

ICPO ANNUAL REPORT 2022



IRISH COUNCIL FOR PRISONERS OVERSEAS

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Introduction

Irish prisoners overseas are one of the most marginalised and vulnerable groups of Irish emigrants. They face significant difficulties including discrimination, language barriers and dealing with unfamiliar legal systems. In some countries prison conditions are a major cause of concern and prisoners may experience extreme hardship, with limited access to food, water and medical treatment.

The Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) works to help reduce the burden faced by these prisoners and their families. Established by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1985 the ICPO continues to operate under the auspices of the Irish Episcopal council for Emigrants

Vision

The vision of the ICPO is of a world where the human rights of Irish prisoners overseas are respected and their dignity is honoured.

Mission

To bring hope to Irish prisoners overseas and their families by helping them to cope with the challenges of imprisonment and to increase their chances of rebuilding their lives after release. This is done by providing pastoral care, information, support and advocacy.

Values

Inclusivity

We work with all Irish prisoners and their families wherever they are and at all stages of the imprisonment process. We do not make any distinction in terms of religious faith or the nature of the conviction.

Respect

We treat everyone with dignity and respect.

Person-centred

Everyone we work with is treated as an individual and the service provided is tailored to their needs.

Presence

We stay with people on their journey, maintaining a presence for as long as it needed.

Coordinator's Review

In 2022 the ICPO continued to provide high level supports and services to clients and their families. We received a steady stream of referrals and are currently providing support to in excess of 1,100 Irish citizens detained in thirty one different countries. Between the teams in the ICPO London and Maynooth offices, in excess of 8,000 calls, letters, emails and visits, to, from and on behalf of prisoners and their families occurred. Our caseload is higher than the last three years due to a growth of international travel and in-prison visits which had been reduced due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

The majority of ICPO clients are imprisoned in England and Wales and both the Maynooth and London offices continue to work closely to support this group and their families. We also provide assistance to a significant number of prisoners throughout Europe, the United States and Australia. Over the past year ICPO supported a small number of immigrant detainees in the United States and Australia; both before and after their deportation to Ireland. Some detainees have not lived in Ireland for many years and have no contacts or family support here. They require significant support in order to access appropriate services upon their return to Ireland.

The ICPO is working with a number of prisoners detained in South and Central America, Asia, Africa and the Middle East. Prison conditions are a major source of concern in these areas and many of our clients have difficulty accessing basic necessities. The ICPO Hardship Fund allows us to provide essential supports to these prisoners.

Strategic Plan 2020-2023

2022 is the third year of the first ICPO Strategic Plan (covering the years 2020 – 2023). The Strategic Plan set out six main priorities: Client well-being; Service development; Advocacy and profile raising; Human Resources; Funding; Governance and Structure. Despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, significant progress has been made. An internal review was carried out, looking in detail at each of the priorities, identifying what had been achieved and actions that remained to be completed. Plans were put in place to progress areas where work remained to be carried out including under client well-being and service development such as services for women in prison, resettlement and education in prison and under advocacy and profile raising including developing and implementing a public relations strategy.

Strategic Plan 2024-2027

In November and December an invitation to tender for ICPO's second strategic plan covering the years 2024-2027 was prepared. An advertisement was placed in Activelink before Christmas with the closing date for the submission of tenders being the 13th of January 2023. It is anticipated that work on this

Coordinator's Review

strategic plan will commence in February 2023 once a Consultant has been engaged with the final draft prepared by the end of June. The successful Consultant will be required to review the existing Strategic Plan and actions achieved in addition to facilitating online group consultation sessions with former clients and family members as well as with ICPO staff from both offices and conducting one-to-one interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Transfer of sentence (Repatriation)

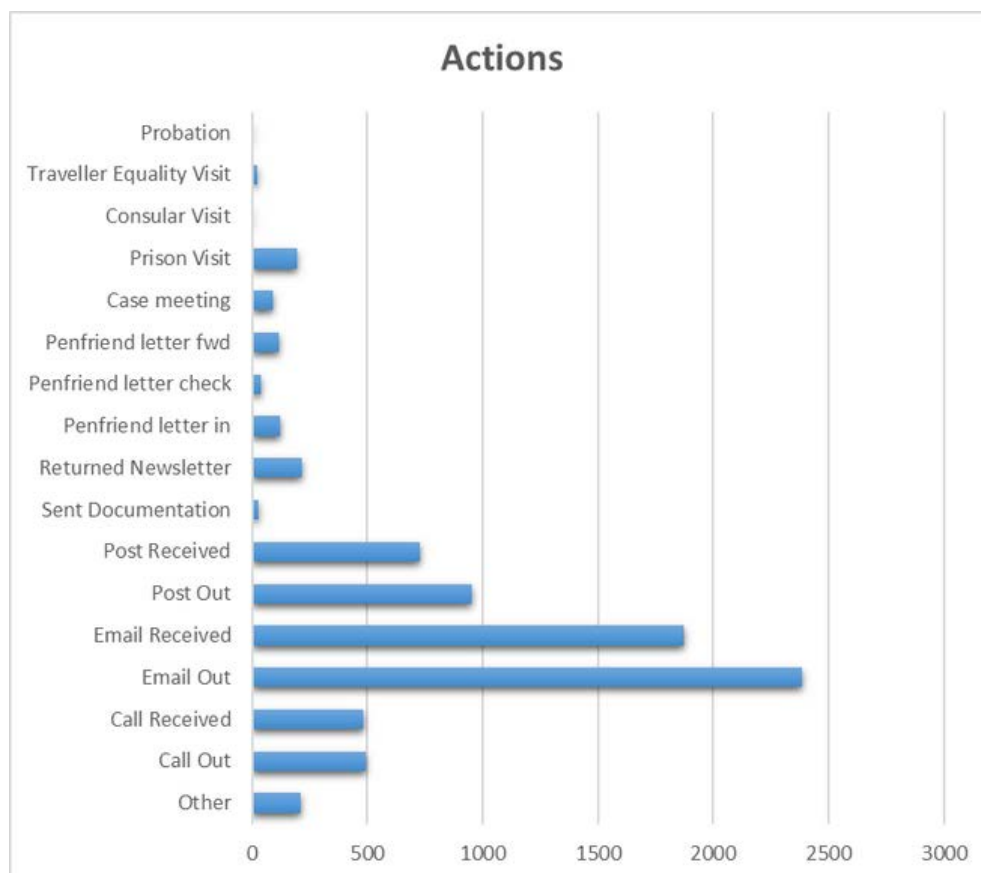
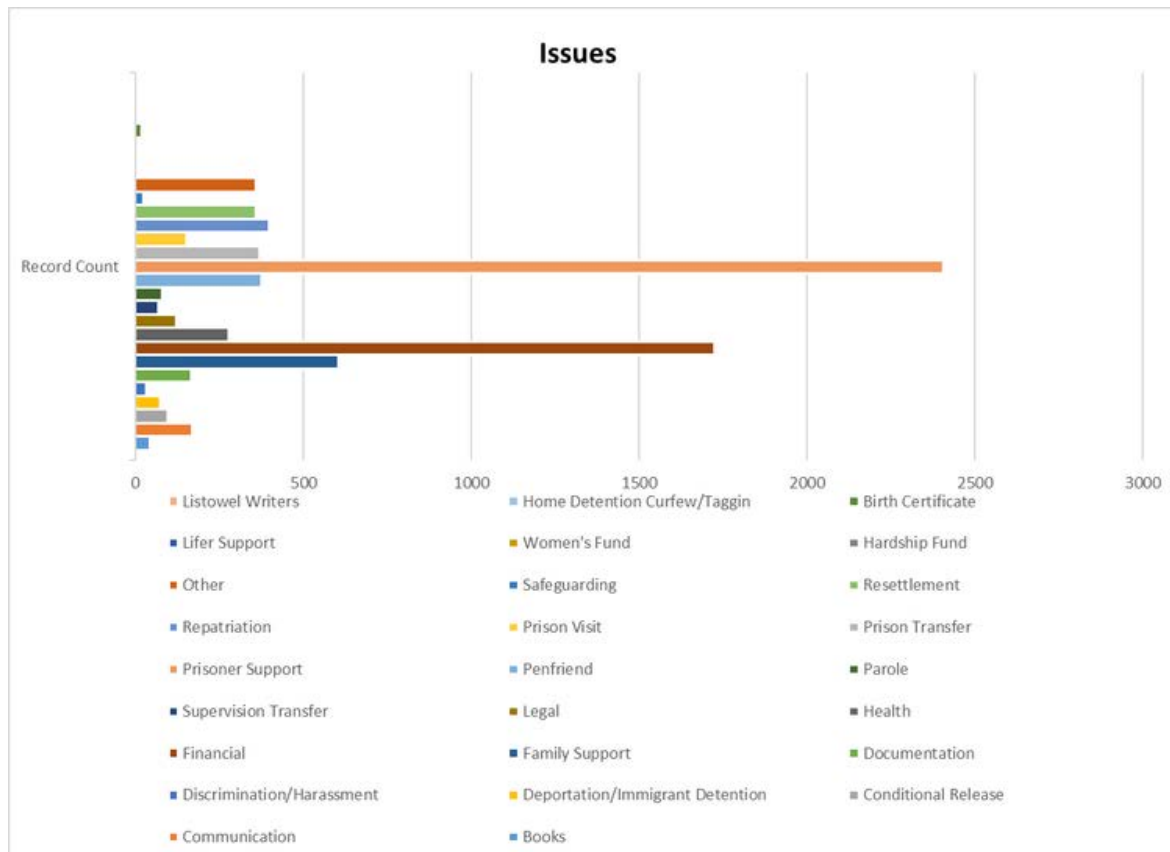
In 2021 a Bill to transpose Framework Decision 2008/909/JHA (governing transfers of prisoners among EU States) was published and has gone through Committee Stage in the Dail. Draft amendments to existing legislation to facilitate the transfer of Irish prisoners in prison in non-EU countries were also published in December 2021. The ICPO continues to maintain contact with the drafting section of the Department of Justice and with relevant politicians in relation to progressing this important legislation and was informed at the end of August that progress had been made and the Bill with revised amendments would go through Fourth Stage in the Dáil in October. Unfortunately this did not happen and no further progress was made on this legislation in 2022. The ICPO continues to liaise with the Irish Prison Service regarding individual cases and provide information and advice to people in prison and their families in relation to repatriation.

It is important to acknowledge the essential support provided to Irish prisoners by Irish embassies and consulates throughout the world. Moreover the collegiality and cooperation of the Dublin based Consular Assistance Unit in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade greatly enhances our ability to support Irish prisoners overseas.

ICPO is especially grateful to its ongoing funders – the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Emigrant Support Programme) and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul without whom it would not be possible to provide this service.

The ongoing commitment and professionalism demonstrated by staff and volunteers alike, remains the bedrock upon which we continue to provide this challenging but essential outreach.

Statistics



Isolation and Mental health problems are the most frequently cited issues for Irish prisoners overseas

Hardship Fund grants totalling €41,202.32 were given to Irish prisoners overseas

ICPO is supporting Irish prisoners in 31 countries

ICPO is providing support to approximately 1,100 Irish prisoners overseas

ICPO provided hundreds of grants for food, medicine, communication and resettlement

ICPO made 8,000 contacts to, from and on behalf of clients in 2021

What Our Clients Say



"My penfriend is a great and wonderful person and I do like to hear from her."



"Thank you for travelling all this way, it means the absolute world that someone knows I'm still alive. I haven't had a visit in 19 years."



"Thanks again to you and all the ICPO for everything you have done and continue to do for my family and I."



"Sometimes you feel a bit down and then you get an ICPO Newsletter or a letter and it makes you feel better."



"I never felt judged by anyone in ICPO, it's great to still be part of the Irish community and to know I haven't been forgotten."



Casework

ICPO clients require support in relation to a range of issues, including repatriation, deportation, health and legal matters, discrimination, ill-treatment and access to post release support and accommodation. We advise clients on these issues and work closely with Government Departments, statutory agencies, solicitors, probation officers, prison officials, local authorities and welfare agencies to meet their specific needs. ICPO caseworkers are assigned to particular countries or regions. This enables them to gain experience and expertise in the legal and penal systems in the areas they manage as well as developing a network of contacts who can assist and support the prisoner as needed.

An important part of our work involves making representations on behalf of clients to prison authorities and other relevant parties. In the past year ICPO interventions resulted in a number of clients receiving essential medical treatment. A particular focus since the pandemic has been in supporting ICPO clients to maintain good mental health. This has undoubtedly been challenging for many; having to deal with 23 hour lockdown, difficulties accessing education, work and offender behaviour courses necessary to progress with their sentence and a protracted absence of visits from friends and family. ICPO has adopted new communication methods made available by many prisons including the increased use of email and video calls. We have also provided a significant increase in communication grants to prisoners and made the most vulnerable and isolated prisoners a particular focus.

In addition to providing advice and support, we provide practical assistance to prisoners by allocating funds to help them buy phone credit, stamps, clothing, books and writing materials. The ICPO makes a special effort to write regularly to clients, especially those who have little or no family contact. Prisoners serving long sentences are a particular concern and we maintain regular correspondence with these clients as they move through the prison system. The use of pre-addressed, post-paid envelopes allows clients who have limited funds to maintain contact with the ICPO.

Another key component of the ICPO's work is the provision of family support. Those with a loved one imprisoned overseas endure significant upset and trauma. ICPO devotes considerable resources to facilitating communication between the prisoner and his/her loved ones; to assisting some families in organising visits to see their family member and to providing a listening ear when required. It is often necessary to explain the different prison rules and regimes which can be very difficult to understand.

ICPO has developed an extensive network of prison visitors over many years. These prison visitors may for some, be their only contact with the outside world.

Casework

Some prison visitors bring food and medicines to Irish citizens incarcerated in the more deprived regions of the world. In addition to these prison visitors, ICPO staff undertake a considerable number of prison visits in the UK, US, Europe, Australia and more recently parts of Asia, the Middle East and South America visiting approximately 900 annually. Unfortunately due to the pandemic virtually no prison visits took place in 2022.

Case Studies

UK

Michael* is serving a short-term sentence in the UK and is a recent client of ICPO. He was in England only a short period before being arrested and convicted on burglary charges. He suffers from anxiety and depression and feels cut off from family and friends. ICPO contacted the prison healthcare team and Michael now has a number of sessions with an outside psychologist who works in conjunction with the healthcare team. With Michael's permission, ICPO met with his family in Ireland and arranged video links for them with him and set up emailprisoner.com for them. Currently ICPO is providing a travel grant towards the overall cost of his Mum and brother visiting Michael in early spring. This is their first visit to him.

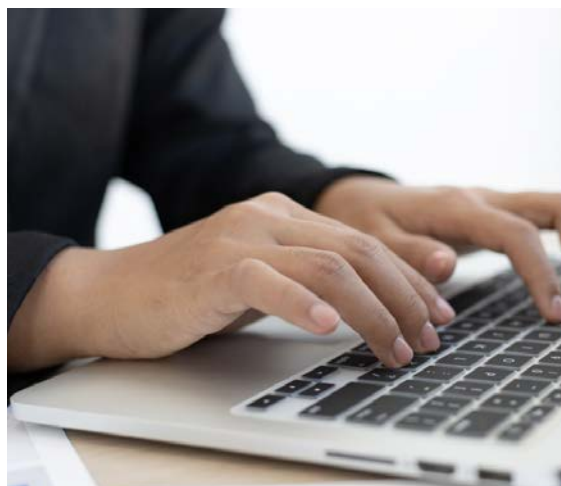


ICPO is in contact with Michael and he is interested in writing and submitted an entry to ICPO writing competitions in the Listowel Writer's Week. During the autumn ICPO visited him in prison, and he no longer feels isolated and is now coping with imprisonment due, in part to the ongoing support provided to him and his family by ICPO.

"Thanking you Ian for being there to talk to always, it is so reassuring."

Europe

Cormac* was arrested last year in a European country and was referred to the ICPO by the Irish Embassy. Cormac does not speak the local language and does not have much family contact. He is therefore quite isolated so he was very pleased to receive a letter from his ICPO caseworker. Cormac replied as soon as he received the ICPO letter and said "I would like thank you for taking the time and effort to write to me."



Casework

I am very happy to receive your letter today" The ICPO caseworker is sending some language resources, so Cormac can communicate better with officers and other prisoners and a small grant to help him keep in more regular contact with family and will also send him some newspapers to help him keep in contact with developments in Ireland.

"Thank you for taking the time and effort to write to me. I am very happy to receive your letter today."

Australia

Frank* 58 year old male who had served 27 years in custody, was parolled to reside at a supported accommodation address, however was re-arrested for a breach of his release conditions. The client reached out to his local consulate who in turn reached out to ICPO to re-engage with the client about his return to custody but also to provide support to his family, who were distraught. The family were supported around registering for visitation and assisted to set up a video call with their loved one. This information was passed on to the consulate who were monitoring the clients return to custody given his fragile state of mind. Contact has also been re-established with Frank to guide him through the next stage of his re-arrest and subsequent revocation of parole.

United States

Martin* is a 75 year old dual citizen who has not had a visitor in years. ICPO has re-commenced visitation and attempts were made to set up a visit with this client, his prison were insistent that evidence be provided as to confirmation of Martin's dual citizenship. The ICPO Caseworker reached out to the local consulate who provided confirmation of citizenship with the clients approval as well as a support letter for the ICPO Caseworker outlining the need for such a visit and the

benefits for Martin. The prison approved the visit and were most accommodating following the provision of supporting documentation from the local consulate. The client is really looking forward to his visit in the coming weeks following a spell of poor health, he reports "I can't wait to sit down with someone from home".

"I can't wait to sit down with someone from home."

Family Support Work

Families with a loved one in prison overseas are greatly impacted in a number of ways by their family member's imprisonment. The main issues that families face is the distance between Ireland and their loved one's country of imprisonment, navigating a new judicial system sometimes in another language, with many family members having never been involved with the criminal justice system before and the strain that the absence has on their day to day lives.

It can be a very isolating time, especially if other family members or friends are not aware of their situation. In addition, some families have little to no contact with their loved one either by letter, phone or email. In some cases, it is not possible for the families to travel due to personal circumstances, financial reasons or due to the location of the prisons, which means that their loved one may not receive a visit for the duration of their sentence. Families are also serving a sentence alongside their loved one and are often the "forgotten" victims of imprisonment.

Family support is a core aspect of our work. ICPO staff supports families in the following ways to help them during this difficult time in their lives:

- Information and advice on processes such as arrest, detention, release, deportation, release on licence specific to their family member's situation and region of the world
- Ongoing emotional support to families, we provide a space where they can speak about their feelings and worries in a confidential and non-judgemental way
- Providing information about getting financial help for the cost of prison visits from the government and also ICPO
- Facilitating initial communication between family members and their loved one
- Liaising with external agencies, including government agencies such as the Department of Foreign Affairs, embassy personnel, probation services, legal and welfare groups, housing authorities and other specialist agencies as appropriate for further support
- Organising family events
- Working with prison chaplains, Her/His Majesty Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and others to locate prisoners who have moved
- Building relationships and contacting Irish welfare associations, communities or religious orders abroad that may be able to provide localised support to prisoners and to families when they go to visit
- Meeting with families in person around the country where possible to allow them an opportunity to speak to ICPO staff in person
- Linking families with UK based agencies and resources - for example, Story Book Dads, Email-a-Prisoner and local family support groups

Family Support Work

- Providing a designated Family Page in the ICPO newsletter with practical and relevant information – for example, resettlement, self-care and judicial updates
- The creation and mail out of ICPO's new Family Booklet written especially for Irish Families with a loved one overseas. This booklet covers the following topics:
 - o Supporting your loved one in prison
 - o Looking after yourself when a family member is in prison
 - o Supporting children with a parent in prison
 - o Coming home



Family Events:

Family Coffee Morning:

ICPO facilitates an online support meeting for families once a month. It is an opportunity for families to come together in a supportive and friendly environment to engage with one another and some members of the ICPO team. Families can share how they are feeling, ask questions or just listen to other people's experiences. Families have told ICPO that they find it useful to talk to people in a non-judgmental space with those who understand what each other is going through.

"I really appreciate the opportunity to be myself at these meetings and not having to cover my situation. A big thank you to all the family members who welcomed me, the compassion shown to me was so heart-warming, you have helped me so much in coming to terms with my situation."

Family member at a recent ICPO online meeting

Family Support Work

Family Information Day:

Twice a year, ICPO holds a Family Information Day in Dublin. This event is an opportunity for families to meet in person with the ICPO team and other families with a loved one in prison overseas. The event is completely free and families are assisted to be able to attend. ICPO will arrange for a number of presentations to be held during the day on topics relevant to families and the challenges around imprisonment overseas such as repatriation, navigating different criminal justice systems and mental health support.

Family Quotes

"I found it really helpful to talk to others about their issues and to share mine."

"I am so glad that I went to the Family Day. I learned a lot about different things and realised that we are not the only ones who have the heartache of having a loved one locked away. Thank you for the lovely day."

"Thank you so much, it was lovely to meet you all, yesterday was the first day since it all happened that I felt ok, well not ok but it helped being around people who were going through a similar experience."

Post Pandemic World

With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, the possibility of in-person visits is now a reality, which has allowed some family members to travel to see their loved one. However, their visits are now being affected by the cost of living crisis. It has become increasingly difficult for families to travel overseas, even as close as England, due to the large increase in the cost of flights, ferries and hotel accommodation. ICPO notes that even when families receive a modest travel grant from our organisation to be able to visit their loved ones, the cost is still prohibitive to most.

Throughout COVID-19 prisons were predominantly responsive to the needs to prisoners and their families so video-calling facilities were installed at most prison locations. These capabilities have remained even with the return of in-person visits so families still have the option of accessing a video call with their loved one where travelling for an in-person visit is not possible.

Family Support Work

Case Study

The ICPO was contacted in early 2022 by Linda* whose brother Tom* was serving a short sentence in a European country. Tom was in poor physical health as a result of an accident he was involved in some years back. Neither Linda nor Tom spoke the local language and Linda was unable to communicate with Tom's social worker regarding his health and welfare in the prison. Tom's ICPO caseworker who speaks the local language was able to email the social worker on Linda's behalf. The ICPO caseworker also provided information to Linda about the prison system in the country where Tom was imprisoned and support her in preparing for his release including providing her with the ICPO resettlement guide. The ICPO also provided Tom with a hardship grant and language resources. Linda said "Thank you so much for your help during Tom's time in prison. I really don't know how I would have done what I did without your help and empathy. Your kind words and genuine kindness was so welcoming."



Case Study

Brenda* has a family member in prison in England and ICPO has been supporting her for the past year. She has a limited support network and no one to share the burden of her loved one's imprisonment with. Due to personal circumstances and health difficulties, both Brenda and her loved one have very limited contact and Brenda cannot travel to England for an in-person visit.

However, Brenda is in regular contact with her ICPO Family Officer for emotional support and information with regard to what she might expect her loved one to experience during their imprisonment.

ICPO Penfriend Scheme

The ICPO operates a popular Penfriend Scheme, which involves volunteers in Ireland corresponding on a regular basis with ICPO clients worldwide. The scheme is especially beneficial to those who have little family contact and many prisoners have commented how it has helped to alleviate their sense of loneliness. Volunteers who write to prisoners can help restore the link that some may have lost with the outside world and bring an increased sense of worth to their lives. We know from prisoners that the letters they receive from penfriends are very important to them.

In 2022, we had 50 volunteers. One hundred and twelve letters from clients were forwarded to volunteers; with multiples of this number sent by penfriend volunteers to clients. Volunteers continue to write to some clients who very infrequently reply to them.

A number of volunteers retired due to ill health in 2022, their years of service varied but some had given up to seventeen years. The staff at ICPO is very grateful to all volunteers who help to support our clients by writing regularly to them.

"Thank you. Having a meaningful conversation with someone who shows genuine interest in who I am is wonderful. This is a dark and depressive place and over time it will break even the strongest of men. This is why I will always be so grateful to all the people who have given me so much kindness, caring and support. Without people like you my suffering would be all the greater. So thank you for taking the time you do to write me."

Client to his penfriend.



Transfer of sentence (Repatriation)

Progress on repatriation was slow in 2022. A Bill to transpose Framework Decision 2008/909/JHA (governing transfers of prisoners among EU States) was published in 2021 and has gone through Committee Stage in the Dail. Draft amendments to existing legislation to facilitate the transfer of Irish prisoners in prison in non-EU countries were also published in December 2021. While it was anticipated that the Bill would go through Fourth Stage in the Dáil in October 2022, this did not happen. The ICPO continues to maintain contact with the drafting section of the Department of Justice and with relevant politicians in relation to progressing this important legislation and looks forward to further progress in the coming year. It is now over six years since the last inward transfer, causing distress and hardship to prisoners who wish to return and to their families. The ICPO continues to liaise with the Irish Prison Service regarding individual cases and provide information and advice to people in prison and their families in relation to repatriation. The ICPO's role was recognized by the Minister for Justice in the most recent report on the operation of the transfer legislation when she stated "My Department continues to co-operate with the Irish Commission for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO) in providing information on applications."^[1]

Returning to Ireland while on Licence

For many years, the Irish Probation Service engaged with people returning to Ireland on licence after serving a prison sentence in the UK. This engagement generally took the form of home circumstance visits, voluntary supervision and referral to Probation Service funded agencies. Every year a small number of generally low risk prisoners seek to return to Ireland to be closer to family, friends and networks while on licence. The majority of those seeking to return have little or no connections with the UK and remaining in the UK for the duration of their licence would lead to considerable hardship for them and their families and may impact negatively on their chances of successful rehabilitation.

In 2021 the International Desk of the Probation Service indicated that this practice would be reviewed. Applications to travel permanently to Ireland while on licence were monitored by ICPO and during 2022, it became apparent that in at least some cases, the Probation Service declined to provide any support to returning prisoners. The reasons given were mainly resource issues and the fact that Ireland does not have any agreement with the UK in relation to supervision of persons returning to Ireland during their licence period.

A briefing was put together outlining the issue and containing relevant case studies. A meeting was held between the ICPO Coordinator and a senior official in the Probation Service in October 2022.

[1] Report by the Minister for Justice on the Operation of the Transfer of Sentenced Persons Acts (01 January 2021 - 31 December 2021), page

Policy and Information

Ongoing contact with the Probation Service will be maintained in the hopes of resolving this issue satisfactorily for the benefit not only of those returning and their families but of wider society.

Foreign National Prisoners

The ICPO has partnered with the Department of Law and Criminology, Maynooth University (MU) to carry out research on the needs of Foreign National Prisoners (FNPs) in Irish prisons. This research is funded by the Irish Research Council New Foundations Scheme 2021. Over 80 FNPs have been interviewed as well as international experts on FNPs on the provision of supports and services to this group of prisoners. The final report has now been completed and is due to be launched in 2023. Key findings include that FNPs experience additional issues and challenges beyond those experienced by all prisoners including language barriers, isolation, and the ad hoc and inconsistent provision of services and information. The report strongly recommends the establishment of a service similar to that provided by the ICPO to Irish people in prison overseas, to help meet the needs of FNPs in Irish prisons. The ICPO has put in place a Steering Group whose members have a wide range of experiences, skills and knowledge and will guide the planning for a new service to be established as recommended by the MU research report.

Strategic Plan 2020-2023

2022 saw the completion of the third year of ICPO Strategic Plan 2020 – 2023. The Strategic Plan set out six main priorities: Client well-being; Service development; Advocacy and profile raising; Human Resources; Funding; Governance and Structure. Despite the challenges brought about by the pandemic, significant progress has been made. An internal review was carried out, looking in detail at each of the priorities, identifying what had been achieved and actions that remained to be completed. Plans were put in place to progress areas where work remained to be carried out including under client well-being and service development such as services for women in prison, resettlement and education in prison. Under advocacy and profile raising work was commenced on developing and implementing a public relations strategy and having an increased presence on social media as well as identifying opportunities for networking.

Strategic Plan 2024-2027

In November and December an invitation to tender for ICPO's second strategic plan covering the years 2024-2027 was prepared. An advertisement was placed in Activelink before Christmas with the closing date for the submission of tenders being the 13th of January 2023. It is anticipated that work on this strategic plan will commence in February 2023 once a Consultant has been

engaged with the final draft prepared by the end of June. The successful Consultant will be required to review the existing Strategic Plan and actions achieved in addition to facilitating online group consultation sessions with former clients and family members as well as with ICPO staff from both the London and Maynooth offices and conducting one-to-one interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Client Survey

In November, the second ICPO client survey was prepared for circulation to ICPO clients worldwide via the Christmas Newsletter. While the majority of questions were kept the same to facilitate comparisons and the identification of trends, some new questions were included, for example regarding the amount of visits received by clients given the importance of visits (from family/friends, ICPO and Consular visits) to people in prison. Questions were also included to assess the interests of Irish prisoners in seeking to transfer their sentence to an Irish prison. It is anticipated that analysis of completed surveys will take place in March and April and a brief report on findings will then be published.

CEP Special Interest Group

The ICPO is a full member of the CEP/EuroPris (Confederation of European Probation) Special Interest Group on Foreign National Prisoners. This is a network of independent organisations that support European citizens imprisoned outside their country of residence and their families. The aim of the EuroPris Special Interest Group is to promote the welfare and interests of this group in order to facilitate their social reintegration. The ICPO continued its active involvement in this Group in 2023 with the ICPO Coordinator attending several online meetings.

Resettlement Supports

The ICPO estimates that each year between 20 and 50 people that have served a sentence overseas return home to resettle here. In some cases they return voluntarily, however some are deported especially from the USA and Australia but increasingly from European countries. This is a relatively small number given that the ICPO supports approximately 1,100 people in prison. However, most are in the UK and in many cases will have been settled there prior to their imprisonment with family and other supports. Some other clients that we support are dual nationals either of Ireland and the country of imprisonment or a third country and may have family and networks in these countries.

The needs of people returning to Ireland after release from prison (and in some cases immigration detention) overseas varies considerably. Many will require a range of supports in order to successfully reintegrate into the community. Most immediately they will require access to accommodation and financial support, usually in the form of social welfare payments at least initially until they find work. The difficulties experienced in accessing these services have been exacerbated by the housing and cost of living crisis. There are a small number of residential programmes available to help people who have recently been released from prison and we refer clients to these programmes if suitable to their needs. Unfortunately, spaces in such programmes are very limited and for the majority of those returning without family support, the only option is homeless services.

Some ex-prisoners may also have physical and mental health issues, including addiction issues, and may need to access relevant services, as well as registering with a GP and obtaining a medical card. A small number of these may have multiple and complex needs and require considerable support to resettle successfully.

The ICPO has seen an increase in people being deported here who have spent a significant part of their lives in the sentencing country, generally having emigrated there with their families as a child. People in this situation require intensive support over a longer period of time as they have no family or networks in Ireland.

While some or all of these resettlement needs may be experienced by people released from prison in Ireland, the ICPO has observed that the particular circumstances of Irish people in prison overseas and the peculiar difficulties they face, can put them in greater need of post-release support. Being imprisoned overseas can and does place them at a particular disadvantage when it comes to preparing for their release in comparison to those released from an Irish prison. Irish prisoners overseas in many cases do not have access to release preparation courses either because such courses are limited to nationals of the sentencing

Resettlement Supports

country or Irish prisoners may not have a sufficient knowledge of the local language to engage in such programmes.

Person-centred peer support is becoming an integral part of resettlement for those who are being returned to Ireland in crisis, particularly when that person's family no longer lives in Ireland. ICPO Caseworkers become a daily point of contact until such time as the person becomes more familiar with their new surroundings and has settled into Irish life.

ICPO wish to acknowledge the assistance provided by the following agencies:

Crosscare Migrant Project (Changed at the end of 2022 to Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project)	Assists returning emigrants including ex-prisoners in accessing emergency accommodation and obtaining their statutory entitlements which are essential as they make their transition to life outside prison.
The Linkage Service	Supports ex-prisoners with employment and training issues.
PACE-Priorswood House	Provides post-release accommodation and key worker support to newly returned prisoners.
Trail (Peter McVerry Trust)	Provides post release accommodation and key worker support to returned clients convicted of a sexual offence.
NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders)	Supports offenders both in prison and on release. They provide peer support, assistance in accessing social welfare and social housing supports, all with a view to reducing an individual's risk of re-offending.
Safe Home	Advises returning emigrants including ex-prisoners on housing and statutory entitlements

Resettlement Supports

Case Studies

Iarlaith* was released from custody six months ago after being recalled on Licence. He wanted to remain in England as this is where his family live. About 9 months prior to his release ICPO send him our Resettlement questionnaire, which helped us to assist him. ICPO worked with his UK Probation Officer and Community Offender Managers preparing for his release and with his local council regarding provision of accommodation. ICPO provided information to Iarlaith on organisations which help ex-offenders gain access to welfare benefits, other financial grants and help with securing work opportunities.

ICPO contacted these organisations but also stressed to him the importance of actively preparing for his release, which he did. ICPO provided a post release grant and a resettlement pack. He keeps in contact with ICPO who recently sourced for him a grant for some small kitchen white goods. This was done by ICPO arranging with a local supplier to deliver the goods he requested and ICPO paying the supplier directly. Iarlaith made a smooth transition to life outside and is now working full time.



"I'm in debt to Ian and really so much appreciate all you have done and continue to do for me. Life would not be the same without your help and all at ICPO. The only real contacts I have now are ICPO and my legal team. I would be lost without ICPO, your letters and correspondence."

Jason* 38 year old male who had served 5 years in prison when he was referred to ICPO by a chaplain at the prison he had been incarcerated in. Jason acknowledged that he would be deported at the end of his prison sentence. Jason's family had emigrated to Australia when he was just 3 years of age, they had never returned and he had no awareness of living in Ireland. Jason had originally travelled on his mother's Irish passport and when referred to ICPO, Jason did not hold an Irish passport and did not have any form of identification. There had been a breakdown in Jason's familial relationship so unfortunately supporting documents for his passport application could not be sourced from his family. Support was provided by Jason's ICPO Caseworker to source his birth certificate from Northern Ireland, assistance around submitting an application for a passport and advocacy with Australian Immigration. Jason also had a number of pre-existing health conditions which meant that he would need instant access to healthcare upon his return to Ireland. A referral was completed to NIACRO

Resettlement Supports

almost 12 months in advance of his return. Jason was identified for a number of community based supports including supported accommodation, healthcare, social welfare supports and peer support.

Once Jason's deportation date had been confirmed, a multi-disciplinary approach was adopted to give Jason the best re-integration support possible given his complex needs and limited support in the community. It involved cooperation between ICPO, NIACRO, a local healthcare provider and Northern Ireland Housing Executive. Jason has been back in Ireland since September 2022 and has continued to receive support from NIACRO. ICPO resettlement support was provided intensively initially and then sporadically once he had appropriate supports in his own community, ICPO supports were provided until 6 months post his return to Northern Ireland.

Jason has continued to remain offence free for the past 8 months.

Ruth* contacted ICPO after her husband Mark was extradited to an eastern European country in 2021 in relation to a minor offence committed a number of years ago. Ruth was keen for her husband to apply to transfer his sentence back to an Irish prison where she could visit him but did not know anything about the process. Their ICPO caseworker explained the process in detail and Mark made an application as soon as he was sentenced. Their caseworker kept in regular contact with the Irish Prison Service and received updates which she passed on to Ruth. Mark's application was approved in 2022 and again their ICPO caseworker explained the process of applying for

the warrant to allow Mark back to Ireland. Before Christmas, Mark was granted conditional release and returned to Ireland. The ICPO provided Ruth with our Resettlement Handbook. Ruth said " I can't thank you enough for all you have done. The support you gave me, I just can't put into words. I really appreciate all you have done and for your patience explaining things to me".



What Our Clients Write

"Thank you for the lovely letter you sent to me and for letting me have another pen friend. that is great as I do like to write letters out and its nice to hear from people in my own country."

"My pen friend is a great and wonderful person and I do like to hear from her."

"I've always been the type of person to do things on my own but I realise there are times when we all could use a little help and I am eternally grateful to the ICPO for being there for me! May God bless you all."

"It's amazing to put an end to this mad story. I just wouldn't have been possible without you all to do it. I'm so happy I can't express it, so relieved and so grateful for all your help, you're just fantastic people."

"Thank you for the newsletter with my story in it. It's the first time I ever won anything and I couldn't even read or write when I came to jail. I am so proud of myself that I had the courage to enter and I want to thank ICPO for all your encouragement."

"Thank you for your card and kind words. Your letters always lift my spirits and in a place like this it is easy to become depressed. Not much changes in prison. A person is either okay or they are not and things are never really good but to be honest the people in ICPO has definitely made my life better and I would like to say Thank you! Thank you for being a light in my dark world, thank you for taking the time to write to a complete stranger. Thank you for being well ...you!"

The Finance and General Purposes Council of the Irish Episcopal Conference (IEC) oversees the budget of the ICPO Maynooth office. The day-to-day management of the budget is undertaken by the ICPO Coordinator who also liaises with the Finance Manager. The Irish Chaplaincy (formerly the Irish Chaplaincy in Britain) has this responsibility for the ICPO London office.

The Irish Episcopal Conference provided funding towards the running of the Maynooth office in 2022. Grant funding from outside agencies also forms a significant part of the organisation's overall funding. In 2022 the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFA) awarded ICPO €205,575 towards caseworker posts, engagement of Consultant to carry out Monitoring and evaluation of ICPO Strategic Plan, prison visits and the ICPO Hardship fund.

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul continues to provide essential grant funding in the amount of €50,000 annually. The funding is used to provide casework and family support services to some of ICPO's most vulnerable and isolated clients. ICPO sees the long time support of this core funder as an important endorsement and recognition of our work by a much respected organisation and we will continue to ensure its grant is spent prudently in support of some of the most vulnerable within our community. This is true of all the organisation's funders.

The ICPO greatly appreciates the generosity of all its funders without whom we could not continue to do this important work.



Hardship Fund 2022

Prisoner Support	€31,132.81
298 grants were provided to 141 clients in 19 countries.	
42 clients received 165 Quarterly payments, of €160.00 each on average.	
13 clients received one-off grants, (e.g. for food and clothing needs, toiletries, phone credit and money for stamps etc).	
51 clients in the UK also received grants of £20-£30 each on average for phone credit, toiletries, stamps, hobby and writing materials.	
Family Support	€7,252.90
With the further easing of the Covid-19 travel restrictions we were able to continue making grants to family members to visit and provide support to their loved ones in prison. Grants were provided to family members of 16 clients.	
Post Release Support	€2,751.84
17 clients were given a post-release grant and assisted with accommodation etc.	
Bank Fees:	€64.77
OVERALL TOTAL	€41,202.32

Report from ICPO London

The year 2022 was another busy one for the London office with the re-opening for visits of almost all the prisons in England and Wales and a gradual return to some form of 'normality'. Life in the prison estate throughout England and Wales has been changing rapidly in recent years and 2022 was no exception. Perhaps the most significant development has been the change in chaplaincy personnel over the Covid period.

This has added somewhat to the difficulty in arranging visits as we have had to introduce ourselves to new personnel and explain the nature of our work and the purpose of our visits. However, this has been something of a mixed blessing in that it also afforded us the opportunity to reflect on the nature of our service and how best to "sell" it to the chaplaincies.

Notwithstanding these difficulties, the London office still managed to maintain a credible visiting schedule: 16 prison visits by **Ellena Costello**, 13 by **Breda Power**, (meeting with a combined total of 325 prisoners), 15 by **Sally Murphy** and 8 by **Gerry**. While Breda and Ellena do their own casework, the bulk of the follow-up casework resulting from visits by **Sally Murphy** and **Gerry** is done by **Liz Power**, our chief caseworker.

Fiona Mullen heads the Traveller Equality Project which works in partnership with the London Probation Service. Its aims are to improve outcomes for Traveller prisoners and Gypsies on Probation and to increase Probation Officers' confidence in and ability to work with this group by delivering staff training across London.

This year also saw a change in **Irish Embassy** personnel. Over the decades we have worked closely with embassy staff on prison visiting and also on advocacy issues such as **deportation**, **repatriation** and the **transfer of Licence supervision**.

Prison visiting is arguably the most important part of the ICPO's outreach and is greatly appreciated by the prisoners themselves and their families.

"You are a great bunch who don't just come round with a clipboard asking to sign this or sign that, ticking boxes".

Prisoner at HMP Wandsworth

Report from ICPO London

Our prison visiting and family contact help to make the prison experience a little more bearable for all concerned. They also help people to maintain their family relationships, which is a crucial factor in the rehabilitation process.

With prisoners from a Traveller background comprising more than 40% of the Irish prisoner population, we work very closely with the Irish Chaplaincy's Traveller Project. Project manager, **Ellena Costello**, makes regular visits to the London prisons with **Breda** and **Fiona** and prisons outside London with **Fr Gerry**.

Breda and Ellena regularly attend Traveller forums throughout the year and last year helped with Traveller History Month events in a number of prisons in London and throughout the country.

"Gypsy, Roma, Traveller Month had been celebrated, visits from the Irish Chaplaincy were appreciated by the prisoners ... " (HMIP Report, on HMP Isis, December, 2022).

***"Well, Ms Ellena, my last Christmas in here. I'm out in April, thank God.
Thanks to you for all the letters you sent me and the little bit of money"***

(Traveller prisoner in HMP Bedford).

Declan Ganly, our office administrator, works tirelessly to ensure that the IT backup required for all three Chaplaincy projects functions properly and is always on hand to assist with statistics for reports and funding applications, etc.

Prison-visiting outside of London continues to be expensive in terms of time, travel and accommodation. Irish prisoners now vie with Polish prisoners for the unenviable title of the largest ethnic group within the prison system. However, if prisoners from the North of Ireland are included, they are the largest. While the biggest concentration of prisoners is to be found in the London area, there are also substantial numbers in the West Midlands, Merseyside and Greater Manchester, as well as South Yorkshire and the North-East.

Most visits are made via the Prison Chaplaincy which helps to maintain the all-important link with religion. However, visits are now increasingly being made via the prison Diversity and Equality departments which are responsible for the welfare of foreign nationals.

Report from ICPO London

Prisons North

This project, led by **Ian Hanna** from the Maynooth office and assisted by **Fr Gerry**, has gone from strength to strength since it started in 2016. Prison visits are made annually to some 12 prisons in the north-east of England including three high security prisons (Full Sutton, Frankland and Wakefield), meeting with an average of some 80 prisoners.

Ian is responsible for the follow-up casework resulting from these visits. However, because of the pandemic, last December saw the first visits to some of these prisons in almost three years.

Administrative Support

The London office deals with an average of 12 letters a day covering everything from requests for money for phone credit and toiletries, to help with family visits and information about repatriation and transfers, etc.

Family Days

Breda Power, Liz Power, Ellena Costello and **Gerry** represented the London office at the Family Day organised by the Maynooth office in May 2022. This was the first virtual family day in almost three years and was very successful. These days are important opportunities for the staff members of both offices to meet with the families of some of the prisoners they are working with. They are also much appreciated by the family members, some of whom travel long distances to be present.

Our Advocacy work on repatriation and the transfer of licence supervision continued throughout 2022. The Repatriation process continues to be painfully slow. The ICPO has been concerned about this issue for some time and the effect it is having on the prisoners we regularly meet as well as their families back in Ireland. It, and the transfer of licence supervision are the most important advocacy issues we deal with.

Transfer to Northern Ireland is also a problem. The three prisons there – Maghaberry, Magilligan and Hydebank Wood (Female and YOI), are nearly always full as priority for places is invariably given to Northern Ireland residents.

PPMI (Prisoners Maintaining Innocence)

Fr Gerry represents the ICPO on this campaigning group which seeks to highlight the problems prisoners maintaining innocence face in progressing through the prison system. In pre-pandemic years this was done mostly by lobbying and holding public meetings. A major success for the group has been getting the parole board to change the terminology from the negative ‘in denial’ to the more positive ‘maintaining innocence’ on prisoners’ files.

Report from ICPO London

Fr Gerry also provides spiritual, pastoral and liturgical support to prisoners in prisons throughout the country.

General Reflections

The prison system in England and Wales continues to cause concern. New prisons are being built, often on the site of older establishments such as at Glen Parva, near Leicester. The prison population in England and Wales is now the highest per head of population of any country in Europe, while the ratio of officer to prisoner remains dangerously low. The ferment experienced by the Probation Service, pre-pandemic, has eased somewhat but the quality of service still leaves room for improvement.

Fr Gerry McFlynn

10 May 2023

What Our Clients Say, London

"I know I wouldn't have got through this sentence without you guys, you picked me up from the floor, literally when I needed it most."

"During my 6 years in custody, I have been the grateful beneficiary of help from numerous organisations but I can honestly say none have helped me quite as much as the ICPO."

"Thank you so much for the £10 and the Information pack. That letter has been the only one that I've received during this whole sentence. It's the first time in 4 months that I've been able to make a phone call as well."

"The posters and prayers have brightened up the cell and really lifted my depressed mood. The ICPO is the best and I am really grateful for all your help and support."

"I cannot tell you what a difference it makes to be free to make the calls I need."

"All of you at the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas are angels."

Appendix

Issue Type	Location	Jan	Feb	March	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Total
Books	London						2		1	3				6
	Maynooth	3	5	12	5	4	6	6			2			43
Communication	London	2			1	1	1	1	1	1	3	5	2	18
	Maynooth		8	23		10	14	36	12	24	22	8	1	158
Conditional Release	London				1									1
	Maynooth		13	4		6	25	3	22	16	1	5	2	97
Deportation/ Immigration	London											2		2
	Maynooth	6	16	10		3	7	6		7	9	3	7	74
Discrimination/ Harrassment	London			1	1					10				12
	Maynooth		6	4	2	2		3			2		1	20
Documentation	London		1	10	3		2	5	11	12	11	12	7	74
	Maynooth	4	14	6	8	9	8	7	6	18	4	2	6	92
Family support	London	7	4	7	14		12	7	8	3	24	20	13	119
	Maynooth	58	27	20	16	35	59	74	38	63	33	44	23	490
Financial	London	95	90	90	66	55	106	85	96	94	119	125	109	1130
	Maynooth	19	51	74	65	57	67	68	32	52	41	35	47	608
Health	London	3	13	2	8	4	12	4	1	2	7	8	7	71
	Maynooth	22	6	7	19	29	15	25	18	22	19	20	6	208
Legal	London	1			1	6			1	2		4	2	17
	Maynooth	1	5	7	13	7	9	3	12	27	15	4	3	106
Supervision Transfer	London	6		7	6	6	3	4	1	3	2	7	5	50
	Maynooth	5	3		2	3		5	4	5		1		28
Parole	London	1	2		1	2	4		2	1		2	4	19
	Maynooth	1	6	1		3	5	3		22	10	9	2	62
Penfriend	London	3	5	1		1	3	2			3	1		19
	Maynooth	41	31	43	43	32	30	20	27	28	24	25	14	358
Prisoner Support	London	84	93	75	94	83	107	69	115	81	117	97	110	1125
	Maynooth	158	157	88	81	110	109	83	110	125	108	70	71	1270
Prison Transfer	London	3	6	10	22	22	13	15	24	24	16	12	5	172
	Maynooth	21	5	20	41	21	22	14	22	7	7	7	12	199
Prison Visit	London			3	1	3	5	4		1	3	9		29
	Maynooth		10	13	2	11	8	12	6	15	13	14	24	128
Repatriation	London	1	2	4	2		6		11	5	1		1	33
	Maynooth	18	31	44	15	39	26	25	27	65	22	36	19	367
Safeguarding	London													
	Maynooth											5	20	25
Resettlement	London	21	19	16	5	13	2	12	7	9	9	19	8	140
	Maynooth	5	12	13	21	15	18	11	40	45	17	18	6	221
Other	London	1		2	4	5	5	2		2	2	5	4	32
	Maynooth	49	4	114	70	2	21	13	7	3	3	52	8	346
	Total	639	645	731	633	599	732	627	662	797	669	686	549	7969