

An Evaluation of the Focus Ireland Women's Outlook Programme

Ann Clarke & Associates

Ann Clarke · Oonagh Clarke · Tom Martin



**Challenging
homelessness.
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FOCUS
Ireland



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An tSeirbhís Phromhaidh
The Probation Service

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Ann Clarke, Tom Martin, and Oonagh Clarke

Foreword

Since its beginning, Focus Ireland has always placed a high value on listening to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Their voices and input are central to the development of our services and the advocacy work that we do. Our research over the years has covered multiple themes including families, youth, Housing First and importantly in this instance women. This echoes back to the origins of Focus Ireland and Sr Stans work with women experiencing homelessness in Dublin's inner city.

The complex relationship between homelessness and the criminal justice system is well documented. Focus Ireland has been active in the area of incarceration, recidivism and homelessness prevention for many years. This happens directly through the delivery of specialist programmes such as the former Prison In-Reach services operating in Dublin and Limerick and the current Women's Outlook Programme which is the object of this evaluation.

The Women's Outlook Programme is a unique partnership led service funded by the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service and delivered by Focus Ireland in active collaboration with both organisations. The programme is a response to 'An Effective Response to Women Who Offend', the joint Probation Service and Irish Prison Service Strategy 2014–2016 and the objective of improving outcomes for women offenders, namely providing a step-down facility that is a practical and cost-effective way to address the needs of women leaving prison.

Prior to the Women's Outlook programme, there was no natural intermediate step that women could take into a less restricted living environment to ease the return to society before they had finished their sentence. This gap substantially increased the risk of a return or entry into homelessness and repeating the cycle of continued trauma, social vulnerability and isolation. The Women's Outlook programme seeks to close that gap through providing a more supportive physical environment with an emphasis on recovery, integration and trauma informed care.

This evaluation makes an important contribution towards the continued development and support of a unique partnership service that seeks to end and prevent homelessness for vulnerable women through quality housing, integrated and holistic support. Stakeholder views captured in the evaluation not only showcase good practice but offer valuable recommendations for programme enhancement.

We are extremely thankful to the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service for their continued support in delivering the Outlook programme. We are also very thankful to St Stephens Green Trust for enabling us to undertake this important evaluation. And lastly, but most importantly, we are very grateful to every person that participated in this evaluation and who so generously gave their time and shared their experiences.

Adrian Quinn

Head of Housing Supports

Focus Ireland

Executive Summary

Context and Aims of the Research

This report documents the findings from an evaluation of the Women's Outlook programme (Outlook), operated by Focus Ireland in collaboration with the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service. Outlook, established in 2019, focuses on preventing homelessness and recidivism among female offenders by providing temporary accommodation and holistic, trauma-informed support. Key components of the programme include a personalised, gender-informed case management approach, access to education and employment opportunities for participants, and facilitation of family re-engagement. Over the Outlook programme's lifetime, family relations were identified by Focus Ireland as an area for further development and improvement. The main objective of the evaluation was therefore to examine and evaluate the housing and support services provided for people leaving prison, emphasising family-centred approaches. It also aimed to capture and document the Outlook programme process from committal to post-release support and assess the impact of the programme for all stakeholders. A central component of the research was to ensure the voices of service users and their families were captured, as well as key learning and recommendations to improve the service and identify any structural barriers to the expansion of the service.

Methodology

The methodology consisted of desk-based and qualitative research. A literature and policy review placed the programme in context and identified good practice examples. Programme data was then examined to develop a profile of service users and to identify any outcomes. The research also included nine in-depth interviews with previous and current programme participants and four of their family members (all adult children). The interviews explored the transition from prison to Outlook, the supports received while on the programme, family engagement, the preparation for and transition back to the community, and how the programme could be enhanced. Interviews were also conducted with staff of the Outlook programme and other key stakeholders. Underpinning the research design was a gender-informed approach.

Key findings

Outlook has supported 51 women. **Programme data** revealed that of the 39 women who have completed Outlook, 67% returned to live in the family home and 33% sourced other accommodation (e.g. private rented or local authority). Seventy per cent were in some form of employment, with 9% volunteering. Some (18%) progressed to further or higher education or other training programs. While no data is gathered about recidivism, anecdotal evidence from stakeholders indicates that it has been low. Additionally, the number of women withdrawn from Outlook is low (8%). Withdrawal is mainly due to breaches of temporary release (TR) conditions and many of the women may be offered a place on Outlook again.

Staff interviews identified several good practice examples in Outlook. These included a flexible selection process, a gender and trauma-informed case working approach, as well as good interagency collaboration on the project. The wrap-around, holistic support on the programme was also viewed as allowing the women space and time to reflect, which empowered and encouraged them to figure out their next steps and long-term goals. Staff identified opportunities for improvement in the areas of specific training e.g. restorative practice, better information provision on transitions to and from Outlook for the women, as well as providing a resettlement component as part of the program. Staff also felt Outlook should be limited to women who are on TR with at least 6 months left of their sentence to allow for meaningful intervention with the women on the program.

Interviews with participants of the Outlook programme were positive and revealed an appreciation for staff support and opportunities for personal development. Programme participants also spoke about the caring attitude they received from staff, as well as the emotional and practical support they provided. They indicated that Outlook gave them hope, time to reflect and work on themselves, and supported them with independent living skills.

Families, all of whom were unfamiliar with the criminal justice system, highlighted the program's positive impact on participants. Families believed it gave their family members opportunities they might not otherwise have had, built confidence, and supported them in making choices and decisions about the future. Reconnecting with family members almost as soon as they entered Outlook was also a relief and a support for families. However, both participants and their families stressed the need for improved communication and information provision from the program. Families believed that better information about the prison system and the expectations of the Outlook Programme would alleviate their anxiety.

Stakeholders praised Outlook for fostering collaboration and achieving its objectives. They referenced positive outcomes for participants including family re-engagement and progression to more stable lifestyles. The Focus Ireland facility was considered a safe and secure place that afforded participants the time and space to review the circumstances that led them into the criminal justice system. They also believed there was scope for expansion of the service to other areas but stressed it should be incremental.

Conclusion

Outlook is a housing-led programme that provides women referred by the Irish Prison Service an opportunity to complete their sentence in supported, short-term housing in a community setting. The programme has elements of good practice such as long-term funding, robust case management, and flexibility in referrals. Interviews with programme participants, their family members, staff and stakeholders highlighted how the Outlook programme fosters a non-judgmental, supportive environment, allowing women to decompress, plan their future, reconnect with family and work towards stability and independence. However, the evaluation revealed a number of areas where the programme could be strengthened, including improving communication, providing written procedures and information, enhancing staff training, and potentially adding aftercare and resettlement components. Strengthening family support is also suggested to reinforce the family-centred objective of the programme.

Recommendations

The recommendations cover a range of areas including governance and participant selection protocols, key outcomes and data collection, programme enhancement for participants and their families, supports and transitions from Outlook, as well as its incremental expansion.

Governance and Participant Selection Process

- > The Outlook Steering Group should convene joint, biannual meetings with the Referrals and Discharges (RAD) committee to facilitate programme learning and good practice, and the latter should incorporate a formal quarterly review into its meeting agenda.
- > The Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and the RAD should document best practices in the identification and selection of candidates – whether in the prison system or under Probation Service supervision in the community – for Outlook, including the most appropriate timeframes in terms of sentence length and time remaining on sentence or community supervision, to guide new RAD members and to enable programme replication elsewhere.

Key Outcomes and Data Collection

- > The Irish Prison Service, in conjunction with the Probation Service, should explore how metrics around recidivism could be captured for programme participants.

Enhancing Outlook for Participants and their Families

- > The Irish Prison Service should provide a unified definition of what Outlook is, also ensuring that prisoners and their family members clearly understand the objectives and conditions of the Outlook programme.
- > Focus Ireland should provide families with an information leaflet describing the Outlook programme and the Focus Ireland facility. It should include plain English descriptions about probation supervision orders, Temporary Release, and Community Return Scheme and what they mean in practical terms.
- > The Irish Prison Service should use their best endeavours and, where possible, to inform women selected for Outlook and the case managers a minimum of 3 days

before their transfer to the programme. During the assessment phase, relevant Probation Service staff and case managers should advise potential participants of the potentially short turnaround from selection to transfer.

- > The Irish Prison Service and Focus Ireland should ensure that there are clear lines of communication between all parties regarding terms of release (temporary release versus community probation). This may involve an element of training for Outlook staff to familiarise themselves with legal terminology.
- > Focus Ireland should collaborate with the Irish Prison Service to put in place a plan for accessing counselling services in the community for women requiring such services in advance of the move to Outlook.

Supports in Outlook

- > The funders of the Outlook programme should consider the benefits of adding resources to enhance evening and overnight supports including case managers on site, evening activities, and the facilitation of overnight stays for children over 18 years of age.
- > Focus Ireland should clarify and better communicate the overnight stay policy for children to Outlook participants. The policy should also be reviewed with the funders of the Outlook programme to ascertain if it could be expanded to include children over the age of 18.
- > The funders of the Outlook programme and Focus Ireland should consider extra resourcing to enable Outlook staff to dedicate time to specific and clearly defined communication with family members as part of the case management process. Such communication and what can be communicated to family members should only occur with the consent of Outlook participants.
- > The Outlook Steering Group should regularly discuss the training needs of Outlook staff and consult with Outlook staff to explore their training needs.
- > Focus Ireland should explore developing links with community services to provide access to child, family and parenting supports for the families of women attending the Outlook programme where requested by women.

Transition from Outlook

- > Other than in exceptional cases, the Irish Prison Service should make every effort to provide women moving to Outlook with an exit date from the programme, which should also be communicated to case managers.
- > The funders of the Outlook programme should consider the benefits of extending the Service Level Agreement with Focus Ireland to include a resettlement component to the Outlook programme for women who are not returning to the family home.
- > Focus Ireland should explore the development of better housing options for women leaving the Outlook programme, for example advocating for priority housing for recently incarcerated women.
- > The funders of the Outlook programme should consider the benefits of providing additional resources for a formal aftercare/floating support component to the case manager's role, which would include home visits and advocacy for a defined period with telephone follow-up thereafter.

Expanding Outlook

- > The funders of the Outlook programme should consider the benefits of incremental (and assessed) growth of the Outlook programme in Dublin.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Focus Ireland is a housing and homeless charity. It works to prevent people from becoming homeless, remaining homeless or returning to homelessness. It does this through the provision of quality services, supported housing, research and advocacy. Its services span homelessness prevention, tenancy sustainment, education and training, Housing First, aftercare for young people and services for families experiencing homelessness, including child support workers.

Focus Ireland is funded by the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service to operate the Women's Outlook Programme (Outlook). The programme is a response to the need for step-down, community-based services for women offenders assessed as being at low risk of re-offending and a low risk to society. It also recognises the intertwined nature of homelessness and recidivism and the importance of secure accommodation to achieve a stable and independent life. Case managers provide support to women referred to the programme and work collaboratively with Probation Officers in respect of women who are subject to Probation supervision.

Outlook aims to prevent homelessness and to prevent recidivism for women who come in contact with the criminal justice system. It has four key objectives:

- 1 To provide clients with a programme of support and short-term accommodation.
- 2 To provide clients referred by the Irish Prison Service an opportunity to complete their sentence in a supported community setting.
- 3 To support move-on to secure housing after completion of the programme/sentence.
- 4 To support clients to avoid recidivism by means of supporting their community integration, family reintegration, compliance with Temporary Release conditions, health and wellbeing supports, and any other issues identified through support planning.

1.2 Context for the Evaluation

Policy developments in the criminal justice system in the past ten years acknowledge the particular challenges women offenders face and commit to addressing these through a range of interventions and supports. Housing policy also recognises the importance of planning for the release of prisoners and preventing homelessness upon their release.

Focus Ireland recognises the value of family reunification and reintegration to prevent homelessness and reduce recidivism. Over the Outlook programme's lifetime, family relations were identified by Focus Ireland as an area for further development and improvement. This report presents the findings from an evaluation of Outlook, with a particular emphasis on family-centred approaches to rehabilitation and reintegration.

1.3 Structure of Report

Following this introduction, section 2 outlines the evaluation terms of reference and the methodology employed. Sections 3 and 4 present the literature and policy review findings: Section 3 examines the Irish justice, housing and homelessness policy context, while section 4 profiles women in prison and their characteristics. Section 5 presents the findings from interviews with Outlook management and staff and describes how the programme is implemented. Section 6 reviews Outlook data and provides a profile of the participants and their outcomes. Section 7 addresses the views of Outlook participants and their family members, while Section 8 provides external stakeholder feedback. Finally, Section 9 presents the conclusions and recommendations. Best practice examples of in-prison and community-based support programmes for female offenders are presented in the Appendix.

Section 2: Evaluation Aims and Methods

2.1 Evaluation Aims

The aims of the evaluation were to:

- > Examine and evaluate the housing and support services provided for people leaving prison, emphasising family-centred approaches.
- > Capture and document the Outlook programme process from committal to post-release support.
- > Assess the impact of the programme and its achievement of objectives for all stakeholders.
- > Ensure the voices of service users and their families are the central component of the research.
- > Capture key learning and recommendations to improve the service and foster wider system change that meets the needs of families affected by imprisonment and convictions.
- > Identify and address any structural barriers to the expansion of the service.

2.2 Research Design

The evaluation of the Women's Outlook programme adopted a gender-informed approach. This is because the drivers behind women offending are different from men. Women offenders often have limited access to finance and may experience poverty, have low educational attainment, be unemployed or in low-paying occupations and may have an addiction and/or mental health challenges.¹

A qualitative approach was used to assess the Outlook programme and its impact on participants and their families. Interviews were flexible and semi-structured and used a topic guide to aid discussion. A service user information sheet and consent form were

¹ Travers, R., Mann, R.E., 2015, 'Gender Differences in Dynamic Predictors of Criminal Reconviction', London: Ministry of Justice Analytical Summary.

designed to explain to participants the purpose of the research and to obtain consent to take part. An interview guide was also designed and agreed upon with Focus Ireland and the evaluation's Advisory Group.

The interviews with Outlook participants followed a journey format. This explored the transition from prison to the Outlook programme, the supports received while on the programme, family engagement, the preparation and transition back to the community, and how the programme could be enhanced. Participants were also asked about how they had benefitted from the programme. A similar format was used to guide interviews with family members.

Interviews with staff explored programme implementation and its benefits for participants. Interviews with key stakeholders including the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service focused on interagency working and protocols, services available to women offenders and opportunities for the Outlook programme.

2.3 Desk-based Research

A review of literature about women offenders and best practices for supporting them was undertaken. This included examining examples of projects both in Ireland and in the U.K that support women offenders. The policy context in which the Outlook programme operates was also examined. Information about the programme, including the Service Level Agreement (SLA), referral form and participant profile and outcomes data, was reviewed.

2.4 Interviews with Staff

In-person interviews were held with the Outlook Project Leader and Team Leader, and a focus group took place with three Outlook case managers. The interviews and focus group discussed the operation of the programme and opportunities for programme enhancement. Subsequently, a workshop was held with the full staff team to discuss and develop a process map and logic model for Outlook.

2.5 Interviews with Outlook Participants

Focus Ireland invited an initial list of ten Outlook participants, past and present, to take part in interviews, and dates and times were agreed. Focus Ireland's Research Officer checked with each Outlook participant closer to the interview date to make sure they were still willing to take part and available to do so. Some requested a change of date or time, which was facilitated, and some declined to take part at this stage, which necessitated other Outlook participants being invited to take part in interviews. Occasionally, on the interview day, participants did not answer telephone calls and, after three attempts, were considered to have lost interest in the evaluation. As a result, between June and August Focus Ireland invited over fifteen Outlook participants to take part, of which nine completed interviews.

It was not always possible for the participants to engage in person, so they were offered telephone interviews as an option and three availed of this option. Interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, with one interview lasting 30 minutes. The interviews took place between July and September 2023. The first interview was conducted in person by both researchers. Subsequently, one researcher conducted six interviews, and the other conducted two.

2.6 Interviews with Families

Conversations between Outlook case managers and participants brought to light how protective the Outlook participants were of their families. Each participant taking part in interviews was asked by the researcher if there was a family member who might be willing to do a telephone interview. If a person was named, the woman was asked to discuss with them whether or not that person would be willing to take part in interviews and to inform the case manager if the person gave their consent. Four women interviewed agreed to check with family members if they would be willing to do a telephone interview. Subsequently, two members of the same family agreed to take part. Focus Ireland then asked another former Outlook participant, who was not taking part in the evaluation, if she had family willing to participate, and two of her family agreed. The Research Officer then agreed a date and time with the family member and informed the researchers of this. One researcher conducted all the family interviews.

In total, four family members from two different families provided insights. Three were consulted via telephone interviews that lasted 30 minutes and one email response was received from a family member based abroad. All four were adult children.

2.7 Interviews with Key Stakeholders

Consultations were held with nine staff in the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. These included senior officials in the Irish Prison Service's Operations Directorate, the Governors of Dóchas and Limerick Women's Prison, an Integrated Sentence Manager in Dóchas, a senior official in the Social Inclusion and Reintegration unit within the Probation Service, a Senior Probation Officer and two Probation Officers attached to Dóchas and one community-based Probation Officer.

The consultations with stakeholders comprised face-to-face and online meetings. The face-to-face meetings occurred in the Dóchas Centre with Irish Prison Service and Probation Service personnel. On average, the consultations with stakeholders took 60 minutes.

2.8 Data Analysis

Written notes were taken during interviews (with permission). This enabled thematic analysis of the information and identification of suitable quotes.

Quantitative data sets supplied by Focus Ireland were used to develop a profile of Outlook participants and assess programme outcomes. Additional quantitative data were obtained, for example, on crime rates and recidivism, from the Central Statistics Office, the Irish Prison Service, and the Probation Service.

2.9 Ethical Considerations

The evaluation was guided by Focus Ireland's Ethical Guidelines and the Advisory Group. The research design was based on obtaining informed consent, privacy in the interview process, ensuring that only issues of relevance to the evaluation were explored in interviews, and the provision of confidentiality and anonymity.

Focus Ireland supported the recruitment process guided by a strict ethics protocol that placed the needs of participants first and foremost. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the process at any time. The service user information sheet provided contact details for the lead researcher and for the Focus Ireland Research Manager if participants had questions or any issues with the conduct of the research.

It was agreed that for ethical and practical reasons only adult children, adult siblings and partners, partners and other adult family members of participants would be invited to take part in interviews.

2.10 Limitations

The original intention was to conduct face to face interviews with between 10 and 12 women who had completed Outlook and as many family members as were willing to engage with the research process by means of a telephone interview. Some women decided not to participate or to engage on the day of interview and Focus Ireland engaged in several rounds of invites to try to achieve the target of 12 interviews. Within the timeframe of the evaluation and based on the knowledge and experience of the Outlook team of the client cohort, it was only possible to complete nine interviews with Outlook participants, the majority of whom were not moving back to the family home. The perspective of women moving back to live with partners or husbands is therefore limited.

Engaging family members also proved to be more challenging than anticipated. Ultimately, four adult children were consulted, including one via email. While they provided a consistent perspective, a larger number and broader spread of family members (e.g. current or ex-partners, husbands and siblings) would have been more robust.

The literature review found few initiatives in Ireland similar in objectives and scope to the Outlook programme. Hence, the researchers extended their research coverage to incorporate UK studies, where initiatives were more advanced than those found here.

Section 3: Policy Context

This section provides a policy context for the Women's Outlook Programme and covers relevant issues such as justice and homelessness.

3.1 Bangkok Rules and Doha Declaration

The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (the Bangkok Rules) were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on 21 December 2010.² The rules give guidance to policymakers, legislators, sentencing authorities and prison staff on how to reduce the unnecessary imprisonment of women and meet the specific needs of women who are imprisoned, including their successful rehabilitation.

Following on from the adoption of the Bangkok Rules, Penal Reform International and the Thailand Institute of Justice published in 2019³ a guide to the rehabilitation and social reintegration of women prisoners that identified 10 key principles for gender-sensitive rehabilitation programmes.

The principles provide a framework for the successful design and implementation of rehabilitation programmes for female prisoners. They can be used as a basis for developing new programmes and improving existing ones. The 10 principles are outlined below:

- | | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| 1 Part of a broader strategy | 6 Holistic |
| 2 Community and prisoner-driven | 7 Based on market needs |
| 3 Supported by staff and managers | 8 Sustainable and consistent |
| 4 Gender responsive | 9 Good quality |
| 5 Individualised | 10 Evidence-based |

² United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2015) Doha Declaration on Integrating Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice into the Wider United Nations Agenda to Address Social and Economic Challenges and to Promote the Rule of Law at the National and International Levels, and Public Participation. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/congress/Declaration/V1504151_English.pdf

³ Penal Reform International, & Thailand Institute of Justice, 2019, Toolbox on the UN Bangkok Rules: The rehabilitation and social reintegration of women prisoners. Implementation of the Bangkok Rules.

The guide highlights the importance of designing rehabilitation programmes according to the local context and taking into account the prisoner population profile and available resources.

In 2015, the Doha Declaration of the UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice emphasised the role of rehabilitation in achieving sustainable development and the importance of policies that focus on education, work, medical care, rehabilitation, social reintegration and prevention of recidivism.

According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, rehabilitation programmes for offenders *'are one of the best and most cost-effective ways of preventing their re-offending, with significant benefits not only for the individuals concerned, but also for public safety more broadly'*.⁴

The Irish government is a signatory to the Doha Declaration and has stated that the Irish Prison Service is in compliance with the Bangkok Rules.

3.2 Justice Policy in Ireland

Published in 2014, the joint Probation Service and Irish Prison Service strategy, *An Effective Response to Women Who Offend*,⁵ recognised that while women who commit crimes are a relatively small but increasing group within the Criminal Justice System (CJS), they pose a low risk to society. The strategy highlights the importance of developing a gender-informed approach that would improve rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes for women offenders. It developed a range of alternative options to custody, and actively promoted awareness and confidence amongst key stakeholders of the significant role of community sanctions in reducing re-offending by women.

The Probation Service and Irish Prison Service published another strategy in 2018, *Strategic Plan 2018–2020*,⁶ which includes a strategic action to develop a range of responses for female offenders to afford them more opportunities and help to realise their potential. The two organisations are committed to building on existing gender-informed approaches. They aimed to expand options and focus on effective care and resettlement into communities, as well as support improved parenting and familial/community relationships. The strategic plan pledged improved transition and resettlement for female offenders to community facilities, such as the Abigail Centre⁷ and the Outlook programme.

4 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2015, *'Rehabilitation and social reintegration of prisoners'*, www.unodc.org/dohadeclaration/en/topics/prisoner-rehabilitation.html

5 Irish Prison Service and The Probation Service, 2014, *Joint Probation Service – Irish Prison Service Strategy 2014–2016: An Effective Response to Women Who Offend*, Dublin: Irish Prison Service.

6 Irish Prison Service and Probation Service (2018), *Strategic Plan 2018–2020*, Dublin: Irish Prison Service.

7 The Abigail Women's Centre, based in Finglas, was a 40-bed facility for homeless women managed by Novas, the voluntary homeless organisation. The centre offered a range of rehabilitation and stabilisation interventions designed to engage with residents and create sustainable pathways out of homelessness. It opened in 2014 and was one of the few supported temporary accommodation services dedicated to women in the capital. It closed in October 2021.

In 2021, the Probation Service published a *Strategic Statement 2021–2023*.⁸ A core focus of the statement was to create safer and more inclusive communities. Under the strategic pillar to enhance community safety the Probation Service committed to implement an action to “strengthen specific initiatives and put forward new proposals which are gender specific and responsive to the challenges faced by women engaged with the Criminal Justice system.”⁹

In the same year, the Probation Service published a scoping report in 2021, *Towards a ‘Best Practice’ Approach with Women who Offend*,¹⁰ that reviewed existing practices against the backdrop of ‘best practice’ research. It concluded that female offenders have complex needs that inevitably warrant a holistic and multi-agency response to support safe family and community reintegration and that gender-sensitive interventions should be a priority. Gender-sensitive interventions recognise the experience of trauma and adversity frequently underpinning women’s pathways to addiction, homelessness, and criminal behaviour. Best practices outlined in the scoping report included gender and trauma-informed interventions, collaboration across agencies, and the importance of therapy to identify and change negative patterns of behaviour. The report also identifies opportunities to replicate some existing approaches across regions that are responsive to local needs and community concerns and provide a consistent and integrated approach to the organisation’s work with women.

In response to the *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*,¹¹ which included several commitments pertinent to women ex-offenders, the Department of Justice in 2022 published *Criminal Justice Policy – Review of Policy Options for Prison and Penal Reform 2022–2024* (CJPR).¹² One of its aims was to find a balance between ensuring that people who commit serious crimes receive a punishment and a period of incarceration proportionate to that crime, while at the same time acknowledging that sometimes community-based sanctions are more appropriate in diverting offenders away from future criminal activity. Additionally, the CJPR pointed out that most women who offend pose a low risk to society but present with a high level of need. It says that when individuals are placed in custody, particularly females, it affects not only the woman herself but also her family and children. This can be disruptive to families often with long-lasting effects resulting in intergenerational offending. The CJPR notes that having a parent who has a history of offending, including committal to prison, is a significant factor in adverse childhood experiences (ACE). A priority in the CJPR, therefore, is to develop and expand the range of community-based sanctions, including alternatives to imprisonment.

8 The Probation Service, 2021, *Strategic Statement 2021–2023 Action Plan: Probation Works for Community Safety*, Stationery Office, Dublin

9 *ibid* pg.5

10 The Probation Service, 2021, *Towards a ‘Best Practice’ Approach to Working with Women who Offend*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

11 Department of the Taoiseach, 2020, *Programme for Government: Our Shared Future*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

12 Department of Justice, 2023, *Strategic Statement 2021–2023 Action Plan: Probation Works for Community Safety*, viewed 21 May 2024, <https://assets.gov.ie/233015/1dd9e5a8-796e-4eda-a2d7-4a1b4c160cea.pdf>

Furthermore, the CJPR says it would be timely to repeat the 2005 study on the *Number, Profile and Progression Routes of Homeless Persons before the Court and in Custody*¹³ as part of new accommodation and support planning for females in conflict with the law and to identify current issues, challenges and opportunities. The CJPR also highlights the Women's Outlook Programme, which it describes as a step-down facility in Dublin for female prisoners and women on community supervision. It states that it provides a welcoming environment for women who pose a low risk to society and a support to assist their reintegration into the community.

Finally, a 2023 scoping study¹⁴ by the Irish Penal Reform Trust on maternal imprisonment notes that the Probation Service delivered a new modular training programme, *A Gender-Informed Approach to Working with Female Offenders*, to staff in 2021. Probation officers and colleagues have received further training in *Seeking Safety*, a well-recognised programme that is skills-focused in helping women attain safety from trauma and/or substance misuse. The Probation Service is also progressing the feasibility of expanding a 'peer mentoring' model as part of its commitment to developing services for women in regional areas. These examples show the how focused interventions for female offenders continue to be built upon.

3.3 Housing and Homelessness Policy in Ireland

Reducing and preventing homelessness is a significant priority for the Government. In 2016, the Government published *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*.¹⁵ A key aim of the action plan was to end long-term homelessness and rough sleeping by the end of 2021. It notes that homelessness is a complex phenomenon based on economic and personal factors. Crime and prisoner release are specifically mentioned in this context. The action plan states that planning for the release of prisoners must include measures to prevent their falling into homelessness on their release. It includes actions to enhance inter-agency arrangements to ensure that accommodation, welfare and health supports for prisoners are in place prior to their release.

Homelessness-related commitments in the Programme for Government, *Our Shared Future*, included commitments to develop aftercare and transition plans as well as protocols for vulnerable homeless people. This also includes those at risk of homelessness leaving hospital, drug treatment, state care, foster care, prison, or other state settings. It also committed to enhance and implement national procedures and inter-agency arrangements to ensure that the necessary accommodation supports are in place prior to prisoner release.

13 Seymour, J. and Costello, L., 2005, *Number, Profile and Progression Routes of Homeless Persons before the Court and in Custody*.

14 Irish Prison Reform Trust (2023), *Maternal Imprisonment in Ireland: A Scoping Study*, Dublin: Irish Penal Reform Trust.

15 Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (2016), *Rebuilding Ireland: Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness*, Stationery Office: Dublin.

In 2021, the Government replaced *Rebuilding Ireland*¹⁶ with a new housing plan for Ireland entitled *Housing for All*.¹⁷ The plan re-commits to expanding Housing First, a housing-led approach that enables people with a history of rough sleeping or long-term use of emergency accommodation and with complex needs to obtain permanent secure accommodation, with the provision of intensive supports to help them to maintain their tenancies. This is important because Housing First recognises that prisoners and other persons convicted before the courts frequently present as homeless with high and complex support needs and that homelessness poses a significant risk for many post-release. This recognition can be seen in *The Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018–2021*¹⁸ and the *Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022–2026*.¹⁹

16 Department of Housing, Planning, and Local Government, 2016, *Rebuilding Ireland: Action plan for housing and homelessness* <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/7e6161-rebuilding-ireland-action-plan-for-housing-and-homelessness/>

17 Government of Ireland (2021), *Housing for All: A new Housing Plan for Ireland*, prepared by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, Stationery Office, Dublin.

18 Government of Ireland (2018), *Housing First National Implementation Plan 2018–2021*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

19 Government of Ireland (2022), *Housing First National Implementation Plan 2022–2026*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

Section 4: Women in the Criminal Justice System

Internationally, there has been an upward trend in female imprisonment. This section explores this trend and the pathways to imprisonment for women and the impact of imprisonment on the family in the international literature. It also examines rehabilitation in prison, barriers on leaving prison, and the profile of Irish women prisoners. Irish and U.K. examples of programmes for women offenders are provided in the Appendix.

4.1 Pathways for Women into Imprisonment

There are commonalities in the pathway of women and men to prison, including substance abuse, poverty, mental health and social exclusion. However, there are also gendered-specific pathways that need to be taken into consideration. The Bangkok Rules recognise the role that discrimination and deprivation, as well as domestic violence, sexual abuse and coercion, play in the pathway to prison for women offenders, the majority of whom commit non-violent crimes. These crimes are often linked to substance dependency and economic pressures to provide for children.

A survey of adult prisoners in England and Wales showed marked differences between the social characteristics of male and female prisoners.²⁰ Both male and female prisoners had much higher levels of social deprivation than the general population. However, a higher percentage of female prisoners had a child taken into care, experienced childhood abuse, or witnessed domestic violence during childhood compared to male prisoners. Additionally, more women reported mental health issues, unemployment before custody, and suicide attempts.

Most women prisoners are also mothers and may have primary care responsibilities for other family members. Imprisoned mothers are more likely to be living with their children prior to custody compared to men.²¹ Separation from children can impact mental wellbeing, relationships and subsequent rehabilitation, especially if women are

²⁰ Prison Reform Trust, 2018, 'Bromley Briefings Prison Factfile'.

²¹ Ministry of Justice (UK), 2018, *A Whole System Approach for Female Offenders: Emerging Evidence*, London.

imprisoned far from their families.²² When children go to live with other relatives or are taken into care, reuniting the family after release can be challenging.

Research in the U.K. for the Ministry of Justice (MOJ)²³ found that female prisoners are more than twice as likely as male prisoners to report needing help for mental health problems. In 2016, almost 60% had experienced domestic violence, and the rate of self-harm among women was 2,093 incidents per 1,000 prisoners, nearly five times higher than the equivalent rate for men.

Women offenders who have children may be parenting alone or may be struggling with parenting, and a spell in prison impacts not just the mother but also the child, with an increased risk of the child becoming involved in anti-social behaviour and crime later in life.²⁴ Relationships with family members or partners who are non-supportive, abusive or engaged in crime can also be associated with women offending.

Many prisoners, including women, have experienced at least one episode of homelessness.²⁵ Factors strongly related to homelessness are drug and alcohol abuse, mental health issues or some combination of these.²⁶ Alcohol and drug abuse are also strongly linked to criminal activity.²⁷ Homelessness impacts the reintegration of women back into their communities, and the provision of a safe step-down accommodation can aid the transition.²⁸

22 Penal Reform International and Thailand Institute of Justice, 2019, *Toolbox on the UN Bangkok Rules. The rehabilitation and social reintegration of women prisoners. Implementation of the Bangkok Rules*

23 Ministry of Justice (UK), 2018, *A Whole System Approach for Female Offenders: Emerging Evidence*, London.

24 Murray, J., 2007, *The cycle of punishment: Social exclusion of prisoners and their children*, *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 7(1), p.58–81; Murray, J., Farrington, D.P., 2008, 'Effects of Parental Imprisonment on Children', in M. Tonry (ed) *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

25 Seymour, M., Costello, L., 2005, *A Study of the Number, Profile and Progression Routes of Homeless Persons before the Court and in Custody*, the Probation Service and Department of Justice, Equality & Law Reform: Dublin.

26 Light., M., Grant, E., Hopkins, K, 2013, *Gender differences in substance misuse and mental health issues among prisoners: Results from Surveying Prisoner Crime Reduction (SPCR) Longitudinal Cohort Study of Prisoners*, London: Ministry of Justice Analytical Service

27 Ibid.

28 McMahon, T., 2019, *A sense of place. A study of accessing housing for women exiting prison – housing first not housing last*, The Griffins Society: London.

4.2 Impact of Imprisonment on the Family

Research by the Childhood Development Initiative (CDI)²⁹ on prisoners who are parents noted impacts on children that included anxiety about the safety of the parent; feelings or fear of loneliness or rejection; shame; bullying; uncertainty about the future, and tensions with other family members. Children might also know that their parent is in prison despite having been given an alternative explanation.

The same research also highlighted several impacts on partners, including emotional, physical, and financial strain, as well as feelings of blame, shame and isolation. Partners also experienced changes in parenting roles, alterations in household routines and norms, as well as experiencing the stress of single parenting such as having to make decisions and solve problems alone. Additionally, they faced uncertainty or lack of information about prison life, visits, and phone calls, as well as how to behave during these interactions.

CDI identified the main needs for supporting reintegration as being support, guidance and practical help with signposting and accessing services. Suggested activities for inclusion in any programme were parenting skills, relationship management, conflict resolution, release preparation, information about prison and community services (e.g. counselling, addiction, mental health) and information about prison policies, procedures and rights.

The impact of the imprisonment of mothers on their families and children has been noted by the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. Firstly, in their joint 2014–2016 strategy for women offenders³⁰ and secondly by the Probation Service's 2021 best practice document³¹ on approaches to working with women who offend. Both documents highlight the negative impact criminalisation and incarceration of parents, particularly mothers, has on families and children. For women, often the primary care-giver, these experiences have a disproportionately negative effect on child development and wellbeing and are a noted contributor to intergenerational offending. Furthermore, the Probation Service document highlighted that, on leaving custody after sentences, women face lives that are often more difficult and stressful than they experienced prior to imprisonment in regards to accommodation, employment, substance misuse, partner violence, ill-health and trauma.

A submission presented in 2021 to the UK's National Women's Prisons Health and Social Care Review,³² commissioned jointly by His Majesty's Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) and NHS England, argued that parental imprisonment could treble the risk of antisocial behaviour in children. It also estimated that the cost to the state of imprisoning mothers for non-violent offences at more than £17 million over ten years. A House of

29 O'Dwyer, K., Kelliher, S., Bowes, J., 2019, *Prisoners Returning Home: Prisoners and Family Reintegration*, CDI.

30 Irish Prison Service and The Probation Service, 2014, *Joint Probation Service – Irish Prison Service Strategy 2014–2016: An Effective Response to Women Who Offend*, Dublin: Irish Prison Service.

31 The Probation Service, 2021, *Towards a 'Best Practice' Approach to Working with Women who Offend*, Stationery Office, Dublin.

32 Jenny Talbot, National Women's Prisons Health and Social Care Review (Independent Chair of the Review at HMPPS & NHSE/I); Charlotte Winter (Programme manager at NHSE/I) (2021), <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/36773/html/>

Commons report³³ on women in prison pointed out that one of the issues faced by organisations seeking to assist female prisoners is that the Ministry of Justice did not know how many women in prison were primary carers.

4.3 Rehabilitation in Prison

Within the EU, less than one-quarter of prisoners participate in education and training in prison.³⁴ Rehabilitation in a prison setting is can be challenging for a number of reasons. These barriers include inconsistent and inadequate educational resources, a lack of gender-sensitive approaches, separation from families resulting in a loss of familial and community connections, as well as difficulties in obtaining employment and maintaining stable housing.

Rehabilitation programmes for women offenders need to take account of factors that are *‘unique or more relevant to women’*³⁵ and *‘treating women offenders with strategies that focus on male criminogenic factors is recognised as both inefficient and counterproductive in terms of time, resources and outcomes’*.³⁶ Successful prison rehabilitation programmes are holistic, gender-specific, address the root causes of criminal attitudes and behaviour (economic, social, physical and psychological), and provide therapeutic and psychosocial support.³⁷ Contact with family, friends and community supports reintegration and rehabilitation and can contribute to reduced risk of recidivism.³⁸ For prisoners with addiction issues, supports from family, friends, and treatment services are important for successful reintegration.³⁹

33 House of Commons Justice Committee (2022), *Women in Prison – First Report of Session 2022–2023 (HC 265)*, House of Commons, London: UK.

34 GHK, 2012, ‘Survey on Prison Education and Training in Europe’.

35 Hedderman, C., 2004, ‘The Criminogenic Needs of Women Offenders’, in G McIvor (ed.), *Women Who Offend*, London: Jessica Kingsley.

36 O’Neill, J., 2011, ‘The Inspire Women’s Project: Managing women offenders within the community’, *Irish Probation Journal*, vol 8, 93–108.

37 Penal Reform International and Thailand Institute of Justice, 2019, *Toolbox on the UN Bangkok Rules. The rehabilitation and social reintegration of women prisoners. Implementation of the Bangkok Rules*.

38 Wang, L., 2021, ‘The positive impacts of family contact for incarcerated people and their families’, Prison Policy Initiative, <https://prisonpolicy.org/blog/2021/12/21/family-contact/>; Irish Prison Reform Trust, 2020, ‘Progress in the Penal System 2020, Standard 11: Family Contact’, <https://pips.iprt.ie/>

39 Davis, C., Bahr, S. J., & Ward, C. (2013). *The process of offender reintegration: Perceptions of what helps prisoners re-enter society*. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 13(4), 446–469. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748895812454748>.

Other factors that need to be considered in rehabilitation programmes include:

- > Women who are pregnant while in prison (many of whom may have experienced childhood trauma, domestic violence or sexual assault as adults and would benefit from trauma-informed care and counselling).⁴⁰
- > Foreign national prisoners (who can experience difficulties accessing services, lack of respect for religious and cultural differences, language and communication barriers, and who are more likely to be given longer sentences for comparable offences).⁴¹
- > Ethnic minorities (who are often over-represented in prisons).⁴²
- > Prisoners with mental health issues (who are significantly over-represented in prison populations, many of whom have experienced or are at risk of homelessness, which in turn is an elevated risk for re-incarceration).⁴³
- > Prisoners with physical disabilities (who may have limited access to mobility aids, sign language interpreting (for Deaf prisoners), plain English information or access to education and employment programmes).⁴⁴
- > Members of the LGBTQ+ community (who may have been ostracised by their family and isolated in prison).⁴⁵
- > Older prisoners (older women prisoners are at increased risk of depression or to have serious health issues, and programmes designed for a younger cohort may not be considered relevant to their situation).⁴⁶

The Ministry of Justice in the U.K. indicated that there was some evidence that a gender-informed approach that addresses the causes of women's offending, including previous abuse and trauma, is more effective than a gender-neutral approach in rehabilitating female offenders and addressing their often-complex needs.⁴⁷ This approach should include addressing substance misuse and mental health issues, as well as improving family contact and emotion management skills. It should also involve support with resettlement, as well as helping women build social capital and develop a pro-social identity. The approach should also help women believe in their ability to control their lives and have goals.⁴⁸

40 O'Malley, S., 2018, 'Motherhood, mothering and the Irish prison system', NUI Galway.

41 Taylor et al, 2022, 'Sometimes I'm Missing the Words. The rights, needs and experiences of foreign nationals and minority ethnic groups in the Irish penal system', IPRT and Maynooth University.

42 European Website on Integration, https://ec.europa.eu/library-document/ireland-rights-and-experiences-foreign-nationals-and-minority-ethnic-groups_en ; Penal Reform International, 2022, 'Ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples', <https://www.penalreform.org/global-prison-trends-2022/ethnic-minorities/>

43 Cotter, L., 2015, 'Are the Needs of Adult Offenders with Mental Health Difficulties being Met in Prisons and on Probation?', Irish Probation Journal vol. 15 October 2015.

44 Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2020, 'Making Rights Real for People with Disabilities in Prison', IPRT.

45 Association for the Prevention of Torture, 2018, 'Towards the Effective Protection of LGBTI Persons Deprived of Liberty: A Monitoring Guide'.

46 Steigerwald, V.L., Rozek, D.C., Paulson, D., 2022, 'Depressive symptoms in older adults with and without a history of incarceration: A matched pairs comparison', *Aging Mental Health*, 26 (11), 2179–2185, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34596476/> ; Hidayati, N.O., Suryani, S., Rahayuwati, L., Widiarti, E., 2023, 'Women Behind Bars: A Scoping Review of Mental Health Needs in Prison', *Iranian Journal of Public Health*, 52 (2), 2023, 243–253.

47 Ministry of Justice (UK), 2018, *A Whole System Approach for Female Offenders: Emerging Evidence*, London.

48 Ministry of Justice (U.K.), 2015, *Better Outcomes for Women Offenders*, London.

4.4 Barriers on Leaving Prison

Once a person leaves prison, they may encounter other barriers. Women may have been financially dependent on their partners and may have no independent means of financial support or ability to access a home.

An evidence review of recidivism and policy responses⁴⁹ pointed out that dynamic risk factors associated with recidivism include unemployment and substance misuse. It concluded that these are amenable to intervention, and the research suggests, for example, that employment opportunities are grasped by those who have decided to turn away from crime.

Employment is recognised as an important factor in reducing recidivism,⁵⁰ yet employers may be reluctant to hire ex-offenders. Prisoners may be restricted in the type of employment they can access due to their criminal record or be stigmatised because of their crime. A key theme of the Department of Justice's '*Working to Change: Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021–2023*'⁵¹ is increasing the employment progression prospects of people with criminal convictions in order to encourage desistance.

A House of Commons Justice Committee examining women in prison in 2022–2023⁵² heard evidence about the barriers to achieving successful resettlement for women and a reduction in reoffending. Among others, concerns were raised specifically about the availability and appropriateness of accommodation for women post-release, the resettlement provision for those women who are in custody far from home and the continuity of care from custody to the community. The challenges faced by women leaving prison are compounded if they are homeless or trapped in unsafe and insecure housing.⁵³

In the U.K., women's centres were noted as an effective tool for reducing recidivism through the provision of a 'one-stop-shop' within a women-only environment that provides holistic and individual support packages. An analysis of 32 such centres across England found a reduction in recidivism of between 1–9 percentage points (compared with a matched sample of similar offenders).⁵⁴ The centres vary in their approach and the interventions they offer. Some seek to assess a woman's needs at her first contact with the criminal justice system and to provide gender-responsive, multi-agency support throughout her justice journey.

49 Department of Justice and Equality, 2020, *An Evidence Review of Recidivism and Policy Responses*, Professor Ian O'Donnell, Institute of Criminology and Criminal Justice School of Law, University College Dublin.

50 Sampson, R., Laub, J., 1993, 'Crime in the Making: Pathways and Turning Points through Life', Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press cited in Maurina S and Immarigeon E (eds.), '*After Crime and Punishment: Pathways to offender reintegration*', Devon, UK, 2004, p.15

51 Department of Justice, 2021, '*Working to Change: Social Enterprise and Employment Strategy 2021–2023*', Stationery Office, Dublin.

52 House of Commons Justice Committee (2022), *Women in Prison – First Report of Session 2022–2023* (HC 265), House of Commons, London: UK.

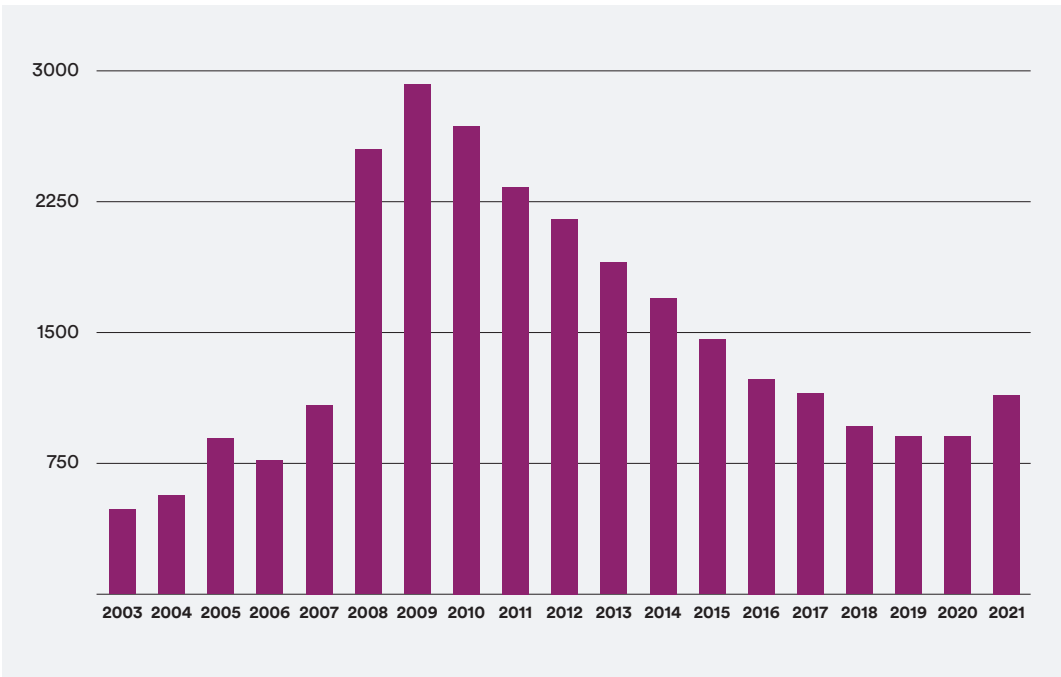
53 Ministry of Justice (UK), 2018, *A Whole System Approach for Female Offenders: Emerging Evidence*, London.

54 Ministry of Justice (UK), 2018, *A Whole System Approach for Female Offenders: Emerging Evidence*, London.

4.5 Statistics on Women in Irish Prisons

Worldwide, female prisoners are a small but growing proportion of prison populations⁵⁵ – female prisoners increased by 53% between 2000 and 2017, representing 6.9% of all prisoners. The same trend is evident in Ireland, where the number of females committed to prison has increased over the last two decades. As shown in figure 1, in 2003 487 females were committed to prison. This number peaked in 2009 when there were 2,918 female committals; since then, the trend has been downward though it started to rise in 2021 with 1,145 committals.

Figure 1: Number of female committals to prison, 2003–2021



Source: Irish Prison Service

There are two women’s prisons: Mountjoy Female Prison, called the Dóchas Centre (Dóchas) in Dublin, and a female wing in Limerick prison.

Dóchas has an operational capacity of 146 female inmates and is the committal prison for females on remand or sentenced from all Courts outside of Munster. Limerick Women’s Prison is a closed medium security committal prison for females for all six Munster counties, with an operational capacity of 56 females. In 2021, the Irish Prison Service noted that the daily average number of women prisoners in total was 144 and that women constituted about 4% of the daily prison population.

⁵⁵ Walmsley, R., 2017, ‘World Female Imprisonment List’, Institute for Criminal Policy Research, 4th edition.

The Irish Penal Reform Trust has noted concerns about overcrowding in both prisons⁵⁶ – as of 31 January 2023, Dóchas was operating at 112% capacity, and Limerick was operating at 164%. In February 2023, the Irish Prison Service stated that the average number of female prisoners in custody in Limerick was 47 and that an additional 22 female cell spaces would be provided before the end of March 2023. The daily average number of women in custody has increased year on year since 2015.⁵⁷

The Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service have been collaborating with the Central Statistics Office’s (CSO) Crime & Justice Statistics Division since 2013 on prison recidivism studies. Statistics published Under Reservation⁵⁸ by the CSO indicate that of the individuals who were released from prison in 2016, 70% of females re-offended within three years, compared with 62% of males.⁵⁹ While males account for the large majority of releases, females continue to have a higher recidivism rate (see Table 2).

Table 1: Recidivism rate by gender

Factor	2011	2016	Change
3-year recidivism rate	67.8%	62.3%	-5.5%
Male (3-year rate)	67.3%	61.7%	-5.6%
Female (3-year rate)	72.3%	69.7%	-2.6%
Total studied (3-year rate)	3,777	2,626	-1,151
Total re-offended	2,559	1,636	-923
Total not re-offending	1,218	990	-228

Source: Central Statistics Office

56 Irish Prison Reform Trust, 2023, *Maternal Imprisonment in Ireland: A Scoping Study*, Dublin: Irish Penal Reform Trust.

57 Irish Prison Service, 2019, *Strategic Plan 2019–2022*, Dublin: Irish Prison Service

58 The Under Reservation categorisation indicates that the quality of these statistics does not meet the standards required of official statistics published by the CSO.

59 The Under Reservation categorisation indicates that the quality of these statistics does not meet the standards required of official statistics published by the CSO.

In 2022, the CSO published a one-year re-offending estimate for custodial and fine sentencing recidivism for the 2011–2019 release cohort, in addition to the standard 3-year re-offending rate. The headline figure for recidivism, applying the 3-year estimate, has fallen from 2011 to 2016 (see Table 3). The 2016 recidivism rate was 62.3%, reflecting a decrease of 5.5% in the re-offending rate since 2011. However, from 2015 to 2016, the headline figure for recidivism, applying the 3-year estimate, increased by 0.6%.

Table 2: Annual reported recidivism rate

Year	3-Year Estimate
2011	67.8%
2012	65.1%
2013	59.5%
2014	60.0%
2015	61.7%
2016	62.3%

Source: Central Statistics Office

4.6 Profile of Female Prisoners in Ireland

In its 2013 position paper,⁶⁰ the Irish Penal Reform Trust (IPRT) asserts that prison is an integral part of the cycle of homelessness and criminality for some very vulnerable women. It states that there is a very strong rationale for providing safe, women-only supported housing (and respite) with a holistic focus to address their complex underlying needs and vulnerabilities in the community.

In 2020, IPRT found that women in prison are among the most marginalised women in Ireland, with multiple and complex physical and mental health needs, including high levels of exposure to violence and abuse and addiction issues.⁶¹

60 Irish Penal Reform Trust 2013, *Position Paper on Women in the Criminal Justice System*, viewed 23 May 2024, https://www.iprt.ie/site/assets/files/6332/iprt_position_paper_on_women_in_the_criminal_justice_system.pdf.

61 Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2020, *Presentation to Women’s Health Task Force*, Dublin: Irish Penal Reform Trust.

Based on 16 in-depth interviews with women in Dóchas, McHugh⁶² reports that services to tackle addiction were identified as the most basic and urgent need. Homelessness has been a common feature for female prisoners on release. In 2005, Seymour and Costello found that 50% of women prisoners had previously been homeless.⁶³ McHugh's report for IPRT found that 14 of the 16 women interviewed in her study had experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, with the vast majority experiencing repeat incidences of homelessness.

Additionally, the life histories of the women interviewed as part of McHugh's study revealed an extremely high rate of early childhood abuse and/or later experiences of physical and sexual abuse, with three-quarters of the women experiencing some level of abuse/violence and three-quarters of those in turn, experiencing repeat instances of trauma and victimisation.

62 Rosemarie McHugh, 2013, *Association for Criminal Justice Research and Development: Tracking the Needs and Service Provision for Women Ex-Prisoners*, Funded by St. Stephen's Green Trust, Dublin.

63 Seymour, M. and Costello, L., 2005, *A Study of the Number, Profile and Progression Routes of Homeless Persons before the Court and in Custody*, Dublin: Probation and Welfare Service.

Section 5: Implementation of Outlook

This section describes how Outlook is resourced, governed and implemented and is primarily based on interviews with the Outlook manager, team leader and case managers, as well as service material provided by Focus Ireland. Additional information was collected through interviews with stakeholders in the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service.

5.1 Resourcing and Governance

Outlook is provided in one of Focus Ireland's facilities in Dublin. The facility has on-site security and is located in its own grounds behind locked gates in a quiet cul-de-sac. It provides long-term accommodation (LTA), step-down accommodation (in partnership with Coolmine Therapeutic Community), and the Outlook programme. Eight housing units on one floor of the main building are set aside for Outlook, and occupancy is high throughout the year.

Outlook has a full-time complement of three case managers who report to a team leader who also has responsibility for other programmes housed in the Focus Ireland facility. The team leader reports to the manager of the facility. There are team meetings every two to three weeks. There is a handover process three times a week and once on Friday afternoons for the weekend shift.

The team works 9 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday and one weekend in every four from 9 am to 5 pm Saturday and Sunday (cover is provided by other Focus Ireland staff one weekend a month – there are eight project workers in total in the facility). Team members have considerable experience in other Focus Ireland programmes and services and have professional qualifications in sociology and anthropology, arts and psychology, and human and community development.

Team members receive core Focus Ireland training, which includes Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, Child Protection (including child protection and safeguarding, domestic violence, CPN report writing skills), Trauma Informed Care Practice, practical-based training in addiction and housing and some limited access to Irish Prison Service training of relevance. They also attend relevant conferences (e.g. Irish Penal Reform Trust) and are encouraged to complete local or online courses to upskill.

Focus Ireland has a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service to deliver Outlook. The SLA sets out the service delivery proposal including staffing and staff training, project management, good neighbourhood policy, case management, facility management, and safety management.

A steering committee comprised of the Irish Prison Service, Probation Service and Focus Ireland was set up to oversee the management of Outlook. The Outlook Programme Manager is a member of the steering group and the Referrals and Discharges committee (see below). The committee meets monthly to discuss the SLA, to monitor programme activities and outputs and to discuss future developments.

5.2 Selection Process

The Referrals and Discharges committee (RAD) was set up to select women for Outlook. It comprises representatives from the Dóchas prison's Integrated Sentence Management teams, other Irish Prison Service staff members, the Probation Service and Focus Ireland. The committee is chaired by a senior official in the Irish Prison Service. Outlook team members attend its monthly meetings, which discuss and make decisions about potential referrals to Outlook. The Outlook team provides reports to the RAD about the progress of participants on Outlook, any concerns they may have, how the participants are getting on with their families, the day programmes they are engaged in, etc. Additionally, the team identifies if a participant is not engaging with Outlook. The committee also reviews the situation of former Outlook participants.

Potential candidates for the Outlook Programme can be identified in several ways. When a woman arrives at the Dóchas Centre after her sentencing, she is interviewed by the Governor and by an Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) coordinator. Either or both may flag her as a potential Outlook candidate. A candidate could also be suggested by Probation Officers attached to the Dóchas who work with women who have a post-release supervision order with their sentence. Occasionally, referrals are made by community-based Probation Officers. Focus Ireland has produced a booklet about the Outlook programme that Prison Officers and Probation Officers can share with potential candidates.

Prisoner Review meetings take place in Dóchas every month which discuss lists of prisoners compiled by Head Office. These meetings are attended by the Governor, staff from Dóchas and other units within the Irish Prison Service and by Probation Officers. The meetings may review possible candidates for Outlook. Potential Outlook candidates are then discussed in more detail at the RAD meeting, which generally takes place within a week of the Dóchas review.

The criteria for selection to Outlook are variable. Generally, women who are selected are doing well in prison, are at low risk of re-offending and are pro-social. They are more likely to have committed a non-violent crime and have no previous conviction. Their crimes may have been opportunistic and are unlikely to be repeated. Additionally, although some women may have had drug or alcohol issues in the past, they may be put forward for Outlook if it is considered that they have made efforts to address these.

More recently, an increasingly diverse group of women have been considered, including those who pose a high risk of re-offending. However, there are women who have committed more serious crimes, such as arson or sex offences, who will not be considered for Outlook. Similarly, the Outlook programme is not considered an appropriate pathway for women with serious addiction problems. Other factors influencing the selection process are that the programme might assist a prisoner with children or caring responsibilities to maintain or re-establish family connections that would be more difficult to achieve if they were still in Dóchas.

Stakeholders have noted that many of the women considered for Outlook either have their own accommodation or have reasonable prospects of obtaining accommodation on their release. Stakeholders point out that even where a participant has a move-on accommodation arrangement prior to being selected for Outlook, this may not come to pass when she is on the programme, and, therefore, is at risk of homelessness.

A second and smaller stream of Outlook candidates are women in the community under Probation Service supervision. Various community-based teams within the Probation Service, including the Homeless Offenders Team, may refer women to the programme. The selection criteria for this stream of community-based candidates are similar to those for women in Dóchas. The emphasis is on women who are low-risk to the community, are engaging with the Probation Service and are willing to avail of the opportunities Outlook presents. Where a woman may have had addiction issues in the past, the focus of the identification process is selecting candidates who have made positive efforts to overcome their addiction to drugs or alcohol.

The RAD committee continually reviews women on the Outlook waiting list and potential new candidates. It also reviews the situation of women who have been sent back from the programme, e.g. for breaching their Temporary Release (TR). The Focus Ireland Outlook team may request any points of clarification or red flags in relation to women identified for the programme. Only rarely might the team consider a person unsuitable (e.g. someone who had committed arson or a sexual offence), and this would be discussed with the RAD.

When a unit within the Focus Ireland facility becomes available, the RAD committee decides on the person to take that space. A Probation Officer assigned to Dóchas or based in the community will then assess the candidate and complete the Focus Ireland Outlook Referral Form (some Dóchas-based Probation Officers may not have had previous engagement with a potential service user). The Outlook Referral Form includes basic biographical information and information on the person's health and well-being, addiction issues, social supports, community integration support needs, history of offending and risk assessment. The Probation Officer will ask the woman if she consents to move to Outlook (it might be the case that the woman would prefer to remain in Dóchas or in the community). The Probation Service emphasises that when it suggests the Outlook programme to a candidate, and she agrees with that choice, she is, in effect, a co-producer of her case management plan.

The Outlook case manager then meets the woman in prison to conduct an assessment using a standard assessment form (effectively a scaled-down version of the Homeless Needs Assessment). This process also helps the case manager to discover more about the woman and her life, why she is in prison, her expectations and plans, her move-on plan and her suitability for Outlook. The form also allows the woman to include anything she feels is relevant. Case managers outline the Outlook programme and the expectations of the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and Focus Ireland. In some cases, more than one meeting may be necessary.

The woman decides if she is going to proceed to participate in Outlook. If the woman decides to participate, case managers will then engage with the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service about necessary paperwork and planning for release, as well as the supports the woman will require. Internal discussion within Focus Ireland management may also be necessary, for example if the woman has mental health or addiction issues.

5.3 Transition to Outlook

Once accepted, the process of moving the woman from prison to Outlook can happen quite quickly (in some cases, this can be one or two days). A case manager attends the prison to bring the woman to the Focus Ireland facility by taxi. Her mobile phone is returned to her, or she is given a mobile phone. Access to laptops can also be provided. Often, the first thing new Outlook participants do is call their family. Family members often turn up to meet in the Outlook facility within a few hours of the person's release from prison.

The woman is shown her unit with bedroom, bathroom and kitchen and is brought shopping for food and basic necessities and given some time and space to herself.

The case manager then takes them through the Outlook Licence Agreement (which is initially for six months with monthly extensions thereafter as dictated by the Irish Prison Service), the Focus Ireland Licence Agreement (tenant agreement, which includes weekly rent of approximately €30 and metered electricity), consent form, Code of Conduct, and terms of Temporary Release (TR). If a woman has been homeless, the case manager reviews her file on the Dublin Regional Homeless Executive's PASS⁶⁴ database.

64 PASS is the Pathway Accommodation and Support System that gathers information about homeless persons.

5.4 Case Managing

A trauma-informed care approach is used in case management. Women on Outlook are considered to be in recovery and rediscovery. They are given time and space to reflect and empowered to move on. They are encouraged to develop a daily routine and structure in their lives. They must deal with the trauma of being in prison and being away from their families and children and, in some cases, the trauma of having their children taken into care. Some women have experienced sexual assault or domestic violence at some stage of their lives.

‘Sometimes there is no acknowledgement by women that something adverse has happened, that an offence was committed, that they have a problem such as mental health issues, and you are dealing with very entrenched issues.’
[Focus Ireland (FI) Staff member]

Within the first couple of days, social welfare entitlements and Medical Card applications are organised. Women are accompanied for appointments if necessary, and the case manager advocates on their behalf. Women are informed that they can access the Society of St. Vincent de Paul if they are in financial difficulty. They might also be referred to the Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS) and Protestant Aid.

Usually, in the first few weeks, a support plan is developed around areas such as family, health, wellness, and adherence to TR and goals (e.g. family reunification, work, education). Women who have experienced domestic violence and/or sexual assault may require information and access to supports and court accompaniment. Some women may be in recovery from addiction and may need support with treatment.

Quite a number of women may leave prison with medical and/or dental issues that need to be addressed. While the Irish Prison Service is now setting up women on TR with Medical Cards and GPs, women on medication or methadone often leave with only one week of medication and prescription renewals need to be organised. Others may require referral to mental health services, addiction services, local authority housing sections or social welfare.

Many women are on short sentences and often have not had the time to reflect on their crime, the behaviours that led to it and the impact of the crime. Outlook can be an opportunity for reflection on this. The case managers do not actively pursue these conversations; instead, they allow them to emerge naturally and informally. They work to build the woman’s self-esteem. However, case managers are also conscious that they must report TR breaches that they are aware of.

‘Women need time to look at their crime and its impact. Everything can come flooding back, and you have to let it emerge.’ [FI Staff member]

Case managers check in on a daily basis to see what each Outlook participant's plan is for the day. Formal case working takes place every fortnight for one hour. The support plan is reviewed, and referrals are made as appropriate.

'Some women are very independent and there is limited engagement. Others need tea and a chat every day'. [FI Staff member]

Outlook participants are supported with advocacy, esteem-building, social welfare and entitlements, addiction, community reintegration, life skills, access to education, training and employment, mental health and wellbeing supports and medical support.

'We give them time and space and get to know them as human beings, build them up, prepare them, especially if a community knows what they did, and empower them.' [FI Staff member]

'The clients have to cook for themselves, and they are encouraged to save money by organising communal meals. The programme aims to help them to develop a daily routine and structure to their lives and it provides them with a base. It is important for Outlook to help women to empower themselves and develop confidence to take the next steps.' [FI Staff member]

It is a condition of most TR that the outlook participants engage in training, education or employment. Women are supported to review options and opportunities. Many join the Pathways programme, which includes access to counselling (and some women continue it after they leave Outlook); some have part-time jobs in social enterprises such as Mug Shot and Clean Slate; others attend training such as Shaping Futures or plan to attend third level education. Other programmes and services that women may be referred to include Shaping Futures, PACE, Brio, Fáilte, My Mind counselling, Gateway, Housing First, Chrysalis and the Matt Talbot Centre.

'Women must do something every day and we ask what the plan is for each day.' [FI Staff member]

'A key part of Outlook is that the women participate in programmes like Pathways (it's a very good programme) or do something like Mug Shot. These are success factor indicators.' [Irish Prison Service interviewee]

All prisoners on Temporary Release must sign on weekly; this is a physical reminder that they are still under sentence. The women on the Outlook programme sign on in the Dóchas Centre. Outlook participants subject to (post-release) supervision meet with their Probation Officer on a regular basis; the frequency is determined by a number of factors

and is underpinned by the Risk-Need-Responsivity principle.⁶⁵ Outlook participants who have been referred from the community would meet their community-based Probation Officers; the regularity of the contact would depend on several factors, including the risk of re-offending. The Probation Service says that there is greater flexibility around meetings with this group; appointments can be re-scheduled to enable outlook participants to engage with support services, training, employment and with family.

Exit planning is built into the support plan. Outlook participants are provided with the case managers' phone numbers upon leaving and are aware the door is always open to them. If possible, the case manager completes an exit interview. However, case managers indicated that on occasion, this may not be possible if a participant is leaving under the Community Return Scheme (CRS).

'Generally, there is 2–3 days' notice if a woman is getting CRS, but sometimes it is only one day when Dóchas needs space, and there is then no time to prepare.' [FI Staff member]

Women eligible for CRS are assessed in the Focus Ireland facility by Probation Officers. Generally, housing is usually in place (many move back to their family), and a letter is provided to access social welfare.

5.5 Supporting Family Reintegration

The Outlook units in the Focus Ireland facility have a family-centred approach. Most of the women attending Outlook have maintained family connections while in prison and Outlook gives them time and space to rebuild relationships.

'We encourage them to interact and communicate with their children and family members.' [FI Staff member]

Supporting Outlook participants to engage with their children is an important part of the programme. The 8 units can each accommodate up to 2 children under the age of 18 for overnight stays. Children can stay overnight 3 nights a week. Often, children come to stay within the first week of the woman moving to Outlook. At weekends, many children and some partners may come for the day, and the Outlook participants use the communal living room to enable the children to play together. Focus Ireland plans to upgrade the play area in the living room. Family time takes priority over individual use of the space, and Outlook participants are facilitated to use the space for a private family visit.

⁶⁵ Risk-Need-Responsivity is a model used in offender management to assess the risk an offender presents and what they need and what types of environments they should be placed in to reduce the risk of recidivism.

Outlook participants can also apply to the Irish Prison Service for away nights, which can be very valuable in easing them back into the family home. Since 2022, a TR condition⁶⁶ for Outlook participants is that they cannot leave Dublin city centre, but they can apply to have this restriction lifted on a temporary basis if they wish to go home for an overnight, weekend, etc.

Supporting the families of outlook participants, however, is not currently a programme element. Case managers have no formal engagement with family members or opportunity to work with families to prepare the ground for Outlook participants returning home, although they do speak to family and friends informally if necessary to smooth the pathway home. Case managers provide Outlook participants with practical advice about parenting or relationships with partners. Options such as family therapy, relationship or family counselling might be explored. The focus is on giving them sufficient information for them to make their own decisions.

‘If a woman is having difficulties with her partner or children, we would look at options for her and if it is serious, we might refer her to counselling or family therapy. We give her the information so she can make the decision.’
[FI Staff member]

Case managers indicated that children, especially young children, may not have been told that their mothers have been in prison and that they, as case managers, must remain conscious of this when engaging with children. Case managers respect parental decisions in this regard and suggested that this could make family work challenging should it ever become part of the Outlook model.

5.6 Transition from Outlook

Many of the Outlook participants have around 6 months left before community release, although for some, it can be up to 18 months away. The typical length of stay in Outlook is between 3 and 9 months. Release date is ultimately decided by the Irish Prison Service. There are several possible pathways for Outlook participants including:

- > TR into Outlook, finish sentence with no post-release probation supervision order, leave Outlook.
- > TR into Outlook, complete sentence with post-release probation supervision order, leave Outlook.
- > TR into Outlook, leave under CRS.

⁶⁶ This TR condition restricting women to Dublin city centre was added because women were sometimes dropping home on a regular basis. The Outlook programme is an alternative to imprisonment, and while there, women need to engage in an authorised structured activity.

All Outlook participants whose sentence has been completed must leave the programme unless they have a probation supervision order, in which case they may remain. In these cases, the participants are usually moved to one of the four off-site single units and are provided with less intensive support. The majority of participants leave under CRS, and the majority return to live with their families. A few become homeless, and Outlook engages housing providers, notably under Housing First, to house them. Discharge to homeless services is an absolute last resort.

‘The move-on piece for women who are homeless and whose sentence has ended can be challenging.’ [FI staff member]

Case managers also support participants in developing a network within the community. If, for example, a participant expresses an interest in swimming, a pathway would be developed to enable her to continue this activity after leaving Outlook. Other participants may be interested in volunteering, and Outlook seeks to develop opportunities to enable this.

5.7 Outlook Process Map and Programme Logic Model

Figure 2 below summarises the processes involved in the Outlook programme and Figure 3 presents the programme Logic Model developed in consultation with the staff team.

The process map outlines the main stages in a woman’s journey through the Outlook programme, from selection/identification to exit/aftercare. It identifies the actions, decisions and supports provided by the Outlook team and by the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service at each stage of the programme. The map also shows the participant’s interactions with external providers (e.g. the Pathways programme) or with statutory agencies, such as the Department of Social Welfare. Additionally, the diagram illustrates the feedback loop, showing where programme learning is channelled back to the RAD and steering committee.

The programme’s logic model is a visual road map of Outlook’s strategies, inputs, outputs, and outcomes. The inputs and outputs are grouped under resources, implementation and activities. The output category provides potential metrics for measuring programme performance, such as the number of participants completing the programme and the number returning to the family home.

Outcomes are classified as short, medium and long-term changes. The diagram also depicts the continuous monitoring and evaluation process, including value-for-money analysis. Underpinning the model is the collection and analysis of evidence (internal statistics, client feedback, etc.).

Figure 2: Process map

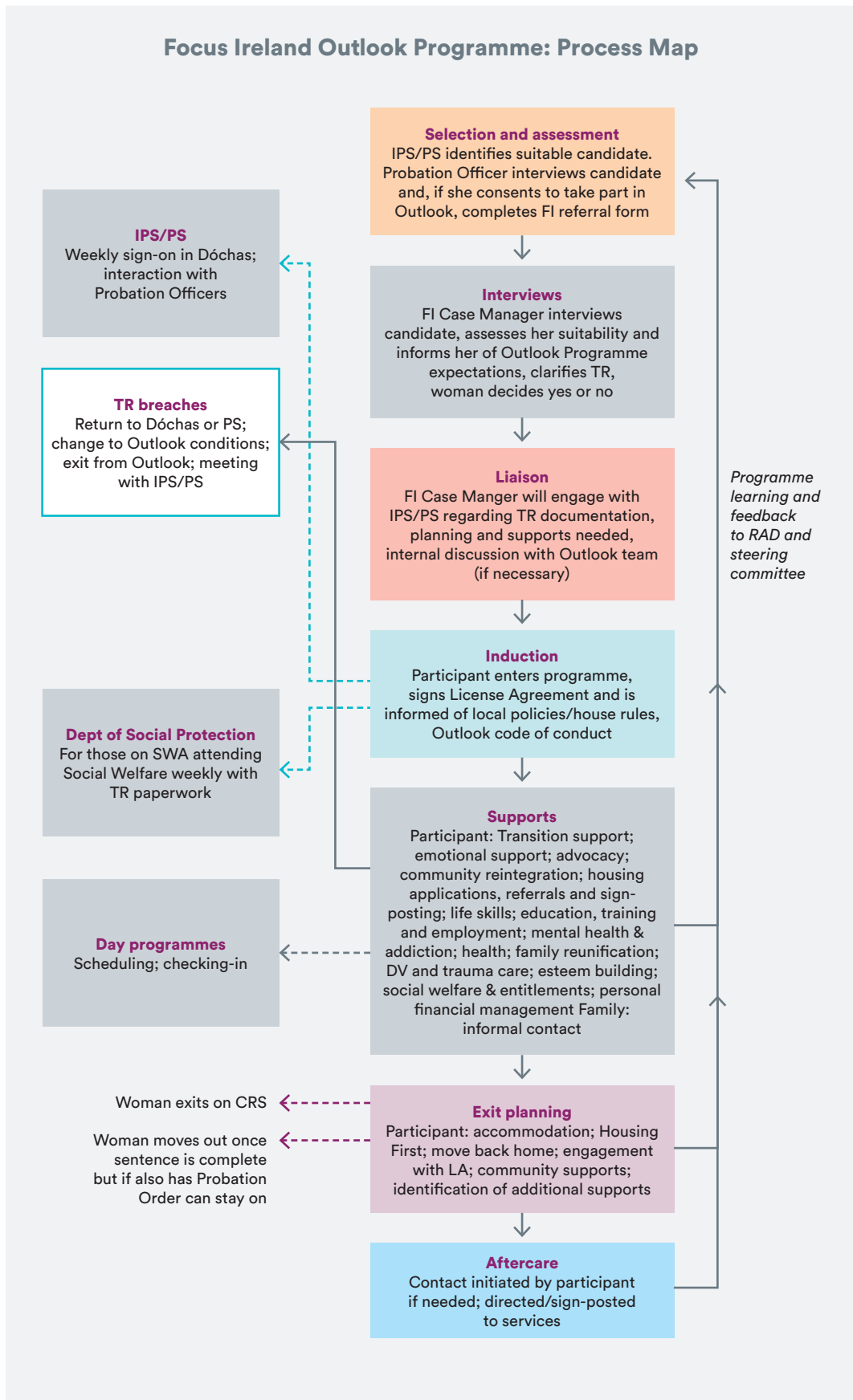
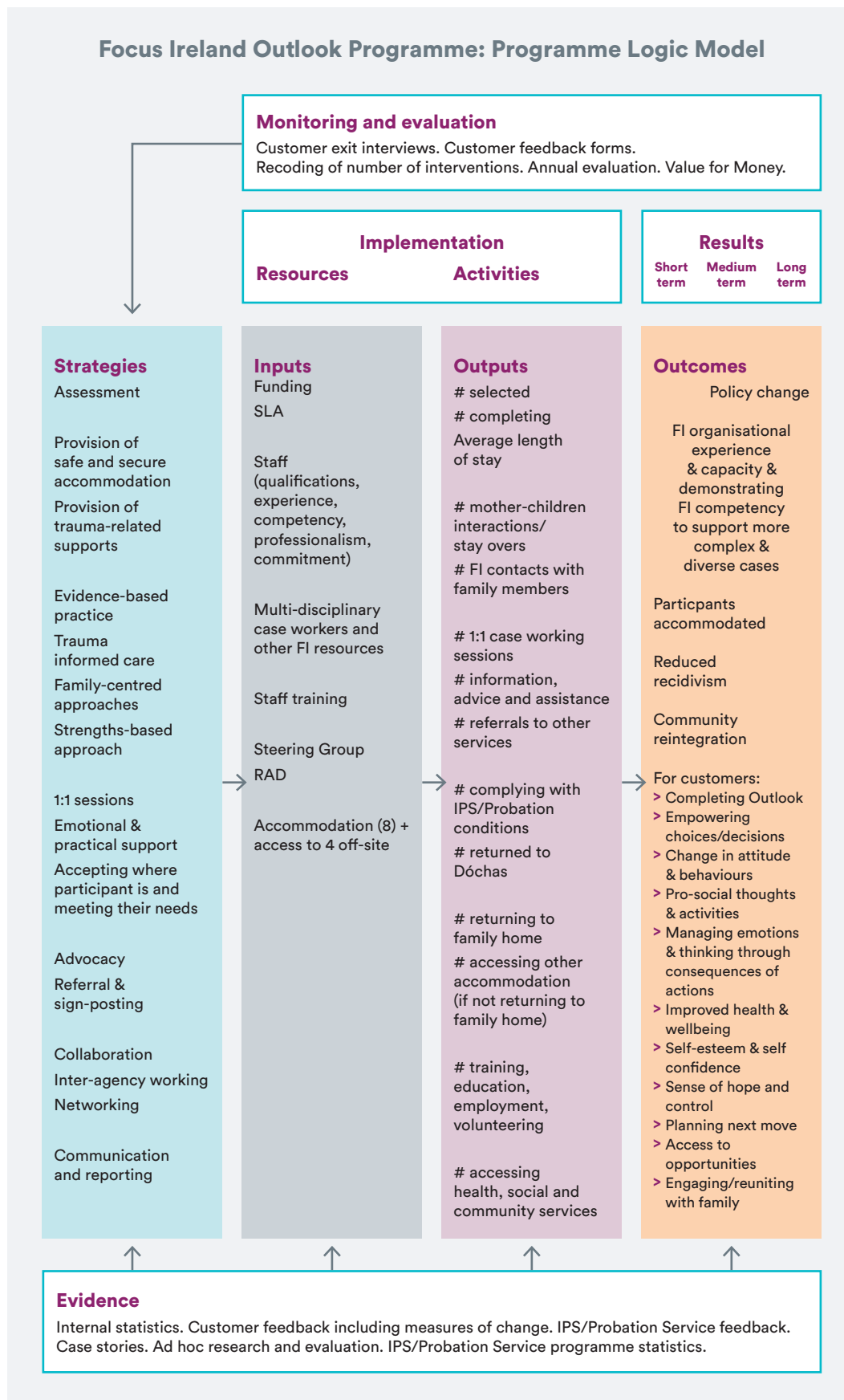


Figure 3: Programme Logic Model



5.8 Good Practice

From discussion with the staff team, good practice in the Outlook programme was identified as follows:

Selection

While there are selection criteria for Outlook, the programme is not limited to any one category of offender. Even if a referral is not within the norm or more challenging, the Outlook team will explore how the person might be accommodated within the programme.

Case Working Approach

There is no pre-judgment. Each participant is treated as an individual and supported to reflect, develop confidence and self-esteem, be empowered, and look forward to the future. The team employs a holistic approach that is gender and trauma-informed. This approach takes into consideration the particular challenges that women offenders experience. These include domestic and sexual violence, parenting and other caring responsibilities, separation from children, the impact of relationship breakdown and implications for future finances and housing options upon release, mental and physical health and addiction issues.

‘Women are in ‘recovery’ – it can be addiction but also other recovery. They are trying to find themselves and you are helping them with this rediscovery.’ [FI Staff member]

‘Some women have been mothers for a long time and have never had time for themselves. We have supported them to consider doing training and education for the first time.’ [FI Staff member]

‘There is regular, mostly daily, communication between case managers and women. Case managers work to develop a network within the community that can support women when they exit the programme.’ [FI Staff member]

Interagency Working

Interagency working was described positively by Outlook staff. This was due to mutual understanding and respect, trust, two-way interaction and a focus on what was best for women offenders.

‘Interagency work is working well. The RAD works, and there is an assessment and discussion about referrals. The relationship [with the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service] is responsive, and there is a good working relationship and a trusting relationship.’ [FI Staff member]

Time and Space to Reflect

Outlook staff named the time the programme affords participants to figure out what to do next and what they want to do longer term as a positive aspect of the programme. The staff team uses the time and space to encourage and empower participants with self-actualisation, gaining autonomy and independence:

‘Outlook is a wrap-around programme, providing accommodation and other supports to help provide clients with space to figure out what they want to do after exiting the programme. It is often the only time and space that the women have to themselves. They have to deal with the trauma of being in prison and being away from their families and children and in some cases, their children being taken into care.’ [FI Staff member]

Sense of Community

Outlook is located in a facility that has people living there from different walks of life, and staff believe that participants benefit from being part of this wider community. The community within the Focus Ireland facility is considered to be very accepting and non-judgemental of Outlook participants. It provides a first step towards a normal life and living back in a community outside of a prison environment.

Media Training

Because some Outlook participants have high-profile cases, media attention can reappear on release. Outlook can provide media training if the need arises. This is usually done when a new participant joins the programme or if, subsequently, journalists present at the Focus Ireland facility, and it is felt that the participant and the wider group would benefit from media training. Outlook aims to have media training twice a year to capture new entrants to the programme.

‘Media training is essential for high-profile cases. I was in the [newspaper] and didn’t know it. I was harassed by a journalist. After the incident, Outlook got someone in to talk on how to deal with the media.’ [Participant A]

Social Mornings

Social mornings with other residents in the Focus Ireland facility are provided, but these can be irregular due to other activities the woman may be engaged in. All residents are encouraged to engage with each other, and there is a communal living room and an outdoor garden available. There is also a living room and kitchen called the Copper Kettle that is dedicated to Outlook, where participants can relax together, have their children play together (often the case at weekends) and cook meals together. Case managers monitor group dynamics and communication between residents.

‘We keep an eye to make sure that the group is functioning okay. There can be a lot of managing communications between them and empowering them.’
[FI Staff member]

5.9 Areas for Improvement

During the interviews with the Outlook team, several areas for programme improvement were identified.

Selection

A small number of referrals have been from the Probation Service for women in the community on probation supervision. These women are not in prison and, therefore, not on TR. Because they have no TR conditions, they are much freer than women still under sentence. Because they are not prisoners, they also have more rights and entitlements. This can create tension when women from prison and women from the community are taking part in Outlook at the same time. The majority of case managers were in favour of keeping Outlook solely for women on TR, partly because of these challenges and also because Outlook is the only programme in the Republic of Ireland for women still under sentence.

‘There needs to be a careful balance in Outlook between Dóchas and community referrals... the latter have more latitude and freedom which can cause resentment amongst the former.’ [FI Staff member]

The team believes that placing women in Outlook who have been in prison for very short periods of time, e.g. 4 weeks, does not work well – it is more difficult for the women who may also not fully understand TR and what they are integrating into. In addition, placing women who have only a short period left on their sentence means there is little time to do any meaningful case work with them. Case managers indicated that for meaningful intervention, women need to be in Outlook for six months.

‘To go at the women’s pace, meaningful intervention would ideally be six months.’ [FI Staff member]

Transitioning into and out of Outlook

The staff team spoke about how there is very little preparation to move to Outlook while in prison. While, at the other end of the process, when participants are exiting Outlook and moving into the community under CRS, staff indicated that they may have been given short notice and thus little time to prepare for the transition.⁶⁷

‘Usually, women get 2 to 3 days’ notice if they are getting CRS, but sometimes it is only one day when Dóchas needs space, and there is no time to prepare.’ [FI Staff member]

‘The prison service has the final decision on when a woman can leave. Cases where there are no move-on options are complex.’ [FI Staff member]

Case managers perceive that the Outlook model currently lacks a resettlement component and that it would benefit from its addition, especially given the challenges for some participants in accessing suitable accommodation. Participants who cannot return home may have to access private rented accommodation (PRA), and Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) is inadequate to meet current rental costs. The team suggested the addition of intensive resettlement work, reduced level of Outlook support over time after a participant leaves the programme, relationships with several key landlords and access to step-down accommodation for participants who could potentially become homeless.

‘When a woman’s sentence comes to an end, she has to leave Outlook. We do not want to discharge women to homelessness, and we try to hold on to them if we can or refer to Housing First if they can’t go back to the family.’ [Staff member]

‘HAP is not working, and we need some form of step-down with less support for women who will be homeless so that resettlement can be worked on intensively.’ [Staff member]

⁶⁷ The Irish Prison Service indicated that participants will have gone through an assessment process for CRS and will be eagerly waiting for the CRS outcome and TR. On several occasions, the Irish Prison Service has been asked to allow a participant to go home on TR a little earlier than the CRS commencement date and this has been acceded to.

Restorative Practice (RP) Training

Staff indicated that specific training would enhance their capacity to support Outlook participants. They noted that even after moving into Outlook, some women do not acknowledge that something adverse has happened and an offence has been committed.

‘Some women do not take responsibility for what they have done and have not learnt.’ [FI Staff member]

Restorative Practice (RP) is currently not part of the toolkit, and case managers indicated that it would be a beneficial addition either directly by training staff in it or by accessing a service that provides RP. It could support some participants to acknowledge the impact of their crime on the victims. Staff also believe that they would benefit from more defined training in respect of mental health, women in prison in general and supporting women coming from prison specifically, the legal system and related terminology, and disclosures made by Outlook participants (they noted that a formal protocol needs to be put in place).

Pathways to Support Services

The team also noted that accessing services for participants who need additional support, such as counselling or mental health services, can be challenging. This is either because a participant does not recognise that she needs help or because there are long waiting times for some community-based services. Staff believe that pathways to support services such as counselling in the community are important and should be planned for and facilitated if participants are not taking part in a programme such as Pathways, which provides a counselling service.

‘We can be dealing with very entrenched issues and women not recognising they have a problem, such as mental health, and a lot need counselling.’ [FI Staff member]

‘What might be helpful is avenues to engage with community programmes that support children with a parent that is in prison... parenting support training and courses with a trauma-informed element... and tighter links to community supports – counselling/addiction, etc. that can carry on with the woman after exit of service.’ [FI Staff member]

Section 6: Outlook Participants: Profile and Outcomes

This section explores the profile of participants of Outlook and the outcomes achieved for them.

6.1 Profile

The Outlook manager provided profile information on forty-eight current and former Outlook participants (including participants withdrawn from the programme). This included information on age, marital status, nationality, membership of a minority group, children, offence committed, previous convictions, health, living circumstances and length of time in the programme.

It should be emphasised that the category headings used in the profile of Outlook programme participants were quite broad. Additionally, under some of these category headings, there was a lack of detailed information and consistency in the data provided. For example, one participant was described as a ‘Traveller’ while another was classified as ‘Traveller identified’, and there was no indication of the date a person became homeless or their period of homelessness.

Some information was provided on participants’ circumstances before they entered Outlook. For example, six participants had debt issues, forty-five participants were in receipt of social welfare; thirteen participants were classified as having been homeless, and a further thirteen participants had been or were suspected of being subject to domestic violence or coercive control.

Age

Eight of the participants were aged under 30. Fifteen were between 30 and 39, and fourteen were between 40 and 49. Nine were in the 50–59 age bracket. One participant was in the 60+ age bracket. The age of one participant was not provided.

Table 3: Age Profile

Age category	Number	Percentage
Under 30	8	17%
30–39	15	31%
40–49	14	29%
50–59	9	19%
60+	1	2%
Unknown	1	2%
Total	48	100%

Marital Status and Children

Twenty-nine participants were single. Twelve were married or were in a civil partnership. Seven were separated or divorced. Twenty-eight participants had children under the age of 18 ranging in age from 7 months to 17. Eight of the twenty-eight who had children under 18 also had adult children. Eighteen participants had adult children, of whom eight also had children under the age of 18.

Table 4: Marital Status

Marital status	Number	Percentage
Single	29	60%
Married/civil partnership	12	25%
Divorced/separated	7	15%
Total	48	100%

Nationality and Minority Groups

Forty-three participants were Irish or naturalised Irish. Five were non-nationals: two Polish, one British, one Latvian and one Nigerian (see Table 6). Nine participants were members of an ethnic minority community. Three were Travellers. One participant was of Asian ethnicity, while another was Bosnian Muslim. Two participants were also members of an unspecified ethnic minority community. Two participants were classified as members of the LGBTQI+ community.

Table 5: Nationality

Nationality	Number	Percentage
Irish	43	90%
Latvian	1	2%
British	1	2%
Polish	2	4%
Nigerian	1	2%
Total	48	100%

Table 6: Minority Groups

Minority groups	Number
Traveller community	3
Asian	1
African	1
Bosnian Muslim	1
Other European	1
LGBTQI+	2
Total	9

Health

Twenty participants had self-diagnosed⁶⁸ mental health issues and twelve participants were classified as having formally diagnosed⁶⁹ mental health issues. Fourteen participants had some form of physical disability. One participant had epilepsy, while another had a mini-stroke. Just under half were categorised as having an addiction.

Table 7: Health status

Health status	Number
Mental health issue (self-diagnosed or diagnosed by GP)	20
Mental health issue (formal diagnosis by psychiatrist or psychologist)	12
Physical disability	14
Epilepsy	1
Mini stroke	1
Addiction issues	21

Duration on Outlook

Eight participants had been on Outlook for less than a month (see Table 9). Six participants had been on the programme between 1 and 3 months. Twelve had been on the programme between 4 and 6 months. Sixteen had participated on the programme between 7 and 12 months. Five participants had been on the programme for longer than 12 months. One participant's involvement in Outlook was categorised as ongoing (and is not included in Table 9 below).

Table 8: Duration on Outlook

Duration	Number	Percentage
Less than a month	8	17%
1–3 months	6	13%
4–6 months	12	26%
7–12 months	16	34%
12 months+	5	11%
Total	47	100%

68 SD: Where a participant had a mental health issue that was self-diagnosed or diagnosed by a GP.

69 FD: Where a participant had a mental health issue that was formally diagnosed by psychiatrist or psychologist.

6.2 Outcomes

The Outlook programme manager provided summary profile details on 51 current and former Outlook participants regarding their accommodation, employment and education/training outcomes. In a few cases, there was limited or no current information on participants who had exited the programme. As with the profile information above, the category headings used to describe participant outcomes were fairly broad. The numbers of participants analysed below in terms of programme outcomes differ from those given in the sub-section above, as the datasets were compiled at different time periods.

Status

Of the fifty-one programme participants profiled, eight were still on the programme. In addition, four participants had been withdrawn from Outlook, mainly for breaches of their TR. Thirty-nine women had completed the programme.

Table 9: Programme status

Programme status	Number	Percentage
Still on programme	8	16%
Withdrawn from programme	4	8%
Completed programme	39	76%
Total	51	100%

The accommodation, employment, education and training situation of the participants (39) who had exited Outlook (i.e. excluding those currently on the Programme or who were withdrawn), is presented below. It should be noted that one participant had not only left Outlook but also the jurisdiction. Another participant who left the programme and was in private rented accommodation had received another charge.

Accommodation

Of the thirty-nine participants who completed Outlook, twenty-six were reported as back living in the family home. Another former participant was also believed to be back in her family home. Four former participants were living in private rented accommodation, and six were in other types of accommodation (e.g., Local Authority or where they were sharing a house or apartment with others). The accommodation situation of three former participants was not known (one of whom had left the country; another was a refugee).

Table 10: Accommodation

Accommodation status	Number	Percentage
Back living in the family home	26	67%
Private rented accommodation	4	10%
Other accommodation types (Local Authority or shared accommodation)	6	15%
Unknown	3	8%
Total	39	100%

Employment and Education/Training

As shown in Table 12, a total of thirty-three out of the thirty-nine women who had completed the programme and for whom information was available were engaged in employment, employment schemes, volunteering, caring/homemaker duties or were unemployed or in receipt of social welfare. Twelve of the thirty-three were in employment, while a further five were also believed to be working. Two former Outlook participants had set up their own businesses. Three participants were engaged in volunteering, while four were either on a Community Employment (CE) scheme or were retired. Three participants were classified as homemakers/carers. Four participants were categorised as unemployed or on social welfare.

Seven former Outlook participants were engaged in education or training. Of these, two were in third level, with another two planning to enter third level. Three former participants were enrolled in education/training programmes such as Pathways or the Shaping Futures programme. Two of the seven engaged in education or training also had jobs.

Table 11: Employment Status

Employment & Education status	Number
In employment/working	17
Own business	2
Volunteering	3
CE scheme/retired	4
Homemakers/carers	3
Unemployed/Social welfare recipient	4
Participating in training/education programmes, e.g. Pathways	3
In third level or planning to enter third level	4

Section 7: Interviews with Outlook Participants and Families

This section is based on interviews with nine women who completed or are currently taking part in the Outlook programme and four family members.

Six of the nine women had completed the Outlook programme, and three were participating in it (but at an advanced stage) at time of writing. Seven of the nine women were referred by Dóchas, and two through probation referrals. The group included women who had been to prison more than once and women who were in prison for the first time. Five of the women were single, three were separated, and one was married. Four had no minor children, and five did. Four had adult children. Two women had no children. In total, the women had 26 children.

7.1 Impact of Conviction on Outlook Participants and their Families

Going into prison had a huge impact on families. Some families fell apart, with children and partners facing much of the burden:

‘My family unit fell apart when I was sentenced. My partner moved into the family home and took care of my children and everything to do with home. My children were very traumatised when I was sentenced and didn’t want to accept that I was in prison.’ [Participant G]

‘My family was close-knit – now they all lead separate lives. My children lost their home, friends, siblings and school.’ [Participant F]

‘My husband was mother and father to our children while also dealing with me and looking after my father and trying to keep me sane’. [Participant A]

One woman described her incarceration as like a death in the family:

‘It was hard for them – they had to clear out my house – it was like a death. As a mother, I felt I had to take a step back and not advise or guide my children. I am now beginning to get past this, and my children are coming to me for advice.’ [Participant G]

The family members interviewed had no previous experience with the criminal justice system and found the experience of incarceration of a family member frightening. It was a time of anxiety, shock, confusion and stress:

‘It was all very frightening – a jump into the unknown... We were shocked and confused and not sure what we could and could not do... The main adjustments we had to make were when mum was in prison – my life was turned upside down.’ [Family member B]

‘We had never been involved with the criminal system before and we found the whole experience overwhelming.’ [Family member D]

‘We knew nothing about the prison system, and it was all very daunting. We didn’t even know where the Dóchas was or how to get there and what happened when you did get there.’ [Family member C]

Family members described how they disliked visiting prison. One child spoke about not being able to hug their mother and the difficulties trying to communicate, which often led to fearing the worst, especially during lockdowns when calls could not be taken:

‘When she was in prison, we were anxious about how she was. You couldn’t hug her on visits for fear of getting her in trouble... It was very hard to communicate with mum, when she was in prison and find out how she was. When there were lockdowns and she couldn’t take a call, you feared the worst and you worried that things in prison were worse than the actual reality, despite her reassurances.’ [Family member C]

One person felt that the experience of Dóchas was not good for them and their mother, especially regarding their mental health:

‘We hated visiting due to searches and the dogs... I felt relief when I heard mum was moving to effectively an open prison. The experience of Dóchas had not been good – it was bad for mum and for us.’ [Family member B]

7.2 Introduction to Outlook

Participants were made aware of Outlook via a number of sources, including prison officers, ISM, and in one case, a chaplain. Word of mouth amongst prisoners in the context of a step-down option was another frequently named source of information. However, Outlook was rarely named in this context:

‘I was aware of a step-down unit from talking to other prisoners in Dóchas, but I didn’t know it as the Outlook programme.’ [Participant D]

‘When I was told I was going on the Outlook programme, I didn’t relate it to the ‘step-down’ programme.’ [Participant C]

‘I knew it initially as step-down while in prison. It was mentioned to me at the start of my sentence because this was my first offence...’ [Participant F]

Some women did not understand why they had been selected for Outlook or why they were going on the programme rather than being released home. Some had served only a short period of their sentence (e.g. 2–4 months) before being told they were being considered for the programme.

One woman who had a good routine in prison and felt comfortable and secure there initially refused to consider Outlook, but a prison officer persisted and eventually convinced her:

‘A prison officer suggested I come on the Outlook programme. I had got into a good routine in prison, felt comfortable and secure, so I said no. I thought the [Focus Ireland facility] was a hostel. However, he persisted and convinced me to go and see it.’ [Participant G]

The option of Outlook was discussed with women by the ISM or Probation Officer before interviews were scheduled with an Outlook case manager. During this interview, the case manager gave an overview of Outlook including details about their room, the house rules, TR conditions and any restrictions participants of Outlook would have to follow.

‘The ISM said that I would be having a meeting with someone from Focus Ireland. [Case manager] interviewed me and went through my life, why I was in prison and explained the programme.’ [Participant I]

‘My Probation Officer interviewed me first and then [case manager] came to the prison to interview me. She told me she was going to take me to somewhere I would be safe and heard and get me help.’ [Participant B]

7.3 The Move to Outlook, Initial Feelings and Impressions

For some women, the move to Outlook happened at very short notice. This suited some women who didn't want high expectations or who would have experienced anxiety if they had been told too early.

'I found out later that all the background checks and paperwork had been done prior to the interview [with the case manager] unbeknown to me, which was good as I wouldn't have liked my expectations raised prior to being interviewed. It was a week later that I moved. I was told on a Tuesday evening that I would be going in the morning.' [Participant I]

'I was told on the Friday I would move on the Monday, so I was full of anxiety over the weekend but happy I hadn't been told earlier as the anxiety would have been worse.' [Participant E]

While some women got onto the Outlook programme quite quickly, others had to wait until a space became available. For one woman, it took several months:

'In all, it took three months before I got into the programme from the initial meeting with [ISM].' [Participant D]

Another woman experienced a considerable delay due to eligibility criteria:

'Because of the nature of my offences, there was a lot of to and fro about my eligibility.' [Participant F]

Family members described happiness and relief that their parent was moving out of Dóchas. For one family member, her mother's move to Outlook provided some respite and time to come to terms with the change:

'I felt relief when i heard about Outlook. If mum had moved straight back home from prison all of us, including her, would have been overwhelmed.' [Family member D]

Another family member described the fast pace of the move as exciting:

'We were blown away about how fast the move happened and there was a lot of excitement.' [Family member C]

However, there were accounts from some family members of anxiety in terms of the suddenness of the move and a lack of information:

‘When we heard of the move to [the Focus Ireland facility], we were initially happy that my mother would be moving out of the Dóchas; however, that quickly changed to anxiousness as we were completely unaware of what the Women’s Outlook programme was.’ [Family member A]

‘The move from prison was very sudden with very little notice, but we were happy she was out.’ [Family member B]

‘Having a loved one being moved somewhere without knowing when or what it is, is unsettling’. [Family member A]

Feelings of anxiety were allayed for one family that visited Outlook and familiarised themselves with the facilities:

‘Being able to see the space and the building was very important to us. Seeing that people had a normal life, could cook and eat together, and that they could go off and do their own thing was very important.’ [Family member C]

On arrival at the Focus Ireland facility, new Outlook participants were shown their room and the Copper Kettle kitchen area and completed the necessary forms with the support of the case manager. They were introduced to anyone who was in the building at the time and brought to do basic shopping. Participants described feeling welcomed, a sense of relief, of calm, and of excitement:

‘I did not expect the welcome I received. I felt very welcome the first night. Everywhere was very calm and comfortable.’ [Participant B]

‘A weight lifted off my shoulders’. [Participant E]

‘I didn’t have a home to go to, and without it I would have been homeless. I felt relief.’ [Participant D]

‘I was very excited to have a key to my own room again’. [Participant C]

Some participants described the move from prison to Outlook as a challenge. As mentioned above, short notice was a contributory factor for some. Others felt overwhelmed, were unsure what to expect, or felt very emotional. The change in routine, with a less regimented day and more freedom, also had to be navigated. The quotes below capture some of those feelings upon entering Outlook for the first time:

‘The move was traumatic. I was not sure what I was supposed to do and was told I was going today and had to wait for ages in the holding area... You have no control when you are in Dóchas, and then you have some in Outlook... You suddenly have to make decisions for yourself again... I became very emotional and only fully realised what myself and my family had been through after I left Dóchas.’ [Participant G]

‘When I was in prison, the routine got me through but when I moved, I freaked out as I couldn’t do what I had been doing for the previous [X] years... On the first night, I came into the Copper Kettle but did not really mingle with anyone. I knew one or two from Dóchas but wouldn’t have talked to them. I was still all over the place.’ [Participant H]

‘It was a big adjustment. I felt overwhelmed with the amount of information I was given on the first day. There had not been much preparation for the move when in Dóchas.’ [Participant I]

‘Moving from a very structured regime in prison to much less structure in Outlook can be scary initially but it is better than jumping straight from prison to the outside world.’ [Participant E]

Two participants described trouble sleeping on their first night in Outlook as they adapted to their new surroundings:

‘I didn’t sleep well that night. It was a big change locking my front door, [with] no one to tell me to go to bed.’ [Participant I]

‘The first night was the longest night of my life... I was going to ask to be sent back to prison the next day as I didn’t know how I would cope with the small room and the lack of routine.’ [Participant H]

In this context, the lack of a staff presence at night was an issue for some of the participants:

‘I found it very overwhelming on the first night when all the key workers went home at 5 pm and I had no one to talk to.’ [Participant I]

‘Nobody is on site after 6 pm except security, so if a woman is struggling, there is no help.’ [Participant A]

Settling in was described as difficult for some of the participants due to the change of routine and new people.

'I introduced myself to others in the Copper Kettle but felt like an outsider. I was afraid of one of the women.' [Participant A]

Participants spoke about keeping to themselves and not engaging with other participants for several days. For one woman, it took weeks to engage with others in the programme, and she also felt uncomfortable by the cameras on the premises:

'Women came up and introduced themselves, but I was exhausted from the emotional trauma ... so it was two to three weeks before I started mixing ... I knew a few women from prison but was wary around them. I found it a bit intimidating at first... I didn't like the cameras everywhere and felt controlled. I didn't like being watched eating, doing my yoga or coming in and out.' [Participant C]

A number of those interviewed noted that there was a participant who had committed a serious crime on the programme, and they felt intimidated by this. However, they did not mention what this crime was.

7.4 Differences in TR and Probation Conditions

The mix of participants within Outlook includes community-based Probation referrals and those who are on temporary release (TR). This can cause friction and alter group dynamics when the two groups are together in Outlook. This is because the former have different conditions and more freedom, while the latter are still serving their sentence with stricter conditions/restrictions as a result. An example of this is the case of one participant who had strict terms attached to her TR in respect of engagement in activities, some of which were very difficult for her to comply with, especially when she got ill. Two participants spoke about tensions that can be experienced in Outlook as a result of the different conditions:

'The Outlook beds are all on one landing, 'the prison landing', and two of these are for people on probation; the rest are on TR. This creates tension as TR people do not understand the difference between the conditions for TR and for probation.' [Participant E]

'Having probation women in the building causes friction among the women. Probation women don't have to abide by strict terms, and those that come from prison feel they are looked down on.' [Participant H]

Miscommunication about what a woman coming from prison could and could not do arose occasionally. For example, one participant was told by her case manager that she could go home after attending Pathways each day, provided she returned to the Focus Ireland facility by 10 pm. However, her Probation Officer queried this and it caused a bit of tension before it was resolved.

7.5 Staff and Supports

Reception staff were described by many Outlook participants as *'lovely'*. Relationships with case managers were also described positively by all of those interviewed. There was generally high praise for case managers, especially regarding their caring attitude, emotional support and the practical support that they provided.

'Now, if I were in trouble, I would go to [case manager] for support in a flash....They sit and chat with you, a bit of normal life... They put me in good humour... When I moved to Outlook, I had a lot of time on my hands. [case manager] helped me get on various programmes to fill this time, and now my week is very busy.' [Participant E]

Practical support included accessing social welfare, accompaniment to the Pathways programme for the first time, exploring hobbies/interests (e.g. sailing, hill walking, swimming, gym), and support with job applications, course applications and housing list applications.

'I had a good relationship with [case manager], who knows how to navigate services. She provided advice on getting social welfare and discussed my housing options.'[Participant F]

'[The case managers] were fabulous and always there for guidance. They provided practical help, like where to go to sort out social welfare, and [case manager] went with me... [case manager] was a calming presence and told me to take baby steps. You could tell her anything and she was not judgmental and was willing to look into things for you. She let me have my freedom to find my own path, and she built up my confidence.' [Participant G]

Participants also mentioned receiving support with media training, maintaining fitness regimes, and sourcing counselling in the community. One participant commented that staff really helped them to navigate services with a criminal conviction:

‘You need to use the facilities and supports in Outlook and bounce things off your case worker all the time and engage with others to get the most out of Outlook. I felt I was being hit by a brick each time I did something like getting car insurance, going on the housing list, as you are asked if you have a criminal conviction. You really need someone to advocate for you through all of this as you are in a mess, and you don’t want to put this on your family.’
[Participant G]

While most participants spoke about positive experiences engaging with staff, a small number gave examples of feeling judged for incidents that had happened and that staff should be more accepting of mistakes made by participants and to work with them to resolve them. For one woman, there was a constant fear of being sent back to prison:

‘The fear of making a mistake and going back to prison is constant.’
[Participant B]

However, it should be noted that some of these mistakes may have been a breach of TR or the Outlook licence agreement, and the women may not have fully understood this.

7.6 Day Programmes

Some of the interviewees described how they had availed of opportunities within the prison system, especially education, and this eased and enabled participation in education and employment programmes while on Outlook.

There was generally high praise for the Pathways programme, which includes access to counselling, with some participants continuing to see counsellors after leaving Outlook. Participants liked the atmosphere in Pathways, the structure, the availability of courses and Community Employment (CE), and staff with experience of the criminal justice system.

‘Pathways is excellent. The councillor is amazing with people, and I still see him every few weeks. I felt I was talked to, not talked down to in Pathways by all the staff.’ [Participant A]

‘Outlook would not be as good as it is without a programme like Pathways.’
[Participant F]

‘I gained knowledge by doing courses in Pathways... I studied social care and addiction studies and did lots of activities, including sailing and going to the gym, which I loved.’ [Participant B]

Two women also named the SAOL project (which runs the BRIO programme) as being beneficial.

‘I attended SAOL daily, and it was excellent.’ [Participant C]

For a few women, Pathways was not so beneficial.

‘I started Pathways, but it was not for me, it was too like prison, and it also had men from Shelton Abbey on it.’ [Participant G]

‘I attended Pathways five days a week but did not find the courses great.’ [Participant H]

Outlook participants interviewed also accessed courses (e.g. addiction studies, social studies), art classes (outside of Pathways), jobs (e.g. Mug Shot), support groups (e.g. Gamblers Anonymous) and some volunteered (e.g. Care After Prison). Three were accepted onto university diplomas/degree courses – one completed her diploma in addiction studies, another was doing a degree in youth and community studies, and another planned to commence social studies in the 2023/2024 academic year.

7.7 Family Reconnection

Many of the participants described how immediate communication, being able to call and see family so soon after leaving Dóchas, as being a huge relief and benefit. Depending on family circumstances, the case manager might ring a family member when the participant left Dóchas, but generally, it was the participants who did this. For some participants, the move provided opportunities for family to visit them or vice versa:

‘My partner and children came to see me. They were so excited to see me there in [Focus Ireland facility]. My partner liked coming in as he felt very welcome.’ [Participant B]

‘[Case manager] explained that my children and husband could come in and see me. [Case manager] rang my husband. On my first day, I went home.’ [Participant A]

In some cases, the participants had family members call to the Focus Ireland facility very soon after the move there.

‘My family felt relief and were in [the Focus Ireland facility] 10 minutes later.’ [Participant G]

For one participant, the move to Outlook was a huge milestone in reengaging with family:

'I now had my own door and felt it was a step to getting my kids back.'
[Participant E]

Most of the interviewees named visits and overnight stays as important to making connections and rebuilding relationships with family members. Case managers explained that children and partners could come in to see participants in the Focus Ireland facility. One participant described it *'as a game changer'*.

Some partners came in to visit with them every day; others visited at weekends.

'My partner came to visit every day, and my adult children regularly visited. This helped when, after six to eight weeks, I went home for an overnight.'
[Participant B]

Another participant was able to connect with her family through the preparation of meals and having them collected by her partner:

'I realised that my family were not eating properly, so I began cooking for them and sending meals home with [partner].... We talked a lot and got to know each other again.' [Participant A]

Participants also visited siblings, cousins or aunts or received visits from them, and some had overnight stays with them. One participant was able to attend a family wedding which was very special to them:

'I was able to go home for Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries. I got to attend my sister's wedding. This would never have happened if I was still in prison.' [Participant I]

Unlike prison, the provision of a mobile phone and the freedom to visit and spend time with Outlook participants was described by family members as key to re-engagement:

‘What helped us to engage with [family member] was that she had her own mobile phone, which meant we could call or text at any time. It also helped that we lived in [an area of Dublin] and were in a position that we could visit.’ [Family member A]

‘Being able to see her and phone her when she moved to Outlook was such a relief.’ [Family member C]

‘I never expected to be able to walk around Dublin with mum while she was still on sentence. We could call her anytime, and she could call us when she liked, unlike prison.’ [Family member B]

For one family member, being able to visit and bring in clothes and extra things for her mother and hand them to her directly, was important. This was a change from the experience of the prison system:

‘We never knew if [family member] got stuff we sent her when she was in prison, while we did know when she was in Outlook.’ [Family member C]

Children and Overnight Stays

Children under 18 may be allowed to stay overnight in the Focus Ireland facility. Some participants and their family members had reservations about this because of safety. In two instances, the case manager spoke to family members to assure them about the safety of the premises, and this resulted in children staying overnight on a regular basis:

‘My ex did not come in to see me or the premises, but he rang [case manager] to discuss whether it was a safe place for the children to come in to. He was happy with what he heard, and the children stay over every second weekend.’ [Participant D]

‘For the first two months, the kids’ granny would not let them come in to see me, and I saw them in parks. She thought it was full of prisoners and not a place suitable for children. [Case manager] spoke to her about the place, and the first time they came in was at Christmas with their grandad. When he saw what the place was, he allowed them come (and stay) every weekend after that.’ [Participant H]

For one participant who did avail of the overnight stays, her young children treated it as an adventure.

'I go and collect [children] at 1 pm on a Saturday from the house and leave them back at 6 pm on a Sunday evening. The kids are delighted as they see this as a big adventure. They love the playground in the area and the pitches.'
[Participant D]

However, this was not the case for one participant who had teenage children:

'My son visited a few times but didn't like the experience. My daughter stayed overnight, but it felt like a prison to her. I brought in her own bed to make her feel more comfortable.' [Participant A]

While the participants were very grateful for the opportunity to spend time with their children, room size in the Focus Ireland facility was named as a challenge, especially if there were more than one child staying overnight. One participant was not happy to share a bed with her 9-year old son.

"The only problem with the rooms is that they are not big enough to accommodate 2 children. I have a blow-up bed on the floor and when one of the kids needs to go to the toilet in the night, they wake up the other..."
[Participant D]

'You make do with what's here – the other option is that they [children] don't come to stay... having a nine year old in your bed is not ideal, but it's better than them not being here at all.'[Participant F]

7.8 The Transition back to the Community

Moving out of Outlook

While case managers help Outlook participants with housing applications, they do not source housing – it is up to the participant to do this. For participants who had their own homes in the past, making housing applications and sourcing rented accommodation could be daunting and they appreciated the support provided. Participants who had not yet sourced accommodation were fearful of ending up in unsuitable accommodation or homeless. One participant had a real fear that a potential move to rented accommodation in an area where drug use was visible would be back using drugs:

'If I accepted this accommodation, I would never be able to see my kids there and more than likely I would end up back on drugs.' [Participant H]

Participants expressed frustration about the lack of information provided about precisely how long they would be on the Outlook programme. Some were told they would be in Outlook for a relatively short time (e.g. 6 weeks to 4 months) before moving home but the reality was usually that they were in Outlook for longer. This uncertainty caused friction with one participant and her family:

‘The uncertainty of not knowing what’s happening next affected all the family. Nobody could answer how long I would be there and me and my family found this very frustrating. You should have the right to know what’s happening.’
[Participant A]

Most of the participants indicated that they could make contact with their case manager or visit the Focus Ireland facility *‘anytime’* after moving on from Outlook. One participant said that Outlook staff *‘are always there at the end of the phone’*. However, some felt that they would benefit from a more structured aftercare approach after leaving Outlook. One participant described a fear of becoming homeless without some form of support while making the transition back into the community:

‘I will need help with the transition, e.g. a weekly visit from [case manager] for the first few weeks after moving out. I am terrified of ending back on the streets.’ [Participant E]

Reintegrating in the community

The move out of Outlook into the community was challenging for many participants. One expressed a fear *‘of people knowing that I was in prison’*. Another wanted *‘to be somewhere where people don’t know me and I don’t know them’*.

For others, it required a period of readjustment and processing changes in family dynamics:

‘I was so excited but also nervous that I had to readjust again... Since I moved home each, family member looks out for each other...’ [Participant I]

‘I had to learn to be patient with my children as they were different people when I moved home.’ [Participant B]

For some, the move out of Outlook meant moving in with younger siblings or adult children. This proved challenging due to space in the home, feeling they were imposing, and a desire to be independent.

'I felt like a teenager again – having no control, no job, no home, having stuff in storage, relying financially on them, building bridges with everyone... I was a grown woman, living with an older sister. In [Focus Ireland facility], I had my own space but with my sister, there was none'. [Participant G]

'While the offer of a room from my daughter still stands, it would not be ideal, and I am working towards getting my own rented accommodation.'
[Participant F]

Some participants left the Outlook programme under the CRS which requires signing on at a police station. One of the participants in this group described how challenging this could be, especially if the person is working or volunteering. She experienced a mix-up between Outlook staff and her Probation Officer regarding signing on it caused some stress:

'I was volunteering, working part-time and did Community Return. It was very trying as I had to sign on at the police station every day with the exception of days doing community service. I was supposed to go to weekly sign on with Probation but there was a mix up and I wasn't informed. Eventually, it got sorted. The Probation Officer was supposed to ring [partner] prior to my leaving to get consent for me to come home. This call never happened.' [Participant A]

Another participant did not like having to use the address of the person she was staying with when signing on under CRS conditions.

'I had to use my [relative's] address to sign on and I found this difficult as I felt I was dragging her into it.' [Participant G]

For some families, the move from Outlook to the home was relatively smooth, with no significant adjustments. However, this was not the case for all families interviewed. For example, one family member described how their lives had changed when their mother went to prison. This meant they could not return to the way things had been before as their mother had changed and so had they (some family members had become adults while the woman was in prison) – a new routine and new normal had to be established. This took several weeks as, at first, the family were nervous about the transition home and about leaving the participant alone. Gradually, as new routines were established, this anxiety receded as the family worked together to support the person in the transition home.

‘The move back was a time of anxiety and a bit overwhelming for us all, but I feel that as a family, we managed it well. At the start, we felt that mum should not be left alone at home, so we worked out how one of us would always be there – this went on for a number of weeks until everything settled down.... Looking back, I think that in the first week we were over-attentive.’
[Family member D]

7.9 The Difference made by Outlook for Participants and their Families

Interviewees were asked about the difference Outlook had made in their lives. They spoke about how Outlook provided a greater level of freedom compared to being in prison and that staff contributed to a positive, welcoming and warm environment where the women benefitted from a positive atmosphere and the practical and emotional supports provided. After the bustle and noise of prison, Outlook was considered a calm space and a step towards normality. Critically, Outlook enabled the women to engage with family members regularly and to rebuild bonds.

‘My relationship with family is amazing now, and I have a very strong relationship with my son... [My partner] and I talked a lot to get to know each other again.’ [Participant A]

‘I like the level of family access and contact. It enabled us to reconnect and establish regular routines... I see my older daughter every week, my boys come and stay every three/four weeks, and my other daughter stays every second week. I love being able to stay for hours on the phone with them.’
[Participant F]

‘My time in Outlook gave me the skills to mediate in the family home and have compassion.’ [Participant C]

The women also spoke about how Outlook enabled access to programmes and projects such as Pathways and SAOL. Women described how these programmes helped them to assess their lives, the impact of their crime, and to set goals. The programmes also provided access to counsellors and pathways to Community Employment and education. Three women spoke about how they had been encouraged by staff in Pathways and by case managers to engage in third-level education.

The time to reflect and work on themselves, identify goals, and work on personal development was identified by the women as making a huge difference. The women reported improved self-confidence, better social and interpersonal skills, being able to manage stress better; learning to live in a shared space and to compromise, making friends and taking part in new activities, and learning to be independent. Below are some selected quotes from participants that capture the difference Outlook made in their lives:

‘Outlook has given me so much confidence and hope... When I was sentenced, I thought I would lose everything. Outlook gave me a voice. I can face the world without any fear or doubt in my mind’. [Participant B]

‘My family haven’t changed, but I have. Outlook has made a huge difference. I had time to myself and did not have to worry about family dynamics... I felt very safe ... I have gained confidence and am much better at mixing with people, learned to say no and have compassion for myself and others.’ [Participant C]

‘[Outlook] helped me to stay clean and gave a roof over my head... I feel proud of myself... I know what my goals are for myself and my kids.’ [Participant E]

‘Without [Outlook], I would end up back on drugs.’ [Participant H]

‘I wouldn’t have had time to work on myself without Outlook. I would never have thought of doing a degree, and I am the happiest I have ever been’. [Participant I]

‘The level of family access and contact helped us to reconnect and establish regular routines.... I now have goals that I want to achieve.’ [Participant F]

The women were hopeful about the future for themselves and their family relationships.

‘I have started looking for a new job and hope my sentence will not preclude me from doing this. I have been applying for lots of positions and hope that my former workplace will take me back.’ [Participant B]

**‘I hope to get a house and co-parent my children and return to work.’
[Participant D]**

‘I am the happiest I have ever been. I plan to do a degree in youth and community studies so that I can help young people.’ [Participant I]

Outlook was described in positive terms by family members, and some outlined experiences of case managers *‘going above and beyond’*:

‘[Case manager] provided mum with emotional, mental and practical support, especially with form filling and helped her to cope.’ [Family member C]

Family members who visited the Focus Ireland facility said that it had good energy and provided some form of normality to participants and a sense that they were part of a ‘family unit’. Some family members specifically mentioned an improvement in their mother’s mental health following the move to Outlook.

Family members felt that Outlook provides opportunities that might not otherwise be open to participants, e.g. education. For one family, they appreciated the supports offered by the programme and how Outlook inspired their mother to complete a degree:

‘Outlook is a very good programme, the place is lovely and welcoming, and there are good supports for the women. My mum completed her degree – Outlook inspired her to do this.’ [Family member D]

Family members spoke about Outlook building confidence and supporting participants to make decisions about future choices for a positive transition to the outside world. They were grateful to Outlook for providing opportunities to rebuild lives and offer a return to normality:

**‘It provided her with reassurance and people to answer to and made the stepdown/ transition to normal life easier – it wasn’t a shock to the system for her as it would have been if she had just walked out of prison... Without Outlook, she wouldn’t have the opportunities she has today’.
[Family member C]**

‘I hope my mum starts living life again and is happy. She has her own house, makes her own decisions, has increased confidence and turned it around with the help of Outlook.’ [Family member B]

‘I will never have my old mum back as she has changed, and we are also different now and feel different as a result of the experience. We are now in a happy place as a family, and normality has returned.’ [Family member D]

7.10 Feedback for Programme Improvement

Both Outlook participants and family members were asked during interviews about how the Outlook programme could be improved. The following section outlines key themes in this area.

Information provision and communication about Outlook

Improved information provision and communication to participants and their families emerged as one of the most important areas for improvement made by those interviewed. Participants on the programme indicated how they would have liked to have been provided with more practical information to prepare them for the selection process for Outlook, as well as more detailed information on the move from prison to the Focus Ireland facility. Practical information involved wanting to know who would interview them during the selection process, what they would need to do before they could leave prison (such as seeing the prison nurse), and what exactly would happen on the day of their move to Outlook. They also suggested having more information on what to expect after the move, such as information on when social welfare payments would be made and what the conditions were on their release to the programme.

While there is an information leaflet about Outlook, none of those interviewed named it. One family member asked specifically for a leaflet to be created for families to inform them about the programme:

‘There was no contact from staff. I would have liked to have received a call from the key worker to say that they were working with mum and a leaflet explaining Outlook – the family need reassurance.’ [Family member B]

Families also described feeling *‘out the loop’* due to a lack of communication from staff during the programme:

‘We had very little notice about the move out of the Focus Ireland facility and no communication from Outlook’ [Family member B]

‘We had no contact from anyone in Outlook. We received no support or information as to what the steps going forward were for my mother.’ [Family member A]

In general, families spoke about the desire for increased communication with their family member’s case managers during their time on the programme. This included clarifying the conditions of participants’ release onto the programme to both the participants and their families, the level of freedom they would have, what restrictions would apply, and how far they could travel during the programme:

‘We were also not told what the conditions were of my mam staying there (in Outlook), e.g. could she visit home during the day?’ [Family member A]

‘While we knew mum was not fully out of her sentence, we did not fully understand the terms of TR.’ [Family member C]

‘My family did not realise that TR means you are still under sentence and that you are not home. They don’t understand about signing on and curfews. They need information about what TR means and involves, especially for people with no experience of the criminal justice system.’ [Participant G]

Interviewees spoke about how the lack of communication about TR conditions caused miscommunications between Outlook participants and their families. This sometimes led to unintentional breaches of participant’s TR, as well as frustration between them and their families:

‘I was initially told by my Probation Officer that I would be told when I could stay overnight at home but then was asked by the Probation Officer why I hadn’t applied for overnights – seems to be a lack of communication.’ [Participant A]

‘I was restricted to staying in the city centre and didn’t realise this and that I couldn’t leave to visit my family. I understand the need for restrictions but it can be very frustrating for the family.’ [Participant F]

To avoid misunderstandings, one suggestion was to include a plain English explanation of any legal terminology in a leaflet about Outlook.

Increased information on the release date of participants was also seen as important, for both participants and their family.⁷⁰ Participants described their upset at release dates constantly changing:

‘We felt that while this project is a step towards completion of a court ordered sentence that it does not explain how far away the finishing line is.’ [Family member A]

‘My family was left in the dark about release dates, and this caused friction as initially I was told I would be there (in Outlook) for anything from eight weeks to three months, but I was there over five months...’ [Participant A]

‘The exit date kept changing... this became frustrating and disheartening... When the final date was agreed, we were given one week’s notice, which was fine.’ [Family member D]

⁷⁰ It should be noted that the Irish Prison Service indicated that the majority of women on Outlook (c.70%) return home and complete their sentence under the CRS. There is an eligibility date for CRS, which the women are informed of; thus it should be possible for most women to let families know when they will be moving home. However sometimes, a case might be made to bring the CRS date forward.

Tensions between TR and Probation participants

The lack of understanding on Outlook participants conditions of release to the programme was also flagged as causing tensions between those on TR and those who were on community-based probation who took part in the programme. Two participants noted the lack of understanding between the two groups as well as ways to mitigate the tensions between them:

‘TR people do not understand the difference between conditions for TR and for probation – the latter has total freedom provided they meet their probation conditions.’ [Participant H]

‘The Outlook beds are on one landing, the ‘prison’ landing, and two of these are for people on probation, the rest are on TR. This creates tensions as TR people don’t understand the difference between the conditions for TR and probation and it would be better if the probation beds were on a different landing.’ [Participant E]

Other suggestions to mitigate these tensions included providing information to participants on the difference between the terms of TR and probation supervision orders.

Evening and other supports in Outlook

The first night and week in Outlook were described as particularly challenging by some participants. They suggested that this could be alleviated by the provision of access to night-time support such as an on-site or on-call case manager or a helpline. These supports were felt to be especially important for the first night in Outlook. Additionally, although the participants described feeling welcomed on their first day, they felt having a more structured ‘meet and greet’ with other residents for new participants could be beneficial.

Some participants suggested evening on-site activities such as art, beauty therapy, music, and evening courses to try and mitigate the lack of support in the evenings. One participant was concerned that a lack of evening activities coupled with loneliness could result in a return to criminality:

‘I would like to see if night courses could be introduced for those that have no family – I found the evenings long. You could see how people might fall off and do things again as there is nothing to keep them occupied in the evening.’ [Participant I]

Interviewees named other supports that they considered would be beneficial for Outlook participants. One such support was to provide access to counselling, especially for those who had received counselling in prison. Another suggestion was a monthly peer support meeting for the first few months after leaving the Focus Ireland facility.

As well as supports during the evening, some participants felt that more could be done to support them when they reported incidents on the programme. They indicated that they felt bullied in Outlook and/or Pathways and felt that this had not been addressed adequately. One of these participants felt that onsite cameras should be used to review incidents:

'I would like more investigations into incidents reported by the women or reception staff. I felt they only listened to one side. The cameras need to be reviewed if an incident is reported' [Participant B]

Family Reconnection

During discussions with families who lived outside Dublin, transport and affordability emerged as a barrier to re-establishing family connections with participants. They spoke about the challenges they experienced trying to organise and afford travel to the facility and that help with travel costs would be welcome:

'The round trip (for me) was quite a lot of money...' [Family member C]

The ability for children to stay overnight was something that interviewees (both Outlook participants and their family members) were incredibly grateful for. One interviewee (now an adult) who was a teenager at the time they stayed overnight noted how beneficial being able to do this was for her and her mother:

'I stayed overnight twice, and while it was very weird, it was good to be able to do this after mum being away for so long.' [Family member D]

Young adults were disappointed that they could not stay overnight with their mothers. They felt that having the option for children aged 18 and over to stay overnight would help re-establish bonds. One daughter discussed not being able to spend the night and how difficult it was to see other women with younger children stay overnight:

'I would have liked to have been able to stay overnight, but because I was 18 this was not allowed. This was hard for me and my mum, as there were lots of other women with young children who could stay overnight. No matter what age you are, you are still her child'. [Family member B]

The restrictions on overnight stays coupled with visiting hours meant that older children did not get to see their parent as much as they would like:

‘Because I worked and mum did various activities, and you had to be out of [Focus Ireland facility] at a certain time in the evening, it limited the time I had to see mum in the evenings.’ [Family member D]

Family supports after Outlook

Families, in particular, spoke about a lack of supports from Outlook once the participant left the programme. One family member recalled how the family *‘had to build our own supports for mam’*. Six women who completed the Outlook programme made several suggestions about supports to help with this transition for them and their families. These suggestions involved an aftercare plan for the first initial months. For families, this included an exit meeting with family members and case managers, as well as providing a definitive departure date.⁷¹ For Outlook participants, a weekly visit from a case manager for the first few weeks followed by telephone support was suggested. These supports were seen as especially important for those not moving back to their family home.

⁷¹ It should be noted that the Irish Prison Service indicated that the majority of women on Outlook (c.70%) return home and complete their sentence under the CRS. There is an eligibility date for CRS, which the women are informed of; thus it should be possible for most women to let families know when they will be moving home. However sometimes, a case might be made to bring the CRS date forward.

Section 8: Interviews with Stakeholders

Interviews were held with staff in the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. The interviews primarily focused on the operation of the Outlook programme which have informed previous sections of the report. However, they also addressed a wider range of issues and topics, and the findings are presented below.

8.1 Project Objectives

Some stakeholders viewed the implementation of the programme as about creating more equal opportunities for women prisoners who currently do not have access to an open prison unlike male prisoners who had the option of completing their sentences in Shelton Abbey and Loughan House, both of which are open, low-security prisons.

‘Male prisoners could progress their sentences in open prisons like Shelton Abbey and Loughan house, but before Outlook, there were not the same opportunities for female prisoners.’ [Irish Prison Service interviewee]

Additionally, the Outlook programme had the added advantage of providing an alternative to which suitable women being held in Dóchas could be sent during times of overcrowding. However, interviewees stressed that though Outlook is a release valve for the Irish Prison Service, it is not its main aim or objective.

For stakeholders, a key objective of Outlook was to provide women who might be in danger of re-offending with the space to investigate accommodation options while being in a safe and secure setting. There was also the perception that women who had committed low-risk crimes or who were first-time offenders (and unlikely to re-offend) might do better in Outlook than in a closed, medium-security prison such as Dóchas:

‘[Outlook] helps a woman to move from a prison and justice environment into the community and hopefully divert and move them away from the justice system, and not just the justice system, but away from the set of attitudes and the relationships that brought them into contact with the justice system and with the courts. So, [Outlook] seek to put them on a different trajectory within mainstream society.’ [Probation Service interviewee]

Through its focus on addressing trauma-related issues and its female-led approach, stakeholders believe that the Outlook programme complements the objectives and ethos of the joint Irish Prison Service and Probation Service strategy for dealing with female prisoners.

8.2 Governance

The stakeholders interviewed included members of the Project Steering Group and the RAD. None of the interviewees were members of both. Interviewees noted that the composition of both committees had remained relatively stable, which had helped to ensure a good understanding of programme procedures between the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and Focus Ireland. It also helped to facilitate smooth communications between the Outlook partner organisations.

There was support for the Project Steering Group and the RAD to meet regularly, perhaps every six months, to exchange information on programme performance. The value of these meetings is likely to increase given the importance of disseminating the learning that those on the programme’s operational side have acquired and developing metrics to measure Outlook’s outcomes and impacts.

There was a call for the RAD’s agenda to include a quarterly review of programme placements, particularly to examine instances where placements did not go as well as expected. The review might also look at trends and opportunities for modifying the programme’s referral and selection criteria.

Additionally, some stakeholder interviewees called for more discussion within RAD about clarifying the role of the Outlook manager and case managers in relation to Probation Service officials. There was a perception that communication protocols between the Outlook team and Probation Service officials should also be reviewed.

‘There is a real need for role clarification... Who does what, when, and how is this communicated?’ [Probation Service interviewee]

8.3 Operations

Stakeholders emphasised the critical importance of the selection criteria to the success of Outlook. The focus was on identifying women who were at low risk of re-offending and accepting some responsibility for their behaviour. They were also more likely to have engaged with the Irish Prison Service or the Probation Service within Dóchas or the community. If they previously had drug or alcohol addiction issues, these were likely to be under control:

‘[selection criteria] is massively important because if we don’t get this selection right, and something goes wrong, I mean, there’s all kinds of different consequences that can flow from that. So, you could have victims involved with a prisoner. And then there’s the reputational damage for the programme. So, if we put the wrong people into the programme, it undermines it. So, it’s critically important that we get the right people.’
[Irish Prison Service interviewee]

‘So, if somebody was dealing with chaotic addiction or if somebody was really struggling with keeping the day-to-day schedule structure for themselves, I wouldn’t consider them for Outlook.’ [Probation Service interviewee]

‘The perfect person for Outlook is somebody within the justice system who doesn’t have a history around addiction. She’s somebody who’s basically striving in the right direction in life. She’s somebody who needs all our support, to move her forward in her life and to make her successful in life, give her that boost towards success in life.’ [Probation Service interviewee]

Some interviewees noted that several of the women considered for the programme had multiple encounters with the criminal justice system, and there was a sense that they had been failed by the broader societal system. Consequently, they said there was a particular onus on ensuring that if a woman were being considered for Outlook, it would generate a positive outcome for her, i.e., it would not lead to another failure.

In the early stages of the programme, the focus had been on identifying and selecting women who were deemed a low risk of re-offending. However, the stakeholder interviewees highlighted that more recently as the Outlook team had gained experience, more women who had committed more serious crimes had been considered – and selected – for inclusion in the programme.

Stakeholders indicated that the operation of the Outlook programme was working well, and there is good interagency collaboration between the partners. The two funding agencies have a lot of experience working with each other and say that their relationship with Focus Ireland has been positive.

The stakeholders generally believe there is good communication between the Outlook team, the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. The presence of the Outlook team at RAD meetings helps address potential issues with programme participants before they can be escalated. The meetings allow case managers to better understand the roles

and responsibilities of the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service regarding the programme participants, especially in relation to the terms and conditions of a participant's TR. Stakeholders mentioned the importance of case managers understanding the TR conditions attached to a participant and contacting their relevant counterparts in the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service when a woman and/or her family were pressing for a relaxation of those conditions.

The stakeholders put forward suggestions as to how communication between the programme partners could be improved. One suggestion was that the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service representatives on the Steering Committee and RAD should visit the Focus Ireland facility on an annual basis to familiarise themselves with the Outlook team and setting. These visits might also strengthen communication channels around TR conditions attached to some programme participants.

There was also a suggestion that Focus Ireland might produce an induction booklet or manual that could serve the needs of new case managers and provide the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service staff with an introduction to the programme.

8.4 Impact of Outlook

Stakeholders believed that Outlook programme's impact has been positive, though currently there are no statistics, e.g. reduced recidivism, to underpin this belief. Stakeholders noted that while the Outlook team had returned a small number of women on the programme to Dóchas for breaching their TR, a high proportion of these women had realised they had made a mistake in not appreciating the programme's value and had sought (and were granted) re-admittance.

Stakeholders referenced some of the positive outcomes the women had gained from participating in the programme. These included positive re-engagement with their families, enrolling on a third-level course and general progression to stable and normal lifestyles:

'[Outlook's] success is that you see [participants] starting to take charge of their life again, getting excited for Christmas, or birthdays, and stressing about communions – very normal parts of everyday life, everyday motherhood, everyday being a young woman or an adult woman.'
[Probation Service interviewee]

Stakeholders agreed that the Focus Ireland facility offered a safe and secure environment where the participants, through their interactions with the case managers and a gender-informed approach, had the time and space to review the circumstances that led them into the criminal justice system.

‘[Outlook] is a calm environment, it’s very structured, it’s very stable, and it promotes the kind of very positive role model that you want for your clients. And the underpinning of nearly all of your female clients is emotional difficulties, difficult relationships, maybe difficult attachments in their lives. So, having that type of really positive environment that is female-led can be actually very beneficial for some of these women and their parenting and all of these different aspects of life skills, which are really important.’
[Probation Service interviewee]

Stakeholders also highlighted the importance of the women engaging in day programmes where they could have the opportunity to learn new skills that previously had not been available to them.

8.5 Future of the Outlook Programme

Stakeholders gave the Outlook programme a positive rating. They believed it was achieving its objectives and that, while hard documentary evidence was lacking, it had led to good outcomes for participants. They noted, too, that the programme was now dealing with women who had committed more serious crimes and with more complex needs.

They believed there was scope for expanding the programme but stressed that this should be incremental. They were concerned that a rapid increase in Outlook numbers or working with less stable women could jeopardise the programme’s success. In this context, stakeholders believed that an Outlook-type programme is worthy of consideration for Munster, where a new women’s facility had opened in Limerick Prison. Research would be required to assess various issues, including capacity, staffing, access to available services and supports (e.g., day programmes) and location. Given the smaller female population in Limerick Prison compared to Dóchas, stakeholders believe that other cohorts, such as referrals from community-based Probation Service teams, might be needed to supplement numbers.

Long-term, stakeholders believed, there was potential for Outlook to be positioned as an alternative to a custodial sentence for women appearing in the courts. Such alternatives are available in Scotland, where they can help avoid family breakdowns arising from the imprisonment of mothers. The Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service are jointly examining how a non-custodial option can be progressed within the judicial system.

Section 9: Conclusions and Recommendations

The overall conclusion of this evaluation is that the Outlook programme delivers a more accessible, comprehensive, cohesive and focused package of supports to women offenders than what is available within the prison system. The Outlook team supports women with housing, medical cards and social welfare applications and works with them to access other supports in the community. Women taking part in Outlook engage in authorised structured daily activity, and the staff team support women to develop hobbies and interests and access education and employment. These all contribute to stabilisation, rehabilitation, reintegration and a lower risk of homelessness and recidivism. The positive, safe environment and emotional support received while on Outlook enabled women time to reflect and to explore choices. Women are supported with their own personal development, especially in terms of confidence and self-esteem, social and interpersonal skills, stress management, dealing with emotions and goal setting.

Prior to the inception of Outlook, the option of a step-down facility was not available to women prisoners. However, eligible men have been able to serve their sentences in open prisons such as Loughan House and Shelton Abbey but no equivalent exists for women. The introduction of an option like Outlook affords better equality for women offenders.

Imprisonment for women can have disproportionate impacts, especially in respect of familial ties, when compared to men. Women offenders may be lone parents, may have experienced domestic violence, may have children in care and are more likely to have been living with their children prior to custody compared to male offenders. All of these circumstances were reflected in the cohort of women interviewed. It is particularly noteworthy that 60% of Outlook participants since 2019 have been single or lone parents, with only 10 women not having children. The impact of imprisonment on women can, therefore, be disproportionate and can include mental health issues due to separation from children, changes to relationships and challenges reuniting the family.

Family connections are a known protective factor for reducing the risk of recidivism. *‘For women, relationships are the most significant factor to impact directly on the likelihood of reoffending.’*⁷² Programmes like Outlook begin the process of family reintegration by enabling immediate communication with family members, providing access to partners and children on the premises in a safe and friendly environment, and facilitating overnight stays for children aged under 18 years. Conversations between case managers and women participants and participation in day programmes, such as Pathways, can support women to reflect on the impact of their crime on themselves and their families and how to move forward from this. However, there are opportunities to enhance the programme’s operational effectiveness and strengthen its family-centred approach.

This concluding chapter discusses the findings presented in the previous chapters and makes recommendations that address several key areas.

9.1 Governance and Participant Selection Process

The length of the Service Level Agreement (7 years) has enabled the building of trust and communication protocols, training of staff, putting in place necessary infrastructure and development of links with services. There are good levels of communication between the Outlook team and the Referrals and Discharges committee (RAD), which is necessary for good decision-making and case review. However, the Outlook Steering Group and the RAD do not meet together, and joint meetings would benefit programme implementation and oversight. Incorporating a formal quarterly review process at RAD meetings to examine Outlook trends, selection criteria, and placements would also contribute to programme learning for RAD and the Steering Group.

A selection process and thorough assessment process, the latter of which is conducted first by the Probation Service and subsequently by Outlook case managers, ensures that, in general, suitable candidates are selected for the programme. However, the selection criteria are not written down; in practice, selection is on a case-by-case basis. Outlook staff indicated that the length of sentence, the time a woman is into that sentence, and the time remaining matter in terms of being able to support them effectively. They indicated that case working that can affect meaningful change ideally requires six months. Women who have short sentences, who have served less than three months, or who have less than three months left on a sentence should not be selected for the programme.

Because there are no other alternatives for women prisoners to serve their sentence outside of a closed prison, it could be argued that Outlook should be only for prisoners on Temporary Release. There is another argument that sending women to prison, especially for minor offences, may be counter-productive, and a more useful alternative to a prison sentence for women whose lives are not chaotic (e.g. due to serious substance misuse) could be an Outlook-type programme. This would require Probation Officers in the community to assess suitability for an Outlook programme and to make a recommendation to the judge involved in the case. For this to be effective, a written statement of selection criteria will be necessary.

72 Statement by Edward Argar, U.K. Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Justice, on the release of the Farmer Review as part of the U.K. Female Offender Strategy, 18.6.2018.

Recommendations

- > The Outlook Steering Group should convene joint, biannual meetings with the Referrals and Discharges (RAD) committee to facilitate programme learning and good practice, and the latter should incorporate a formal quarterly review into its meeting agenda.
- > The Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and the RAD should document best practices in the identification and selection of candidates – whether in the prison system or under Probation Service supervision in the community – for Outlook, including the most appropriate timeframes in terms of sentence length and time remaining on sentence or community supervision, to guide new RAD members and to enable programme replication elsewhere.

9.2 Key Outcomes and Data Collection

Although a relatively young programme, Outlook has achieved a number of outcomes that have enabled transformation in the lives of the women supported. Since its inception in 2019 and up to June 2023, Outlook has supported 51 women. 5 withdrew from the programme, mainly due to breaches of Temporary Release conditions, but were subsequently accepted back into the programme. Almost 70% of participants who completed the programme returned to live in the family home. The remainder were living in different types of permanent accommodation (including Focus Ireland LTA or offsite housing). None were homeless. Over 50% of participants completing the programme were employed/self-employed/on Community Employment. The remainder were either retired, carers, engaged in volunteering or unemployed. Just under 20% of former participants were taking part in education or training, including third-level diplomas and degrees.

Due to the nature of Outlook, participants can engage with day programmes, training and education, employment, and meet family and friends, provided they remain within Dublin city centre. However, participants are under strict terms of Temporary Release as well as a licence agreement with Focus Ireland, breaches of which can result in them being sent back to the Dóchas Centre to complete their sentence in prison. A process of selection and ongoing reviews ensure that, to date, this has happened in relatively few cases.

While no specific data on recidivism is gathered, anecdotal evidence from the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Outlook team suggests that recidivism amongst the Outlook participants has been very low to date. Given that one of the programme's aims is to reduce re-offending, gathering hard evidence would contribute to a better assessment of the extent to which this is being achieved.

Recommendations:

- > The Irish Prison Service, in conjunction with the Probation Service, should explore how metrics around recidivism could be captured for programme participants.

9.3 Enhancing Outlook for Participants and their Families

Transition to Outlook

Outlook participants interviewed indicated that prison staff and other prisoners used different terms to describe Outlook, and some had not received the leaflet describing the programme. Consequently, family members may not fully know the programme's name or understand its purpose. Consistent communication about what the Outlook programme is (and what it is called) would improve understanding amongst women prisoners and their families about who the programme is for, its benefits and limitations and dispel unrealistic expectations.

Communication between Outlook and families emerged as the single most important requirement for those interviewed. Family members interviewed were unsure about, or had no prior knowledge of, the Outlook programme and what was involved or about the Focus Ireland facility. They spoke about struggling with legal terminology and understanding the conditions of Temporary Release and the Community Return Scheme. This could lead to misunderstanding about what could be expected in terms of home visits and release dates and lead to frustration due to the uncertainty.

Some Outlook participants spoke about being unprepared for the process involved in being released from prison and what would happen on the day of release. Adequate notice can facilitate families living outside Dublin to make arrangements to visit as soon as possible and reduce anxiety due to uncertainty. Space becoming available within the Focus Ireland facility is also a factor in the timing of the release. Another issue raised by Outlook participants in this transitional phase was a breakdown in communication between case managers and the Probation Service and Irish Prison Service regarding terms of release, which caused confusion and stress and created challenges in group dynamics on the programme given the different conditions experienced depending on which group a participant belonged to. It also created tensions with families who were not informed of the differences.

Women prisoners selected for Outlook may have had access to counselling whilst in prison. While some women access counselling in the community when they take part in the Pathways programme, there is no planning for the transition to community-based counselling, and waiting times to access such services can mean that an Outlook participant may not receive necessary counselling support. Interviews with stakeholders also stress the importance of providing follow-up supports to women prisoners after they have completed their sentences. Unless assistance such as counselling is provided to them post-release, they say there is a risk that the benefits of any support provided to the women during their time in prison will be lost and could increase the likelihood that they will re-offend.

Recommendations:

- > The Irish Prison Service should provide a unified definition of what Outlook is, also ensuring that prisoners and their family members clearly understand the objectives and conditions of the Outlook programme.
- > Focus Ireland should provide families with an information leaflet describing the Outlook programme and the Focus Ireland facility. It should include plain English descriptions about probation supervision orders, Temporary Release, and Community Return Scheme and what they mean in practical terms.
- > The Irish Prison Service should use their best endeavours and, where possible, to inform women selected for Outlook and the case managers a minimum of 3 days before their transfer to the programme. During the assessment phase, relevant Probation Service staff and case managers should advise potential participants of the potentially short turnaround from selection to transfer.
- > The Irish Prison Service and Focus Ireland should ensure that there are clear lines of communication between all parties regarding terms of release (temporary release versus community probation). This may involve an element of training for Outlook staff to familiarise themselves with legal terminology.
- > Focus Ireland should collaborate with the Irish Prison Service to put in place a plan for accessing counselling services in the community for women requiring such services in advance of the move to Outlook.

9.4 Supports in Outlook

The issue of evening and night-time support was raised by a number of Outlook participants in the evaluation. Although security personnel are on site during the evenings and overnight, Outlook does not provide case manager support during this time and for these women coming from prison this lack of support was challenging. In addition, some Outlook participants felt a sense of loneliness in the evening times and suggested that this could be alleviated by on-site activities such as art, beauty therapy, and music courses. Another issue that arose for Outlook participants in this evaluation was the rules around overnight stays for children over 18 years of age. While children under 18 can have overnight stays with their mothers in the Focus Ireland facility, older children cannot, and some adult children and women expressed disappointment about this. They felt it would have facilitated reconnecting, especially if the adult children lived a considerable distance from Dublin and, as a result, were not visiting regularly.

Family members that participated in the evaluation noted that communication from Outlook staff could be improved. Families outlined that they were keen to know who will be working with their family member, to understand the terms and conditions in Outlook, to hear about the progress being made by their family member and to receive information about how best to support her, to have queries answered and to be signposted to relevant services and supports, and to get information about exit planning and notification of timing, even in respect of women who will not be moving back to the family home. This type of information would go a considerable way to providing support to families and help them to cope better. However, this also needs to be balanced with the woman's autonomy, needs and her desire or otherwise for the case manager to communicate with

family members. It also needs to balance the potential challenges that may emerge if family members make a disclosure to the case manager that could have implications for plans for the woman to return home.

Interviews with staff highlighted the need for training to enhance their capacity to support Outlook participants. One of the key training areas identified by staff was general knowledge about women in the prison system and the related terminology. This echoes some of the findings from interviews with Outlook participants who described how information relayed to them by staff was incorrect. Staff also spoke about the need for particular training in the area of Restorative Practice. Staff felt this would be a beneficial addition to their toolkit to support participants to deal with the harm caused by their crime. Mental health was an important consideration for staff. They wanted more **training** in the area, and also better access to support services in the community for counselling, which was particularly challenging to source for Outlook participants given the long waiting times.

Recommendations:

- > The funders of the Outlook Programme should consider the benefits of adding resources to enhance evening and overnight supports including case managers on site, evening activities, and the facilitation of overnight stays for children over 18 years of age.
- > Focus Ireland should clarify and better communicate the overnight stay policy for children to Outlook participants. The policy should also be reviewed with the funders of the Outlook programme to ascertain if it could be expanded to include children over the age of 18.
- > The funders of the Outlook programme and Focus Ireland should consider extra resourcing to enable Outlook staff to dedicate time to specific and clearly defined communication with family members as part of the case management process. Such communication and what can be communicated to family members should only occur with the consent of Outlook participants.
- > The Outlook Steering Group should regularly discuss the training needs of Outlook staff and consult with Outlook staff to explore their training needs.
- > Focus Ireland should explore developing links with community services to provide access to child, family and parenting supports for the families of women attending the Outlook programme where requested by women.

9.5 Transition from Outlook

The step-down approach afforded by Outlook eased the transition back into the community and was viewed by participants and families as more positive and supportive than re-entering straight from a prison environment. A number of programme elements supported the development of routines and structure, assisted with practical matters, enabled engagement in activities and rebuilding of family relationships (especially with children) that could be transferred into the community setting and ease the move back into society. For some women, they and their families indicated that Outlook also supported their mental health.

However, challenges with preparation for transition to the community were noted by those interviewed. The most significant was uncertainty about how long a woman would be on Outlook. Staff indicated that they were given little notice about commencement dates for the Community Return Scheme (CRS), leaving very little time to prepare women for the transition. Although women assessed for CRS are provided with an eligibility date, this may be brought forward at short notice, especially if there is pressure to relieve overcrowding in the Dóchas Centre. Family members described tensions that arose because of uncertainty about when a woman on Outlook would be allowed back home and also indicated that they needed time to prepare for the change, both emotionally and in terms of practical matters.

To date, the majority of women on Outlook have returned home, and the number of women referred by the Probation Service's Homeless Unit has been small. However, sourcing accommodation for women not returning to the family home was identified by the women interviewed and staff as a major challenge, given the current housing crisis. There is no formal resettlement component to the Outlook programme, although, within the prison system, resettlement supports are offered to prisoners (e.g. IASIO and the Peter McVerry Trust), which technically Outlook participants referred by the Irish Prison Service should be able to access.

Women who complete Outlook are aware that they can contact their case manager after leaving at any time, which they indicated they have done. However, some of the women interviewed described how the programme would benefit from a more structured approach to aftercare, especially for women who are not moving back to the family home and would benefit from additional support.

Recommendations:

- > Other than in exceptional cases, the Irish Prison Service should make every effort to provide women moving to Outlook with an exit date from the programme, which should also be communicated to case managers.
- > The funders of the Outlook programme should consider the benefits of extending the Service Level Agreement with Focus Ireland to include a resettlement component to the Outlook programme for women who are not returning to the family home.
- > Focus Ireland should explore the development of better housing options for women leaving the Outlook programme, for example advocating for priority housing for recently incarcerated women.
- > The funders of the Outlook programme should consider the benefits of providing additional resources for a formal aftercare/floating support component to the case manager's role, which would include home visits and advocacy for a defined period with telephone follow-up thereafter.

9.6 Expanding Outlook

Three considerations impact the potential to expand the Outlook programme. The first is capacity within the existing resourcing for the programme to accommodate additional women on the programme. Interviews with Focus Ireland management indicate that there is capacity to extend staff: client ratios within the existing case management team that could enable provision of support for up to 7 extra women. The addition of a half-time equivalent case management post would further expand provision and enable a total of 18 women from prison and the community to be supported. Additional rooms would also have to be dedicated to the Outlook programme within the Focus Ireland facility, and communal facilities such as the Copper Kettle could become cramped, especially at weekends when partners and children visit.

The second consideration is the perspective of the Irish Prison Service on risk management. Maintaining the integrity of the current programme and achieving positive outcomes is considered essential, and any significant expansion could dilute the programme and pose additional risks. For example, if expansion meant that there was pressure to fill capacity, women with higher risk offences, ongoing addiction issues and/or chaotic lives would be selected, which could jeopardise the programme's standing.

Recommendations:

- > The funders of the Outlook programme should consider the benefits of incremental (and assessed) growth of the Outlook programme in Dublin.

Glossary

Justice

- CRS Community Return Scheme is incentivised early release scheme where prisoners who meet certain criteria are assessed by the Irish Prison Service and offered early Temporary Release in return for doing community service.
- CSO Community Service Order is a community-based sanction imposed by a judge as an alternative to a prison sentence of 12 months or less for persons aged 16 years and over.
- CSS Community Support Scheme is an early release programme delivered in conjunction with Probation Service-funded Community-based Organisations (CBOs) with the aim of reducing the level of crime and increasing public safety.
- ISM Integrated Sentence Management. A newly committed prisoner with a sentenced of one year or more is assessed by the ISM Coordinator. A personal plan for the person is completed during his/her time in prison, which is periodically reviewed.
- IPRT Irish Penal Reform Trust is a not for profit organisation that campaigns for rights in the penal system and reform of penal policy.
- TR Temporary Release means that a prisoner will be allowed to leave the prison for a certain period of time set by the Governor.
- PSO Probation Supervision Order can be ordered by the District Court having found the facts proved but not proceeding to a finding of guilt. A Probation Order places the offender under the supervision of a Probation Officer for a specified period of time up to 3 years. A Probation Order is not a recorded conviction.

Homelessness

- PASS Pathway Accommodation and Support System that gathers information about homeless persons.
- PEA Private Emergency Accommodation: this may include hotels, B&Bs and other residential facilities that are used on an emergency basis. Supports are provided to services users on a visiting supports basis.
- STA Supported Temporary Accommodation: accommodation, including family hubs, hostels, with onsite professional support.
- TEA Temporary Emergency Accommodation: emergency accommodation with no (or minimal) support

Notes:

Hostels can be used as long or short-term accommodation, and some provide meals and other services. Some hostels may charge on a weekly or nightly basis. However, the local authority can waive the fee on a case-by-case basis.

People can be placed in a hostel on a night-by-night basis, or they may get a rolling booking on a weekly basis. A rolling booking is when the booking continues for a certain period until the hostel is told otherwise. Some hostels also provide three-month placements known as Supported Temporary Accommodation (STA). In STAs, onsite support workers are available to support the residents. Family hubs are used for families with children who are experiencing homelessness. They have the security of on-going placement that a hostel or hotel might not provide. Hubs also have separate bedrooms, spaces for play and homework and either provides a communal kitchen or meals.

There are extra supports available for homeless families. Children under the age of five with parents who are homeless (or homeless transitioning to permanent accommodation) get 25 hours of free childcare a week. This includes 15 hours of free pre-school where children are eligible, or school hours. It also includes a daily meal.

Women and children who are victims of domestic violence may be accommodated in dedicated refuges for protection. It is important to point out that these are not considered homeless accommodation by some local authorities, and some may not recognise the woman and children as homeless.

Explanatory Notes

Sentencing

The IPRT maternal imprisonment scoping study (2023) provides a useful overview of sentencing decisions in Ireland from a gender and care-giving perspective. Several key observations were presented:

- > Ireland systematically overuses imprisonment as punishment. While the average prison population is low, between 2005–2015, Ireland ranked the fourth highest country in the EU in terms of the flow of prisoners throughout the prison system;
- > Constitutionally, sentencing decisions should be governed by the principle of proportionality, and case law advocates that sentences should be proportionate to the personal circumstances of the appellant. However, there is no mandatory requirement for judges to consider the defendant’s personal circumstances, such as caregiving responsibilities, in sentencing decisions;
- > Ireland does not have any guidelines found in other jurisdictions for assessing the best interests of children when considering the sentencing of their mothers. However, a committee established under the Judicial Council Act 2019 has been asked to look at sentencing guidelines to improve consistency in sentencing;
- > There are two types of pre-sanction assessments in Ireland where a person has committed an offence, both prepared for the courts by the Probation Service. The pre-sanction report assesses the person’s suitability for a non-custodial measure, and the community service report looks specifically at the suitability of community work (and tends to be longer and potentially includes information on family circumstances). Although judges are under no statutory obligation to use either report, they request and use these reports frequently. Questions have been raised though about the consistency in the quality and effectiveness of the reports. According to a 2015 report, assessments of an individual’s suitability for a non-custodial sentence tend to be very short and information about children was only included if deemed relevant to the suitability assessment. The IPRT scoping study reports that the Probation Service is in the process of adapting these assessments to include gender-specific considerations.

The study notes recent gender-informed initiatives underway in the Probation Service, including the Seeking Safety training programme to develop probation officers’ skills in helping women attain safety from PTSD and substance abuse.

Supervision and release programmes

The Irish Prison Service, in collaboration with the Probation Service, has introduced several structured Temporary Release programmes to ensure that early releases from prison are undertaken in a planned way. Structured release programmes such as Community Return are incentivised schemes of earned Temporary Release and require offenders to perform supervised community service instead of a portion of their custodial sentence. The primary aim of these Schemes is to reduce the current recidivism rates by arranging for additional support structures and providing for a more structured form of Temporary Release.

Temporary Release

The Minister for Justice decides whether or not to grant a prisoner a Temporary Release. Temporary release means that a prisoner will be allowed to leave the prison for a certain period of time set by the Governor. The Minister will consider a number of things when deciding to grant Temporary Release. These include:

- > the offence the prisoner committed;
- > their family circumstances;
- > their attitude to rehabilitation;
- > their employment and training skills.

Temporary release is usually granted in these three circumstances:

- 1** Temporary release on compassionate grounds may be granted if there is an emergency in the prisoner's family, for example where someone has died or is seriously ill. They may also be released to go to special family occasions like weddings, christenings or communions, or to deal with family matters.
- 2** Day-to-day and weekly release is usually granted to allow a prisoner to do work outside the prison. In some circumstances a Prison Officer will go with them ('under escort'), or they may go alone.
- 3** Reviewable Temporary Release towards the end of a prisoner's sentence is like parole. It means early release from prison towards the end of their sentence. 'Reviewable Temporary Release' usually depends on certain conditions being met. In most cases, these may include a condition that the prisoner reports to a Garda station on a regular basis.

A prisoner can also be granted reviewable Temporary Release which means that they can get early release from prison towards the end of their sentence.

Community Return Scheme

The Community Return Scheme is an incentivised early release scheme where prisoners who meet certain criteria are assessed by the Probation Service and offered early Temporary Release in return for doing community service. The CRS gives prisoners, whom the Irish Prison Service and Probation Service have assessed as being suitable and motivated, the opportunity of early – and renewable Temporary Release with resettlement support. It is available for those who have been assessed as posing no threat to the community; are serving more than one year and fewer than eight years, and who have served at least 50% of their sentence. The programme involves participants doing supervised community service instead of remaining in prison.

If a prisoner is placed on the Community Return Scheme, they will be supervised by the Probation Service and the expectations on them are similar to that of Community Service; they must complete the work on the days assigned for the length of time it was agreed.

Research has shown that Community Return is a successful strategy. In a study of the programme for the period 2011–2013, almost 89% had either successfully completed their Community Return Programme or were still working on it. Of those participants released during the first year of the programme, 91% had not been committed to prison on a new custodial sentence in the period up to the end of 2013.

Community Support Scheme

The Community Support Scheme is an early release programme delivered in conjunction with Probation Service-funded Community-based Organisations (CBOs), including Care After Prison in Dublin, PALLS in Limerick and the Cork Alliance Centre.

The objectives of this Scheme are to reduce the level of crime and to increase public safety by:

- > Identifying suitable candidates serving a short terms sentence between 3–12 months;
- > Working on care plans of support for these offenders and prepare them for release;
- > Working with offenders to change behaviour and reduce offending behaviour's by linking the offender in with relevant support services through a Community Based Organisation (CBO) before release.
- > Monitoring progress or regression of persons on the scheme while on their sentence.

These CBOs offer structured support upon release for short-sentence prisoners, e.g. those serving less than 12 months imprisonment. Prisoners can be released at any point in their sentence following a pre-release assessment regarding suitability and risks/needs (homelessness, addiction, mental illness, etc.) and are required as part of their TR conditions to attend meetings with a support worker in the community usually within a week of release.

The scheme is more about support and structure in the difficult days and weeks after release than supervision or monitoring. Previously, these prisoners would have been released with little or no warning on TR, often on a Friday evening, with no community support and perhaps no money or place to stay.

Community Service Order

The Community Service Order was introduced in 1983 as an alternative to imprisonment, and with the primary purpose of reducing prison overcrowding.

It is a community-based sanction imposed by a judge as an alternative to a prison sentence of 12 months or less for persons aged 16 years and over. The CSO is not a sanction in its own right. Thus, before a judge can consider a CSO they must first form the view that a custodial sentence is warranted. Before imposing this sanction, the judge may request a Community Service Report from the Probation Service to inform his or her decision as to whether or not a person is suitable to perform Community Service work.

If, after considering the reports produced by the Probation Officer, work in the community is considered an appropriate sanction, the judge will specify the number of hours work to be done, (between 40–240 hours) and what prison sentence should be imposed if the person fails to complete this work. The Probation Service is responsible for informing the Court if the person does not complete this work.

There are two principal ways in which Community Service work is carried out:

- > In small work groups supervised directly by a Community Service Supervisor who works for the Probation Service. The Community Service Supervisor remains on site with the group of participants.
- > In individual placements: This is where a person may be placed on an individual placement with a host organisation, other than the Probation Service, who agree to allow them to work the requisite hours within their organisation. Host organisations who agree to allow Community Service participants work in their organisations are required to provide appropriate levels of supervision.

The IPRT scoping study on maternal imprisonment recommended that justice sector officials promote the use of gender-responsive CSOs for women offenders, developed to meet their specific needs including caretaking responsibilities. The study noted that previous research has indicated that unemployed, young, single men with poor education and living in the parental home are the most likely beneficiaries of CSOs by the Irish courts and that the use of CSOs for women is far less common. It said that the Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service have committed to developing women-specific CSO and CRS options.

In 2022, the Probation Service published an evidence-based review of community services policy, practice and structure.⁷³ The review's recommendations are intended to provide broad guidance to the Probation Service in the development of community service in Ireland, and to highlight key areas that require further investigation. Several difficulties were encountered by the reviewers, including information gaps on the operation of the CSO and its inconsistent application throughout the country. The review indicated that further research was needed to identify and understand aspects of the sanction that are working well. The review also stressed the importance of ongoing monitoring and assessment of community sanction management and operation. It identified a number of areas to monitor relating to the CSO, including the extent to which they were gender-responsive.

⁷³ Probation Service (2022), *An Evidence Review of Community Service Policy, Practice and Structure*, by Louise Kennewick and Eoin Guilfoyle, Dublin: Probation Service.

Appendix:

Examples of Programmes for Women Offenders

This appendix outlines examples of prison and community-based initiatives to support female prisoners in Ireland and the U.K. Particular focus is placed on profiling initiatives addressing issues relating to women prisoners, such as family relationships, counselling, education and training, and post-release accommodation.

Prison-Based Services in Ireland

In-Prison Programmes

The women in Dóchas live together in a community-style setting, accommodated in houses rather than cell block. The regime focuses on training and rehabilitation, including access to mental health services, psychology service and addiction counsellors.

Officially opened in October 2023, the new women's facility at Limerick, which provides accommodation for 56 women, is based on rehabilitation facilities in Scandinavia and have been designed in a trauma-informed and therapeutic way.⁷⁴ The accommodation comprises a mixture of bedroom units, some apartment-style units and a mother and baby unit, all with individual ensuites. The visiting area includes improved facilities with an outdoor space and a play area for children.

The Irish Prison Service, along with other statutory and non-statutory partners, provide supports and services to allow offenders to address the factors that led to their imprisonment. The Irish Prison Service, through the development of individual sentence management plans, provides offenders with the means to identify the factors leading to their imprisonment and provide an opportunity, while in custody, to address these factors. It has sought to enhance linkages with service providers in the community to help the transition of offenders from prison to the community.

⁷⁴ Irish Prison Reform Trust (2023), *Maternal Imprisonment in Ireland: A Scoping Study*, Dublin: Irish Penal Reform Trust.

The Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service run female-specific programmes within the criminal justice system which are profiled below.

Additionally, several voluntary organisations provide services to women in the prison system. For example, Exchange House Ireland, the national Travellers service, provides a weekly family support services to Traveller women in Dóchas. The National Traveller Women's Forum Ireland (NTWF) employs a Peer Support worker who supports and engages with Traveller women in Dóchas. Dublin Rape Crisis Centre provides outreach therapy to women in Dóchas, and Merchants Quay Ireland (MQI) provides addiction counselling services. MQI staff offer support, advice and counselling, focusing on accessing pre-entry and post-release options for women in addiction.

The Irish Prison Service also funds the provision of supports to family members visiting women in Dóchas. East Region Prison Visitor Centres is a collaboration between the Society of St. Vincent De Paul and the Dublin Quakers (Society of Friends). With funding and support from the Irish Prison Service, designated centres were first provided in 1999. There is a centre in Dóchas which provides visitors with free tea, coffee and snacks before and after their visits. The centre also has a fully equipped play area, which is staffed by qualified childcare workers. All the Prison Visitor Centres offer services to all those affected by the imprisonment of a loved one, including parenting advice and support, family support and information and advocacy services.

Limerick Women's Prison provides a multi-flexible visits regime to facilitate the provision of a variety of In-Reach services such as mental health services and addiction counselling. Organisations such as Bedford Row Family Project provide supports and services to women in the prison.

Bedford Row Family Project and Patch Work Play are the co-developers of *Playful Reconnections: Parenting Inside*, a unique psycho-therapeutic and psycho-educational intervention for women in Limerick Women's Prison. The programme, now in its third year, seeks to support mothers and other family caregivers in a prison setting. This programme aims to ultimately reduce the adverse effects of parental incarceration on a child and disrupt ongoing generational trauma and the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. Playful Reconnections also focuses on the individual's own childhood traumas and how this can impact their relationship with their child or family.

Resettlement and GATE

Irish Prison Service policy is that all releases from prisons are planned to ensure that an offender can make the informed and effective transition from prison to the community in compliance with statutory, legal and sentencing provisions. The Irish Association for the Social Inclusion Opportunities (IASIO)⁷⁵ is contracted by the Irish Prison Service to provide Resettlement Coordinators in each prison. Resettlement Coordinators take a case management approach to intervene with a prisoner 9 to 12 months pre-release to commence planning for post-release supports. This includes, amongst other functions, working with the individual in custody to submit housing, welfare and medical card applications well before release. They work with other services in prisons such as probation, counsellors, psychology and teachers.

⁷⁵ An additional Resettlement Coordinator is provided to Cork Prison by the Cork Local Drug and Alcohol Task Force.

The Irish Prison Service also works in cooperation with IASIO to deliver Gaining Access to Training and Employment (GATE), which is a vocational service offering guidance counselling and placement supports to prisoners referred to the service with the overall aim of securing a placement in training or employment post-release.

Community Return

The Community Return programme is an incentivised early release scheme co-managed by the Irish Prison Service and the Probation Service. It commenced in October 2011 and is now operational in every county and from every prison in the State. The Programme has been supported by the reallocation of resources and key personnel from within both services.

Community Return targets prisoners serving prison sentences of between 1 and 8 years who are making genuine efforts to desist from reoffending. Prisoners serving sentences of less than one year are ineligible for Community Return and may instead be considered for release under the Community Support Scheme. Persons serving sentences of over 8 years generally fall within the Parole Board process. The legislative basis for making decisions on Temporary Release is fully set out in the *Criminal Justice Act 1960*, as amended by the *Criminal Justice (Temporary Release of Prisoners) Act 2003*. Each application is considered on its individual merits and in line with the legislative provisions.

Equality and Human Rights

The Irish Prison Service's *Strategic Plan 2019–2022*⁷⁶ indicates that the Service had undertaken a pilot project with the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC). The pilot aimed to assess and address specific equality and human rights issues for women in prison and to inform the Service's approach to implementing the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. Both the Irish Prison Service and the Commission had previously collaborated in the development of a human rights training course for prison staff which reflects best international practice.

Family Links Programme

The Irish Prison Service assists the families of offenders in maintaining stable relationships by offering prisoners and their partners an opportunity to invest in developing the family unit through the Family Links Programme (formerly the Family Imprisonment Parenting Programme).

The Family Links initiative has two main aims: increasing awareness and support amongst prison staff on the importance of prisoners maintaining good family relationships and delivering a bespoke parent education programme for parents in prison and their partners.

76 Ibid.

The Family Links programme, which is delivered by the Irish Prison Service, Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) and the Parents Plus Charity, seeks to:

- > Reduce recidivism by improving and enhancing the relationship between parents in prison and their families and supporting this engagement both pre and post-release;
- > Implement strategies to foster a consistent approach to supporting connections between parents in prison and their children/families and enhancing this relationship.

The programme was implemented in Limerick Prison from October 2014 to March 2016.

An independent review⁷⁷ of the programme in 2017 found that:

- > Family Links enhanced empathy for parents amongst prison staff and raised awareness in relation to the benefits of a child-friendly prison.
- > Participants found that communication with their children improved; empathy for each other enhanced, and, for the women, an acceptance that self-care is important.
- > Families of prisoners experience stigma, isolation and financial strain.
- > Imprisoned fathers struggle with their identity as a father and as a prisoner.
- > Communication improved between fathers and mothers after the course.

The evaluators of the pilot described the initiative as ‘a sea-change in the way in which the Prison Service views and hopes to work with families affected by imprisonment.’⁷⁸ The positive experience in Limerick resulted in a commitment to roll out the initiative to all prisons. A CDI report⁷⁹ noted that while there was a short period of delivery in Castlerea and Wheatfield Prisons, there has been no Family Links activity in any prison since early 2018. The Irish Penal Reform Trust recommended in a 2021 report⁸⁰ that the Irish Prison Service should extend the Family Links programme across all prisons in Ireland.

Cork Prison In-Reach

It has long been recognised that prisoners and ex-prisoners are at greater risk of homelessness. They can also have additional complex needs that include mental and physical illness, drug and alcohol misuse and difficulties with inter-personal relationships, which in turn can lead to a loss of social support and behavioural problems. However, the services to address and counteract the complex needs of this group are provided by several statutory and voluntary agencies that exist within a fragmented system.

In 2007, Focus Ireland proposed the establishment of a Prison In-Reach Project in Cloverhill Prison in partnership with the Irish Prison Service, the Probation Service and the Homeless Persons Unit. In 2008, Prison In-Reach services were established in Cork (male prisoners only) and Limerick Prisons (male and female prisoners). These prisons were selected as locations as In-Reach services were less developed in these institutions.

77 Bradshaw, D., & Muldoon, O.T., 2017, “Family Links” Evaluation Report. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative (CDI).

78 Childhood Development Initiative, 2018, *Implementation Guide for Family Links*, Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

79 Childhood Development Initiative, 2019, *Prisoners Returning Home: Prisoners and Family Reintegration*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

80 Irish Penal Reform Trust, 2021, *Piecing It Together: Supporting Children and Families with a Family Member In Prison in Ireland*, IPRT, Dublin.

The overall aim of the pilot project was to provide a seamless transition from prison to the community, for offenders who have been previously homeless or may be at risk of homelessness on release from custody. The project worked with prisoners at risk of homelessness to ensure that there were accommodation options available to them upon their release. This was to ensure an easy transition from prison to emergency, transitional or more long-term accommodation options in the community and to provide follow-up supports using a case management model.

The In-Reach project worker engaged with those at risk of homelessness pre-release, assessed their needs, developed a case plan and implemented the case plan post-release.

The Cork project was evaluated and covered the period, July 2009 to July 2011, and involved the provision of support services to 30 service users. The evaluation⁸¹ found that the project worker had interacted with the service users prior to their release to assess their needs and to develop a case plan and liaised with other services and also had worked collaboratively with the Post-Release Service. The report made a number of recommendations, including that the project partners should collectively consider how the absence of step-down, high- or low-support accommodation in Cork could be addressed. Another recommendation was that the project partners should consider the opportunity presented by Integrated Sentence Management (ISM) to provide concurrent notification of unplanned releases to prisoners and the project worker.

Community-Based Services in Ireland

This section profiles community-based programmes that can be accessed by female offenders. The Women's Outlook programme is a perfect example of a community-based initiative specifically for female offenders.

Pathways

Established in 1996, the Pathways Centre is an outreach initiative of the City of Dublin Education and Training Board (CDETB) Education Service to Prisons. The Pathways Centre offers respite to former prisoners in the crucial period after release by providing information, education, counselling, support and referral in a safe and understanding environment.

The Centre's programme comprises four core elements:

- 1 Peer support work.
- 2 Educational programmes and activities.
- 3 Guidance counselling.
- 4 Personal addiction counselling.

81 Sarma, K. (2014), *Evaluation of the Cork Prison In-Reach Pilot Project*, report commissioned by Focus Ireland, Dublin.

The Pathways Centre provides a wide range of classes and services, including maths and literacy skills, coping with change, health and fitness, social studies, creative skills and addiction studies. The centre offers blended learning courses delivered through online teaching and activities and classroom-based learning.

The Pathways Centre is open to former prisoners, their families, and members of the wider community.

Prisoners who are due for release and wish to avail of what the Pathways Centre offers can apply to their prison's Education Unit, the ISM officer or the Training and Employment officer for referral. If suitable, a staff worker from the Pathways Centre will call to see them in the prison. Where a person has already been released from prison, they can contact the Pathways Centre directly.

The majority of Outlook participants are referred to Pathways.

PALLS

PALLS, based in Limerick, is an education and training centre which provides individual support for purposeful change for people involved with the Probation Service and the criminal justice system.

The project works with men and women over the age of 23 who are clients of the Probation Service. PALLS supports women in addiction through the Helping Women Recover Programme (HWR), men and women on temporary release from Limerick Prison through the Community Support Scheme (CSS) and female prisoners through the PALLS Art Therapy Programme. The organisation also has a Drug Rehabilitation CE Scheme.

Additionally, PALLS has initiated a horticulture project providing a therapeutic space and horticulture training for participants.

SAOL/BRIO (Building Recovery Inwards & Outwards) Programme

SAOL is an integrated education, rehabilitation, advocacy and childcare community-based programme based in Dublin. SAOL works to promote the needs of female drug users and their children.

SAOL works with the Probation Service to deliver the BRIO (Building Recovery Inwards & Outwards) programme, a 2-year education and training programme for women who have dual issues of criminality and addiction. The BRIO programme links participants with community-based education and other services which support the women's recovery and progression.

BRIO focuses on helping participants to change their behaviour and attitudes towards drugs and criminality through peer-to-peer learning. Many of the women who help deliver the programme are themselves former participants. The BRIO programme incorporates various training modules, including 'Reduce the Use', a harm reduction module, 'RecoverMe', a personal development module and 'Solas sa SAOL', dealing with domestic violence and learning to stay safe. In addition, SAOL's educational approach is heavily influenced by Trauma Informed Care and Practice (TICP), as trauma is extensively prevalent among its client group.

A typical profile of the women attending BRIO includes early school leaving, basic education, drug addiction, poverty, poor housing, and in some cases, homelessness and criminality. Clients of the Outlook Programme have been referred to BRIO and have attended SAOL. Unlike the Outlook programme, BRIO does not have a residential component.

Tus Nua

Depaul established Tus Nua in 2003 as a result of research and visits to prisons in Dublin by the Guild of St. Philip Neri and a St. Vincent de Paul conference, which recognised an acute need for programmes to assist women released from prison in their transition to independent living in the community. The aim is to provide safe housing and a positive environment for women in the criminal justice system.

Tus Nua can accommodate 15 women in a communal setting with single rooms for up to 6 months. Each room is furnished and contains a kitchenette. All residents have access to communal spaces and a garden. Each resident is appointed a key worker, with whom they work together to identify a support plan for their stay addressing: life skills, budgeting, alcohol harm reduction, detox access, and physical and mental health support. A gender- and trauma-informed approach underpins the work.

Working in partnership with the Probation Service, Tus Nua aims to reduce the risk of re-offending by:

- > Supporting women subject to Probation Service supervision/following release from custody.
- > Addressing needs arising from substance misuse, mental health issues and homelessness.
- > Assisting in the development of life skills.
- > Identifying opportunities to help residents live independently upon leaving Tus Nua and to take a positive role in their community
- > All referrals to Tus Nua are from Dóchas and are through the Probation Service. Additionally, some referrals may be on Temporary Release and others will be subject to Probation Service supervision.

Supports for Families of Prisoners in Ireland

Visitor Centres – Bedford Row and St. Nicholas Trust

The CDI report, *Prisoners Returning Home*,⁸² says that Irish prisons rely heavily on community-based organisations and charities to support families of prisoners through the operation of visitor centres. The report profiles two organisations: the Bedford Row Family Project, which provides services in Limerick and Clare, and St. Nicholas Trust, which offers services in Cork. Both organisations support families of prisoners.

⁸² Childhood Development Initiative, (2019). *Prisoners Returning Home: Prisoners and Family Reintegration*. Dublin: Childhood Development Initiative.

Bedford Row Family Project is a charity that receives core funding from the Irish Prison Service and provides a variety of services. This includes hospitality in the waiting area at Limerick Prison, as well as support and counselling (including play therapy) for prisoners, partners and children. It also provides information, referral and advocacy services, and re-integration of prisoners through meeting with individuals in prison and post-release, as well as a providing a 'Family Link' Social Worker.

As noted above, Bedford Row Family Project is a co-developer of the Playful Reconnections programme that supports mothers in Limerick Women's Prison.

Established in 2008, St. Nicholas Trust is a family support service with several key objectives. These include raising public awareness about the experiences of prisoners' families, providing practical information to families when a loved one is sentenced to prison, and offering a safe, confidential environment for families to discuss their issues. Additionally, the Trust advocates for the rights of prisoners' children and facilitates positive reintegration to help prevent reoffending. The service offers support and provides information to new members, seeking to empower them rather than advise them.

U.K. Project Examples

Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison Initiative (England)

The Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison initiative is an informal partnership of the London Prisons Mission (LPM), the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields and the Prison Reform Trust that works with women leaving prison to homelessness to provide realistic solutions to their plight.

The partnership began in early 2019 when LPM volunteers working inside London's Bronzefield Prison learned that up to 50 women were leaving prison each month to homelessness, putting them at risk of abuse, recall and reoffending. It was also discovered that the prison chaplaincy gave out sleeping bags as women were being released without anywhere to go.⁸³

Homelessness is a known risk factor for reoffending, and this is especially the case for women.⁸⁴ The partnership quoted Baroness Corston, who, in her 2007 review, pointed out that "*the accommodation pathway is the most in need of speedy, fundamental gender-specific reform*" and over a decade later, this had still not been achieved. In February 2020, the Independent Monitoring Boards in ten of the 12 women's prisons conducted a survey of women being released – only 41% of women interviewed said they had housing to go to on release. The report also found that a quarter of the women had lost their homes due to imprisonment, often as a result of a very short prison sentence. The point is made repeatedly by women that being released to homelessness or to unsuitable, temporary or unsafe housing means they are being "set up to fail".

83 House of Commons Justice Committee. (2021). Written evidence submitted by the Prison Reform Trust (PRT) (MRS0071). <https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/36743/pdf/>

84 London Prisons Mission, Prison Reform Trust, the Church of St Martin-in-the-Fields, 2020, *Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison*, London: UK.

The Safe Homes for Women Leaving Prison Initiative partnership maintains that the profile of women in prison is different from men, and this profoundly affects their resettlement needs including the kind of housing support that should be provided. Women are:

- > more likely to be imprisoned far from home;
- > more likely to be a primary carer so requiring accommodation that enables them to be reunited with their children on release;
- > more likely to be at risk of domestic and sexual abuse and may therefore need to relocate for safety;
- > more likely to have been in care as a child and therefore have less family support;
- > more likely to have significant physical and mental health problems, often deriving from past abuse and trauma, for which access to health and social support services is critical;
- > less likely than men to be rough sleeping and are often described as the 'hidden homeless' because rather than put themselves at risk on the street they will tend to 'sofa surf', exchange sex or risk exposure to abusive and coercive relationships for a roof over their heads.

218 Project (Scotland)

Increased numbers of women in custody and a rise in a series of suicides in Scotland's only women's prison led to a review of the use of imprisonment and non-custodial sentences for female offenders. The review concluded that the background of women who offend and the circumstances which lead to their offending meant that prison was, for the most part, an inappropriate and potential damaging disposal for this group. An Inter-Agency Forum was set up to establish services for women in the criminal justice system and it recommended the establishment of a 'Time Out' centre to provide residential and non-residential support services for women. The 218 Project, based in Glasgow, was set up in 2003.⁸⁵

Based on a single site, the 218 Project provides a specialist facility incorporating a day service and supported accommodation for up to 12 women offenders aged 18 years and over. It provides a safe environment for women to address offending behaviour, including residential and daily support for detoxification, prescribing facilities, helping women to avert crises in their lives and enabling women to move on and reintegrate into society. It uses a therapeutic, trauma-informed and case management approach and its support programme is provided either as an alternative to a custodial sentence or as part of a Community Payback Order (CPO). It also provides Bail Bed accommodation within the residential unit as an alternative to remand.

Interventions include regular one-to-one therapeutic sessions, psychoeducational group work, psychological therapies, physical health advice and education, and maintenance of opioid replacement therapy (ORT) to promote safety and stabilisation. Additionally, there are links to community recovery support networks and a variety of other therapeutic activities. All these enable the women to create a range of tools and healthy coping strategies to build resilience and support them to manage and manoeuvre through their recovery journey.

⁸⁵ The project was originally called the Time Out Centre.

Selected candidates are assessed and provided with four weeks of pre-admission support and preparation for a 16-week residential stay. Women are supported to develop a move-on plan and up to 4 weeks aftercare is provided to women returning to the community.

Housing for Women (England)

Housing for Women (H4W) is a registered charity and independent housing association. It champions female empowerment by providing and promoting affordable homes for women and gender-specific support services. The organisation owns and manages over 920 homes across eleven London boroughs.

Housing for Women operates two specialist accommodation programmes, ReUnite and ReConnect, for women leaving prison who are vulnerable to destitution and have at least one co-occurring support need.

ReUnite works with mothers leaving prison who would otherwise be homeless. The project strives to address the difficult catch-22 of mothers being made homeless when imprisoned, then struggling to regain care and custody of their children upon release because they do not have adequate family housing. The programme provides:

- > Supported Accommodation: H4W provides accommodation for mothers exiting the criminal justice system with space for group work and therapeutic services. Experienced support workers provide advocacy, practical and emotional support for issues including employment, debt, practical living skills and community involvement.
- > Support for children and young people: H4W's dedicated Children and Young People's Support Workers directly support children of H4W's service users, helping them re-establish healthy bonds with their mothers and overcome the trauma they may have experienced. The support workers also advocate and liaise with social services and family courts where appropriate, regarding issues of contact and custody.
- > Floating Support Service: the organisation provides support and advocacy services to help women in the community secure accommodation through a range of housing providers.

ReConnect offers supported accommodation for women dealing with substance misuse and with complex needs on release from prison. It combines housing and holistic support to help women to bring about positive changes in their lives, reduce substance misuse, improve their emotional well-being and prevent future re-offending.

On-site staff help residents to access support from local substance misuse and community mental health services, as well as GPs and counselling to help women improve confidence, independent living skills and mental health.

H4W provides women with a period of stability and routine so that they can re-orientate their lives, establish wider support networks and support their transition from prison into the community.

Both the ReUnite and ReConnect programmes require that women are in receipt of, or eligible for, public funds, as placements are funded through Housing Benefit. A local connection is not required; referrals are accepted for any borough.

Hestia Battersea (England)

Hestia is a London-based homelessness service founded in 1970. Today, the organisation provides various services across the city, including criminal justice services. Hestia says its criminal justice services recognise the impact of trauma on those who commit crimes, and its criminal justice teams work with service users to develop robust risk management plans. Hestia's multi-agency approach works alongside key professionals such as police, probation, substance misuse and mental health services, amongst others, to help prevent victims and protect the public. The organisation takes a gender-informed approach to its work, recognising that female offenders often have a different journey towards and through the Criminal Justice System than their male counterparts.

Hestia operates several Approved Premises (APs), which are premises approved under the UK's Offender Management Act 2007. They provide intensive supervision for those with a high or very high risk of serious harm. Additionally, APs play a role in monitoring and managing the risk of their residents. They also provide key workers and a programme of purposeful activity that is intended to help with reducing re-offending and reintegration into society.

In 2020, Hestia changed its AP in Battersea from male to female, where it works with service users to support them to better manage their mental health, substance misuse or other additional needs, therefore reducing their risk of future offending.

Following extensive refurbishment, the Battersea AP has been designed to be an environment that is not only warm and welcoming but is a physically and psychologically safe space for residents to begin their rehabilitative journey. Staff focus on the development of physical and mental wellbeing in order to build a strong foundation for re-integrating in society. The work that is carried out in Battersea additionally recognises the impact of trauma on those who commit crimes, which is particularly true of women who offend.

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