 3,025 more than Ireland had in the same year (905). On average, from 2019 to 2023, 38.72% of New Zealand's prison population comprised remand prisoners. In comparison, Ireland's average remand rate for the same period was 19.04%, which was less than half that of New Zealand.

As shown in Figure 33, Slovakia's overall prison population is larger than Ireland's. Slovakia also recorded a higher absolute number of prisoners on remand, averaging nearly twice Ireland's total between 2019 and 2023. When expressed as a proportion of the total prison population, Ireland reported a higher remand rate than Slovakia during this period. Slovakia's average remand rate was 14.98%, which is 4.07 percentage points lower than Ireland's average of 19.04%.

## Analysis

Ireland generally has a lower number of remand prisoners compared to other jurisdictions. Between 2019 and 2024, Ireland recorded lower remand rates than the average across Council of Europe Member States. While the European average during this period was 28.15%, Ireland's average remand rate was 20.98% (7.17 percentage points lower). The gap varied each year, narrowing to a low of 5.10 percentage points in 2020 and increasing to a high of 9.50 percentage points in 2023. In 2024, there was a difference of 8.50 percentage points.

When compared with other jurisdictions of similar size or legal tradition, Ireland's relative position in respect of its remand detention rates becomes clearer. In Scotland, remand rates averaged 25.32% over the same six-year period. This was 4.33 percentage points more than Ireland's average rate of 20.98%. Scotland's remand rates were higher than Ireland's in each year reviewed other than in 2020. That year, Scotland's remand rate was 19.30% while Ireland's was 20.60% (a difference of 1.30 percentage points). While Scotland has a similar population to Ireland, its prison population is approximately twice that of Ireland's (see Figure 35).

New Zealand's prison population is closer in size to that of Scotland than it is to that of Ireland (see Figure 35). In other words, it has approximately twice as many prisoners as Ireland. As can be seen from Figure 34, New Zealand's average remand rate across the period of analysis was 38.72%. This was 17.73 percentage points higher than Ireland's average rate and 13.40 percentage points higher than Scotland's. It was also 10.57 percentage points higher than the Council of Europe average. In 2023, 3,930 were detained on remand in New Zealand's prisons. That was more than four times the number of people who were held on remand in Irish prisons that year (905).

## Analytical Boundaries

Variations arise in relation to how some Council of Europe Member States classify whether a prisoner is a remand prisoner or not. Some jurisdictions continue to classify prisoners as being held on remand where they have been convicted but are awaiting the outcome of an appeal. Other jurisdictions consider such prisoners to be ‘sentenced’ and no longer being held on remand.<sup>204</sup>

When comparing Ireland with other European jurisdictions, it is worth noting that the procedures by which bail is granted or denied typically differ between civil law systems and common law systems. In Ireland for example, legislation does not prescribe maximum periods for remand detention. Individuals remain in custody until their trial commences or until bail is granted. Where bail is approved, it is typically subject to conditions that can be restrictive, depending on the seriousness of the offence and the court’s assessment of risks such as absconding, interfering with witnesses, committing further offences, or otherwise obstructing the course of justice. In contrast, civil law jurisdictions impose codified time limits and mandatory judicial reviews, creating a more structured process that ensures detention periods are regularly assessed and resolved within defined timeframes.<sup>205, 206</sup>

On 27 November 2025, the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration released a report on the operation of bail in Ireland. The report sets out a series of recommendations currently under consideration by the Department, including proposed legislative amendments aimed at strengthening the legal framework governing bail.<sup>207</sup>

Ireland maintains a reservation to Article 10.2(b) of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR), requiring states to keep those who are detained on remand separate from sentenced prisoners “save for in exceptional circumstances”. This means that Ireland does not guarantee the separate detention of remand prisoners, which is at variance with the fundamental principle of the presumption of innocence. Ireland’s comparatively moderate use of remand should be considered alongside this reservation and alongside the increasing problem of overcrowding in its prisons, discussed under the Occupancy Rates indicator.

The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) has emphasised that pre-trial detention should only be used as an exceptional measure.<sup>208</sup> In 2022, it noted with concern that there had been a sustained increase in the number of remand prisoners in Ireland between 2017 and 2022, rising from 584 to 875.<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Marcelo Aebi and Edoardo Cocco, *Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2024: Key Findings of the SPACE I survey* (Council of Europe, 2025) 15 <[https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2025/07/250715\\_key-findings-space-i\\_prisons-europe-2024\\_full.pdf](https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2025/07/250715_key-findings-space-i_prisons-europe-2024_full.pdf)> accessed 5 August 2025.

<sup>205</sup> ICCL, *Improving Judicial Assessment of FlightRisk* (ICCL, April 2024) <<https://www.iccl.ie/news/iccl-research-raises-concerns-about-pre-trial-detention-and-denial-of-bail/>> accessed 28 November 2025. Irish Penal Reform Trust, *Bail and Remand* (IPRT, November 2015) <[https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6363/iprt\\_position\\_paper\\_11\\_on\\_bail\\_and\\_remand\\_sml.pdf](https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6363/iprt_position_paper_11_on_bail_and_remand_sml.pdf)> accessed 28 November 2025.

<sup>206</sup> The Council of Europe’s CEPEJ reports outline that civil law jurisdictions typically impose codified statutory limits on pre-trial detention, with mandatory judicial review at regular intervals. These reviews ensure detention is proportionate and time-bound, reflecting the structured nature of civil law systems.

<sup>207</sup> Department of Justice, Home Affairs and Migration, ‘Press release: Minister Jim O’Callaghan publishes report into operation of bail in Ireland’ (Government of Ireland, 27 November 2025) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/press-releases/minister-jim-o-callaghan-publishes-report-into-operation-of-bail-in-ireland/>> accessed 28 November 2025.

<sup>208</sup> IPRT, *Progress in the Penal System* (PIPS) project; reports published annually between 2017 and 2022. See IPRT, ‘Progress in the Penal System (PIPS) Project’ (IPRT, no date) <<https://www.iprt.ie/progress-in-the-penal-system-pips-project/>> accessed 15 July 2025.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid, at 46.

In its 2024 *Progress in the Penal System Report*, the IPRT noted that from 2022 to 2024 there had been an increase in both the number of remand detainees and the number of remand detainees sharing a cell with sentenced detainees.<sup>210</sup>

The *Bail Amendment Act 2013* in New Zealand reversed the onus of proof in certain bail applications. The effect of this change is that the default position in New Zealand is that an accused person will not be granted bail, leading to a higher number of prisoners being detained on remand.

Slovakia introduced electronic monitoring (EM) as part of criminal justice reforms in 2015, under *Act No. 78/2015 Coll. on Control of the Enforcement of Certain Decisions by Technical Instruments*. This legislation allowed courts to use electronic monitoring not only for sentenced offenders but also for individuals on remand, as an alternative to custody. This was incentivised by an EU-sponsored project.

Although the absolute number of remand prisoners in Scotland has decreased since 2021, the Scottish Prison Service has acknowledged that remand levels remain elevated compared with pre-pandemic norms, creating operational challenges in managing prison populations.<sup>211</sup>

In 2017, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)<sup>212</sup> emphasised the “severe psychological effects” of remand detention.<sup>213</sup> Indeed, the CPT reported that suicide rates were much higher among remand prisoners than among sentenced prisoners.<sup>214</sup>

The rating for this indicator is based on the finding that, in 2023, the percentage of prisoners being held on remand in Ireland’s prisons was 19.29%, while the Council of Europe average that year was 24.70%.

**Traffic Light Indicator:** Red



<sup>210</sup> IPRT, *Progress in the Penal System (PIPS): A Framework for Penal Reform* (IPRT, 2 December 2025) 31.

<sup>211</sup> Scottish Prison Service, *Annual Report and Account 2024-2025* (2025) 6 <[https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/SPS\\_Annual\\_Report\\_and\\_Accounts\\_2024-25.pdf](https://www.sps.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-09/SPS_Annual_Report_and_Accounts_2024-25.pdf)> accessed 26 November 2025.

<sup>212</sup> The CPT is a body of the Council of Europe that monitors how people deprived of their liberty are treated, aiming to prevent torture and inhuman or degrading treatment. It was established under the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

<sup>213</sup> European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, *Remand detention CPT/Inf(2017)* (Council of Europe, 2017) <<https://rm.coe.int/168070d0c8>> accessed 5 August 2025.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

## Average Prison Sentence Length

The average prison sentence length refers to the average length of time for which a person is incarcerated in Irish prisons.

From 2019 to 2023, the average length of time served by a prisoner in Ireland was 6.74 months. This ranged from a low of 5.3 months in 2018 to a high of 7.4 months in 2021.

In each of the years reviewed, Ireland's average prison sentence was below the average prison sentence across Council of Europe Member States. The difference was at its largest in 2019, when the Council of Europe average was 10.1 months (4.8 months longer than the average prison term in Ireland). For the most recent figures available (2023), this difference had decreased to 3 months.

**Figure 36: Average length of a prison sentence served in Ireland and across the Council of Europe (expressed in months)**



Source: SPACE I Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics<sup>216</sup>

The overall average prison sentence across the Council of Europe for the period considered was 10.62 months, which was 3.88 months longer than Ireland's average of 6.74 months.

Ireland's average prison sentence lengths were also below those of Slovakia and Scotland. In 2023, Slovakian average prison sentences were 8 months longer than Ireland's, and Scottish sentences were 1.2 month longer.

<sup>215</sup> Slovakia does not provide data for the average length of imprisonment based on number of prisoners, but instead provides data based on the stock and flow of prisoners.

<sup>216</sup> Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics SPACE I and SPACE II Annual Reports* (July 2025) <<https://wp.unil.ch/space/space-i/annual-reports/>> accessed 24 July 2025.

## Analysis

Council of Europe data (SPACE reports) show that the average prison sentence length (in terms of time spent in prison) for Ireland was 6.9 months in 2023. This ranged between 5.3 months in 2019 to and 7.4 months 2021. For each year reviewed, Ireland's average sentence length was shorter than the Council of Europe average, which ranged between 9.9 and 11.3 months.

Slovakia reported longer average sentences than Ireland, between 14.9 and 15.8 months. That was more than double Ireland's figures across the same period. Scotland's average sentence length was between 8.1 and 8.6 months (from 2020 onward). This placed Scotland above Ireland but below the Council of Europe average.

In 2023, Ireland reported to the Council of Europe that 477 out of 4,808 prisoners were serving sentences of less than one year, representing 12.5% of the prison population.<sup>217</sup> In comparison, the EU average was 17.7%. Slovakia reported 16% of its prison population were serving sentences of less than one year, while Scotland reported 10.6%.

The data reported to the Council of Europe represent a snapshot taken on the day of reporting. Short sentences create a degree of population 'churn', as prisoners are frequently released and replaced.<sup>218</sup> According to the Irish Prison Service, there were 3,729 sentencing committals of less than 12 months in 2023.<sup>219</sup> In 2024, 77% of people committed to prison received sentences of less than one year, with 31% being sentenced to between three and six months.<sup>220</sup> The Irish Prison Service found that the number of prisoners serving sentences of three months or less increased 29% between 2023 and 2024.<sup>221</sup>

In 2024, theft and related offences accounted for the largest share of prison sentences (16.9%), while kidnapping (0.2%) and homicide offences (0.7%) represented the smallest proportions.<sup>222</sup> Among those sentenced to less than one year, the most common offences were classified under 'Government, Justice Procedures and Organisation of Crime' (22.5%), followed by theft offences (19.1%). For longer sentences, 9.7% of the prison population (386 prisoners) were serving life sentences, and a further 8.7% were serving terms of ten years or more.

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<sup>217</sup> Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Annual Penal Statistics SPACE I and SPACE II Annual Reports* (July 2025) <<https://wp.unil.ch/space/space-i/annual-reports/>> accessed 24 November 2025.

<sup>218</sup> Department of Justice, *Community or Custody? A Review of Evidence and Sentencers' Perspectives on Community Service Orders and Short-Term Prison Sentences* (November 2024) <[HTTPS://WWW.GOV.IE/EN/DEPARTMENT-OF-JUSTICE-HOME-AFFAIRS-AND-MIGRATION/PUBLICATIONS/COMMUNITY-OR-CUSTODY-EVIDENCE-AND-SENTENCERS-PERSPECTIVES-ON-COMMUNITY-SERVICE-ORDERS-AND-SHORT-TERM-PRISON-SENTENCES/](https://WWW.GOV.IE/EN/DEPARTMENT-OF-JUSTICE-HOME-AFFAIRS-AND-MIGRATION/PUBLICATIONS/COMMUNITY-OR-CUSTODY-EVIDENCE-AND-SENTENCERS-PERSPECTIVES-ON-COMMUNITY-SERVICE-ORDERS-AND-SHORT-TERM-PRISON-SENTENCES/)> accessed 24 November 2025.

<sup>219</sup> Irish Prison Service, 'Sentenced Committals each year from Year 2007 to Year 2023' <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/statistics-information/yearly-statistics/>> accessed 24 November 2025..

<sup>220</sup> Department of Justice, *Community or Custody? A Review of Evidence and Sentencers' Perspectives on Community Service Orders and Short-Term Prison Sentences* (November 2024) 22 <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/publications/community-or-custody-evidence-and-sentencers-perspectives-on-community-service-orders-and-short-term-prison-sentences/>> accessed 24 November 2025.

<sup>221</sup> Irish Prison Service, *Annual Report 2024* (2024) 65 <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/publications/annual-reports/>> accessed 24 November 2025.

<sup>222</sup> Irish Prison Service, *Annual Report 2024* (2024) 65 <<https://www.irishprisons.ie/information-centre/publications/annual-reports/>> accessed 24 November 2025.

## Analytical Boundaries

There are several factors that might explain why average prison sentences in Ireland are lower than the Council of Europe averages. Without further research into the causes, it is not possible to say whether this pattern is suggestive of a lower level of serious crime or an overuse of incarceration for less serious offending, for example.

Caution should be exercised when comparing average prison terms across jurisdictions, as variations in offence classifications and different sentencing frameworks can affect outcomes. The statistics analysed under this indicator do not account for the predominant purpose of incarceration in each jurisdiction, for example. Whether the predominant purpose is deterrence, punishment, rehabilitation, public protection potentially impacts the type of sanction imposed and the length of any term of imprisonment imposed. Systems that prioritise rehabilitation, (for example, in Nordic countries), tend to impose shorter prison sentences.<sup>223</sup> Conversely, other jurisdictions have a more punitive focus and, therefore, rely more heavily on custodial sentences, such as Georgia and Türkiye.<sup>224</sup>

Sentencing can also reflect broader societal attitudes to certain types of offending. For example, some jurisdictions may have a lower tolerance for driving-related offences. Other jurisdictions may take a more lenient approach to drug-related offending. Further, not all jurisdictions report sentencing-related data in the same way.

Under section 3 of the *Criminal Justice (Community Service) Act 1983*, judges are obliged to consider imposing a Community Service Order (CSO) as an alternative to a prison sentence of 12 months or less. Despite this obligation, research conducted by the Department of Justice in 2024 found that the use of CSOs had decreased in recent years, while the use of imprisonment, including for shorter terms, had increased.<sup>225</sup> The Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) has also highlighted that there is a need to utilise community-based alternatives to prison and “to ensure that imprisonment is a sanction of last resort”.<sup>226</sup> Reasons given for the decline of CSOs in the past include the unsuitability of certain types of offenders for community work, and a lack of rural options for community service.<sup>227</sup>

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223 Prison Insider, ‘Nordic prisons, human prisons? The reality behind the model’ (15 October 2025) <<https://www.prison-insider.com/en/articles/nordic-prisons-human-prisons>> accessed 11 December 2025.

224 Marcelo Aebi and Edoardo Cocco, *Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2024: Key Findings of the SPACE I survey* (2025) <[https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2025/07/250715\\_key-findings-space-i\\_prisons-europe-2024\\_full.pdf](https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2025/07/250715_key-findings-space-i_prisons-europe-2024_full.pdf)> accessed 5 August 2025.

225 Department of Justice, *Community or Custody? A Review of Evidence and Sentencers’ Perspectives on Community Service Orders and Short-Term Prison Sentences* (November 2024) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/publications/community-or-custody-evidence-and-sentencers-perspectives-on-community-service-orders-and-short-term-prison-sentences/>> accessed 5 August 2025.

226 Irish Penal Reform Trust, ‘Alarming rise in imprisonment rates and use of short sentences in latest reports’ (October 2023) <<https://www.iprt.ie/latest-news/alarming-rise-in-imprisonment-rates-and-use-of-short-sentences-in-latest-reports-iprt/>> accessed 5 August 2025.

227 Department of Justice, *Community or Custody? A Review of Evidence and Sentencers’ Perspectives on Community Service Orders and Short-Term Prison Sentences* (November 2024) 28 <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/publications/community-or-custody-evidence-and-sentencers-perspectives-on-community-service-orders-and-short-term-prison-sentences/>> accessed 24 November 2025; and The Probation Service, *An Evidence Review of Community Service Policy, Practice and Structure* (November 2022) 54 <<https://probation.ie/en/PB/Pages/WP22000035>> accessed 24 November 2025.

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According to a Department of Justice review of prison policy options,<sup>228</sup> the use of short-term prison sentences places additional strain on the Irish prison system, due to the high turnover of prisoners in overcrowded facilities.<sup>229</sup> The same review also pointed out that it can lead to higher occupancy rates, which is borne out in the data examined within the Prison Occupancy Rates indicator. Further, there is evidence to suggest that prison sentences of less than 12 months lead to high rates of recidivism (reoffending).<sup>230</sup>

The rating for this indicator is based on the finding that, in 2023, Ireland's average prison sentence of 6.9 months was 30.30% lower than the average prison sentence among Council of Europe Member States.

**Traffic Light Indicator: Red**



<sup>228</sup> Department of Justice, *Criminal Justice Policy: Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022-2024I* (August 2022) <<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-justice-home-affairs-and-migration/collections/review-of-policy-options-for-prison-and-penal-reform-2022-2024/>> accessed 17 December 2025.

<sup>229</sup> Global Organised Crime Index, 'Ireland' (Global Organised Crime Index, 2023) <<https://ocindex.net/country/ireland>> accessed 15 July 2025.

<sup>230</sup> Central Statistics Office, *Prison Re-offending Statistics 2019* <<https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/ep/p-pros/prison-re-offendingstatistics2019/>> accessed 5 August 2025.



## Conclusions and Recommendations





# Conclusions and Recommendations

Assessing the justice system across different justice indicators has highlighted both strengths and gaps in the available information. This analysis underscores the need for additional data to ensure a more comprehensive understanding of performance, trends, and emerging challenges.

## Trust and Confidence in the Justice System

Trust in An Garda Síochána, the judiciary, and the courts remains relatively robust in Ireland, even when acknowledging the methodological constraints and data gaps that often accompany public opinion research. Surveys indicate that the public tends to view these institutions as generally reliable, fair, and capable of upholding the rule of law.

In contrast, confidence in the Prison Service is lower. While not necessarily indicative of outright distrust, the public appears less convinced that the prison system is effective in achieving its goals – whether those involve rehabilitation, security, or reducing reoffending. As a result, trust in the Prison Service is behind the comparatively higher levels of confidence expressed in both the Gardaí and the courts.

## Core Institutions of the Justice System

### Policing

Ireland's policing budget rose from 2019 and 2026, reaching €2.59 billion in 2026 (an increase of 45%). The 2026 budget represented 42% of the overall justice budget. Ireland's per capita expenditure was higher than the EU average each year reviewed. When measured as a share of GNI\* or GDP, Ireland's spending was below the EU average.

Garda numbers fluctuated during the period reviewed, with 14,191 uniformed officers in 2024 compared with 14,307 in 2019. Population growth meant that the number of Gardaí per 100,000 inhabitants decreased (from 291 to 264), though recruitment numbers have increased in recent years, including a large intake of trainees in 2025. Comparisons with neighbouring jurisdictions showed that Ireland's police density was lower than that of Northern Ireland and Scotland, but higher than that of England and Wales. Ireland ranks highly in the Global Peace Index, ranking second (below only Iceland) in 2025.

Crime data highlighted differing patterns across offence types. Intentional homicide rates in Ireland remained below EU averages between 2019 and 2023, with 81 incidents recorded in 2024. Sexual offences were consistently above EU averages, with rates per 100,000 inhabitants ranging between 52 and 62 compared with the EU average of 40. Theft offences also remained above EU averages, with the number of incidents ranging from 46,807 to 76,142 over the period.

Detection rates varied across offence categories. Homicide offences had high detection rates, sexual offences had low detection rates, and the detection rates for theft offences fell between the two.

## Courts

Ireland's courts expenditure grew over the period analysed, with the Courts Service's gross budget reaching €214 million in 2026 (up from €137 million in 2019). Per capita spending on courts in 2024 was €42.50, compared with €33.52 in 2019. Council of Europe data show that Ireland's per capita spending in 2022 was below the European average; it was also lower than comparable jurisdictions, such as England and Wales, Denmark, and Finland.

Court efficiency indicators highlight challenges in case progression times and clearance rates. The average case disposition time in 2024 was 486 days, longer than the Council of Europe projected averages in recent years (168 days in 2022). Caseloads per judge decreased in the District and Circuit Courts between 2023 and 2024, while the superior courts experienced increases, particularly in the Supreme Court and High Court.

Ireland had the lowest number of judges per 100,000 inhabitants among Council of Europe Member States in 2022, a finding reiterated in the 2025 EU Justice Scoreboard. Case clearance rates remained below 100% across most courts in Ireland between 2019 and 2024, contributing to a growing backlog of unresolved cases. The Court of Appeal and Supreme Court recorded clearance rates above 100% in 2024.

There are many data gaps regarding how efficiently the courts operate, which is reflected in many of the recommendations made below. The information that is available shows that the Irish courts perform below their EU counterparts. For example, the EU Justice Scoreboard ranks Ireland as the lowest among EU Member States in relation to how efficiently the courts resolve civil matters.

Should a more comprehensive set of data be made available, it is possible that Ireland's rating might improve. It is important to note, for example, that the majority of civil matters initiated in the Irish courts do not proceed to hearing and, therefore, are not resolved by the courts.<sup>231</sup> The disposition times for civil matters in the District and Circuit Courts could be lower than the equivalent disposition times among EU Member States.

## Prisons

The Irish Prison Service's budget reached €579 million in 2026, reflecting growth of €218 million since 2019. Spending has increased at a faster pace than the EU average, though per capita expenditure remains below the EU benchmark, with the gap widening over time.

The Irish prison population has been above official capacity levels since 2023, leading to a myriad of issues arising from prison overcrowding. Statistics from December 2025 show that Irish prisons were operating at 123% of capacity. From 2019 to 2023, the average rate at which Ireland's prison population increased each year was 4.55% (see Figure 31). On average, EU prison populations reduced over the same period.

Remand rates also shifted during the period reviewed, with the proportion of prisoners held on remand in Ireland increasing from 18.20% to 19.27% between 2019 and 2024, and the total number of remand prisoners increasing by more than a third. Ireland's average remand rate remained below the Council of Europe average but was higher than some comparable jurisdictions, aligning most closely with Scotland.

In terms of sentence length, the average time served in Ireland's prisons between 2019 and 2023 was seven months, which is shorter than the Council of Europe average of nine months.

<sup>231</sup> Courts Service, *Annual Report 2023* (Courts Service, 2024) 56 <<https://www2.courts.ie/acc/alfresco/2b552955-e0f9-41a2-80e7-c526d24651e2/Courts%20Service%20Annual%20Report%202023.pdf/pdf/1>> accessed 6 November 2025.

# Recommendations

A comprehensive and transparent approach to data collection and reporting is needed across the Irish justice system. Without adequate resourcing, however, data gaps are likely to persist, limiting the ability to evaluate court performance, identify systemic issues, and inform evidence-based reforms.

The following specific improvements to data collection are recommended as priorities:

## Average Case Disposition Time

1. The Courts Service should record and publish in its annual reports the average length of court proceedings (or average case disposition time) in respect of all courts and for all matter types. This would increase transparency for court users and enable a more accurate international comparison under this indicator.
2. The Courts Service should share the necessary data with the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) to enable the calculation of estimated disposition times for the Irish courts that can be directly compared with those of other Member States. This includes detailing:
  - a. The number of incoming cases (new cases initiated) each year, disaggregated by matter type (e.g., civil, administrative, and criminal).
  - b. The number of resolved cases (cases completed or closed) each year, disaggregated by matter type.
  - c. The number of pending cases at the end of the year (i.e., the size of the case backlog).
  - d. The age of pending cases at the end of the year (e.g., less than one year, one-two years, more than two years, etc.).
  - e. Separate figures for each court level (e.g., first instance, second instance, and Supreme Court).

The above information is also necessary for the European Commission's Justice Scoreboard, as the figures that are evaluated by the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) are a core data source for the Scoreboard.

## Crime Detection Rates

Detection rates for historical crime incidents should be reported separately from detection rates for contemporary incidents. Historical cases often involve different evidentiary circumstances, which can distort overall detection figures. Because contemporary cases are investigated with current resources, technologies, and procedures, their detection rates reflect present-day policing performance, whereas historical cases reflect the challenges of investigating offences after more time has passed. Separating the two makes it clearer that lower detection in older cases does not necessarily indicate declining police effectiveness today.

Distinguishing between the two categories would provide a more accurate picture of crime detection trends and allow for better assessment of the impact of policy interventions and resource allocations.

3. An Garda Síochána should publish detection rate statistics separately for historical and contemporary crime incidents.
4. The Central Statistics Office (CSO) should publish detection rate statistics separately for historical and contemporary crime incidents.

## Case Clearance Rates

5. The Courts Service should record and publish in its annual reports the number of civil matters that are settled each year to reflect the actual resolution of civil disputes. These statistics are necessary to more accurately determine and assess case clearance rates. Where it is not possible to capture formal settlement data, civil matters that do not progress (e.g., cases that are withdrawn, discontinued, or are otherwise inactive) should be treated as having been settled or ended for the purposes of case resolution statistics.
6. The Courts Service should disaggregate administrative cases from civil cases when reporting to the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) on case clearance rates. This would ensure that Ireland's performance can be directly compared with other Member States. This information is also needed for the Commission's Justice Scoreboard as noted above (recommendation 2).
7. The Courts Service should record and publish the extent of the case backlog at each court level on an annual basis, as well as reporting the number of pending cases (case backlog) to the Council of Europe and the European Commission (see recommendation 2). This information would give a more realistic indication of the average length of proceedings in the courts and would enable a more accurate assessment of how clearance rates in Ireland compare with those of other jurisdictions. This is also needed to increase transparency for prospective court users prior to initiating proceedings. Such information would help them to plan realistically, reduce uncertainty in respect of waiting times, and make informed decisions about whether and when to pursue legal action.
8. The Courts Service should transparently record and publish the age of the backlogged cases on an annual basis as well as reporting the age of pending cases (case backlog) to the Council of Europe and the European Commission (see recommendation 2). The availability of such data would better illustrate the progression of a case through the justice system and the experience that court users are likely to face should they find themselves involved in litigation.
9. The Courts Service should include a breakdown of the number of judges in each court in its annual reports. While the Courts Service keeps this information updated on its website on an ongoing basis, for research and comparative purposes (e.g., to more accurately calculate judges' caseloads), historical data are required.

## Caseload Per Judge

10. The Courts Service should publish the number of sitting days of each court. Together with the extent of the case backlog and the number of judges, this will enable a more accurate calculation of judges' caseloads.
11. The Council of Europe should broaden the scope of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) Evaluation Reports to incorporate data on caseloads per judge. This enhancement would enable systematic comparison across Member States, thereby strengthening the capacity of policymakers, judicial authorities, and researchers to assess judicial efficiency and resource allocation.

## Court Expenditure

12. The Courts Service should follow the Council of Europe (CEPEJ) Guidance Note when reporting to it on the annual public budget allocated to the functioning of all courts. The Guidance Note provides that this should include the gross salaries of all judicial and non-judicial staff working within courts, which would include judicial salaries. This would enable more accurate direct comparison with other Council of Europe Member States.

## Number of Gardaí

13. Eurostat should ensure that its own definition of 'police officers' is consistently applied when publishing figures for EU Member States. According to that definition, non-uniformed members of An Garda Síochána should not be included in the numbers published. Ensuring the definition is applied consistently would assist in more accurate comparison between Ireland and other EU Member States.
14. An Garda Síochána should systematically record and publish annual statistics on the number of resignations and retirements from, and appointments to, the service. This would ensure that such information is readily available without reliance on Parliamentary Questions.

## Trust and Confidence in the Justice System

Neither the EU Justice Scoreboard nor the Council of Europe's CEPEJ evaluation reports currently include indicators specifically on public trust in the prison system. Their focus is on judicial efficiency, independence, and quality. The Council of Europe collects prison-related data through its SPACE reports (Statistiques Pénale Annuelles du Conseil de l'Europe (Annual Penal Statistics of the Council of Europe)), which cover prison populations, conditions, and management, but not public trust perceptions.

15. The Council of Europe should expand the scope of its Annual Penal Statistics of the Council of Europe (SPACE) reports to include indicators on public trust in prison systems. Incorporating survey-based measures of public trust would complement existing quantitative indicators on prison populations, occupancy rates, and conditions, and would provide a fuller picture of how prison systems are viewed by society. This would strengthen comparative analysis across Member States and support evidence-based policy reforms aimed at improving accountability and legitimacy in the prison system.
16. The Department of Justice, in collaboration with the Irish Prison Service, should reintroduce systematic and regular data collection mechanisms to measure public and stakeholder trust in the prison system. At present, data are only available for 2021 and 2022, and they focus on confidence rather than on trust. Establishing a consistent series would provide valuable insights into how the prison system is perceived domestically and would complement international reporting. In particular, this national data could serve as a foundation for the Council of Europe to expand its SPACE reports to include indicators on public trust in prison systems, thereby strengthening both national and European-level assessments of the effectiveness of the prison system.

The above recommendations arise directly from the justice indicators analysed. They are not intended to be exhaustive and should not preclude the collection and publication of additional data.



## Appendix



# APPENDIX A: Data Sources

The various sources of information that have been collated are set out below and are also cited throughout this publication.

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