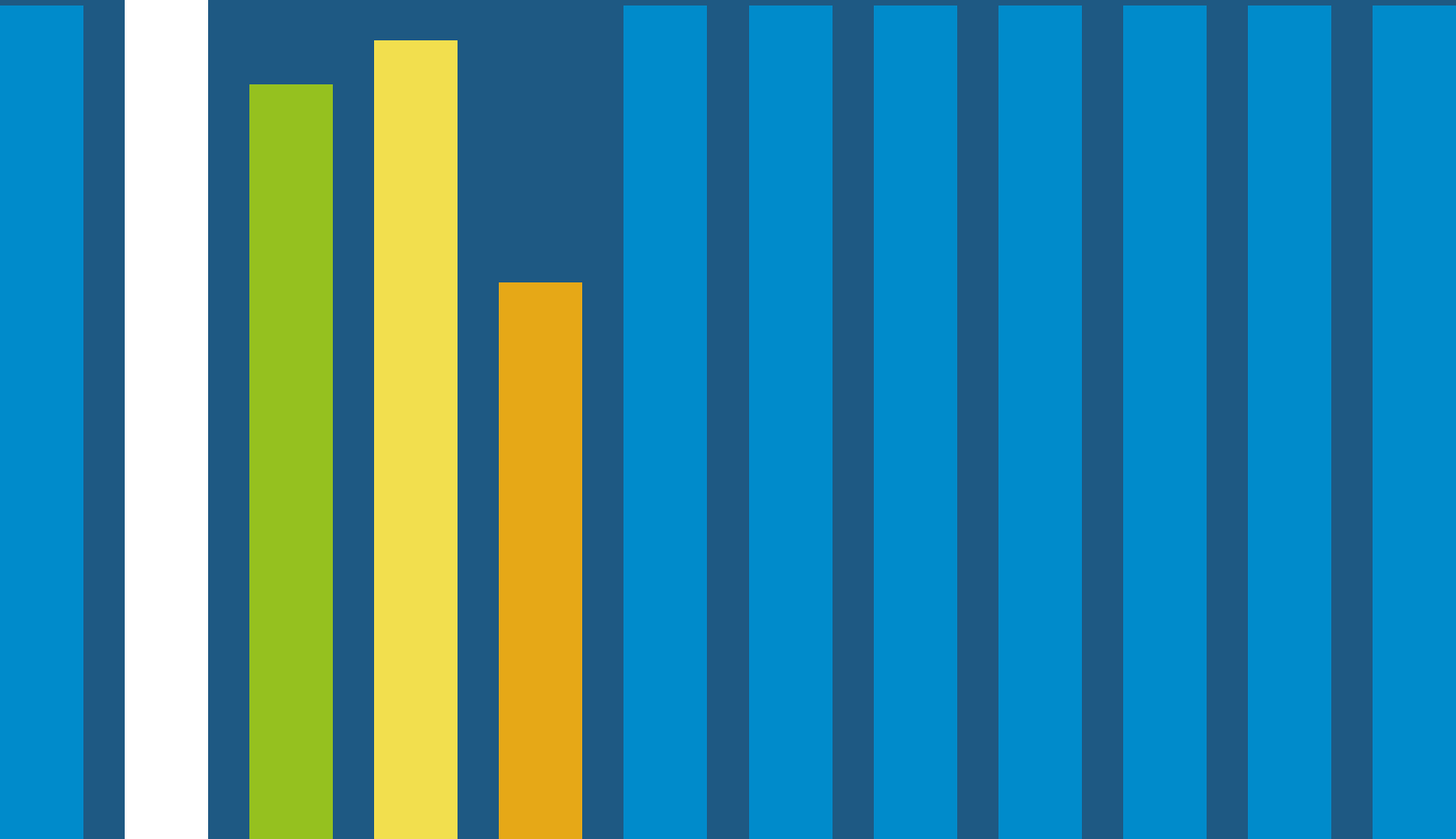


## PRISON RESEARCH REPORT

# Equality of Access to Information and Services Enhances Personal Power

Exploring the subjective experience of prisoners  
in accessing information and assistance from  
outside state services and other vital services.

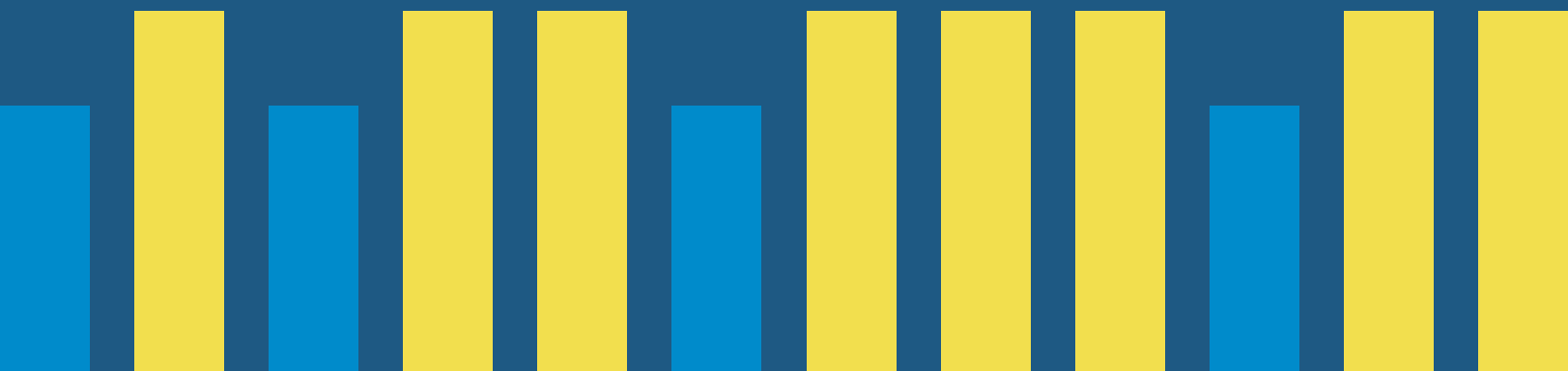
A report on behalf of South Leinster  
Citizens Information Service (SLCIS).



This project has received funding from the Irish Human Rights and Equality Grants Scheme as part of the Commission's statutory power to provide grants to promote human rights and equality under the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

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# Foreword

by Gemma Culleton  
Prisons Information Officer

The Citizens Information Service (CIS) in Portlaoise has delivered an In-reach service to the Midlands Prison for over two decades. The Information Officers providing this service have observed first-hand the barriers prisoners encounter in accessing outside State Services and other vital services as they seek information and assistance to deal with personal matters. The Information Officers believe that this experience leads to social inequality and discrimination, adding to the prisoners' sense of isolation and loss of self-efficacy.

The CIS experience in delivering the Prison In-reach service tells us that prisoners are often forgotten about when planning how outside State Services and other vital services are accessed. Accordingly, in trying to assist prisoners with matters concerning their personal lives, the CIS, as service providers, have to continually find alternative strategies to remove access barriers. This experience has long indicated that prisoners and their advocates encounter real obstacles as they try to deal with personal matters while in prison. However, until now, research in this area has been scant and empirical evidence lacking.

In an effort to remedy this, South Leinster Citizens Information Service embarked on the Prison Research Project with the aim of exploring the lived experience of prisoners in the Midlands Prison as they try to access information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital services on personal matters - such as banking, housing, social welfare, travel and immigration. All of these are very real and relevant issues to people who are in prison, just as they are to people on the outside. Prisoners have rights which must be protected, despite the removal of their liberty. They also have families and loved ones whom they must still support, despite their incarceration. And prisoners are acutely aware of the need to have official paperwork and services in order so that their transition back into society is not needlessly complex.

It is hoped that the evidence and recommendations documented in this report will contribute in some way to the protection of prisoners' rights and entitlements and that it will promote equality of access to State Services and other vital services as prisoners attempt to deal with personal matters while in prison.

*Gemma Culleton*



# Executive Summary

This Research Project focused primarily on the experience of prisoners in trying to deal with personal matters while in prison. The Research explored prisoners' thoughts on the importance of keeping their personal documentation, such as passport and driving licence, as well as personal services, such as banking, updated while they were in prison. It also identified how prisoners approach dealing with personal matters from prison. The data gathered identified the barriers encountered by prisoners as they tried to access information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital services and how these barriers impacted on the prisoners' sense of wellbeing.

Access to the services offered by the outside State Services and other vital service providers proved to be very difficult for prisoners. In general access to such services is by phone, in person or online. These are options that are not readily available to prisoners. Phone calls are of limited duration for prisoners, online access is limited to the minority of prisoners who are taking advanced courses of study and is limited to that area, and prisoners cannot attend State Services or other vital service providers in person, for obvious reasons.

The Research Report contains many suggestions on how the barriers encountered by prisoners when trying to access outside State Services and other vital services might be overcome. The Report highlights the need for meaningful dialogue between the IPS and outside State Services and other vital services to consider how access to these services might be extended to the prison community.

The Research makes many recommendations, such as;

- The need for acknowledgement by State Services and vital service providers that the normal access routes to avail of their services are, in general, not a realistic option for prisoners in closed prisons.
- A fresh approach to providing access to services to these citizens is required, based on listening and responding to their reality.
- Extended phone calls should be facilitated if a prisoner needs to access an outside State Service or other vital service provider by phone.
- Limited online access to specific websites should be provided to enable prisoners to make online applications, where this is the only option available for accessing a service.
- All service providers should be obliged to provide alternative ways of engaging with the prison community.
- A Professional Digital Intermediary Service should be introduced to reduce prisoners' reliance on individuals such as family and prison staff.
- The IPS, CIB, all State Services and other vital services should ensure they give full expression to their legal obligation to implement the Public Sector and Human Rights Duty.

## CHAPTER ONE

# Introduction

### 1.1 The Citizens Information Prison In-reach Service

The Citizens Information Service (CIS) in Portlaoise has delivered an In-reach service to the Midlands Prison for over 20 years. This free, confidential service provides information, advice, assistance and advocacy to all members of the prisoner community in the Midlands Prison who wish to avail of the service. Those who avail of the service self-refer, as they would to their local CIS on the outside. This gives the prisoner choice, which forges a relationship different from what he might have with a mandatory service imposed on him concerning his prison sentence.

The CIS functions as an independent, autonomous body in the delivery of its service in the Midlands Prison. The CIS staff are wholly independent of the prison authorities, giving prisoners the confidence to seek information, advice, assistance and advocacy on all personal issues and matters relating to the life that continues on the outside as they serve their sentence.

The CIS In-reach staff are non-judgmental in their dealings with prisoners. They do not ask prisoners why they are in prison. The rationale for this is that when a client presents in a CIC, they are not asked whether they have a criminal record and what crime they were convicted of. In-reach staff meet each individual as a person, with their presenting query and if having a criminal record is a relevant part of an application form, the In-reach staff are then obliged to gather this information.

The service is delivered weekly, in person, to maintain relationships with prisoners and staff in this unique environment. The physical presence of the CIS staff in the Midlands Prison contributes greatly to the excellent working relationship between the CIS and the IPS. Over the years, healthy respect and appreciation for our individual roles have evolved, creating a space for both services to function in harmony. The CIS In-reach staff depend on the goodwill of the IPS staff to facilitate their service. Accommodating an independent, confidential information service in a prison setting, where security is paramount, is not without its challenges. Credit is due to both the IPS and the CIS for their accommodative spirit in enabling the Citizens Information Service to be made available to the prisoner community, despite the restrictions of the prison environment.

For the In-reach service to grow and be effective, the CIS needed to gain the trust, confidence and respect of the prisoner community. This required a patient willingness to turn up weekly, year-in and year-out, to allow a relationship of trust to develop between the prisoners and the CIS. Today, this relationship has become the most important feature of the Prison In-reach service.

The ultimate aim of the CIS in the Midlands Prison is to ensure that the prisoner community, a marginalised group in Irish society, has access to an impartial information, advice, assistance and advocacy service concerning their public and social rights and entitlements. Through its work in the Midlands Prison, the CIS also strives to ensure that the hurdles faced by prisoners in accessing information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital services are highlighted, as part of the CIS's Social Policy remit. This research project furthers this aim by gathering the subjective experience of prisoners in accessing information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital Service providers, identifying the barriers they encounter and exploring potential options for their removal.

## 1.2 Research Objectives

The main objectives of the research are fourfold: first, to set out the human rights framework that protects the rights of prisoners as citizens, to have equal access to information and public services, and the responsibilities of duty-bearers to respect, protect and fulfil those rights; second, to identify the difficulties and barriers prisoners encounter when trying to access information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital services; third, to document the different ways in which prisoners cope when trying to access such information and assistance; and fourth, to give a voice to the prisoner community on the difficulties they experience when the life that continues on the "outside" requires action on their part while they are still "inside" and to enable them to suggest changes that could improve their lives.





## CHAPTER TWO

# Methodology

### 2.1 Introduction

The research was a mix of desk, quantitative and qualitative research. The primary mode of garnering the prisoners' views was through interviews and surveys.

### 2.2 Desk Research

Using desk research, the international, European and national human rights standards concerning prisoners and their rights of access to information and services were set out. This included the obligations that public sector bodies, including the IPS, CIB and IHREC, have to implement the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty. IHREC also has the responsibility for monitoring the implementation of the Public Sector Duty in Ireland.

### 2.3 Preparation for Research Project

On 17th September 2021, the Researcher submitted an Information leaflet on the research to the Chief Officer Work and Training for publication in the Midlands Prison newsletter. This was to promote the research project within the prisoner community in the Midlands Prison. All prisoners interested in participating in the research were advised to give their names to their Class Officer by 11th October 2021. Information on the research project was placed on the Internal Prison TV Channel to ensure prisoners with literacy difficulties were aware of the research project.

The names of prisoners interested in taking part in the research project were collected from the Class Officer by the Chief Officer on 11th October 2021. The Chief Officer input the details of each prisoner on an analysis sheet (age, landing, gender, nationality and cultural background, level of education and length of sentence). This sheet did not show the prisoner's name, just their prison number.

The Researcher randomly selected 13 participants, ensuring a balanced mix of the differentiating features listed above.

Any prisoner who volunteered but was not randomly selected for the interview was offered a short quantitative questionnaire. The data gathered from these questionnaires contributes to the findings of this research report. The Red Cross volunteers in the Midlands Prison distributed and collected

the questionnaires, and were available to assist any prisoner facing any difficulty in completing the questionnaire.

The Researcher liaised with the Chief Officer regarding organising the interview times.

Consents were signed at the interview stage. All interviews lasted approximately 30-40 minutes and were conducted in the screened visiting area of the Midlands Prison. All interviews with prisoners were conducted over the last quarter of 2021.

The Irish Prison Service (IPS) accorded permission for the research to be conducted on-site in the Midlands Prison. The longstanding relationship, founded on mutual respect, goodwill and trust between the CIS and the IPS was paramount in transcending any potential difficulty regarding an application to conduct research in the prison setting. The Researcher ensured informed consent was gathered from each participant and confidentiality was guaranteed. Interviewees were advised that they could withdraw from the research at any stage of the process.

## 2.4 Research Interviews

A qualitative approach was adopted as the most appropriate method for the research since it entailed research into the lived experience of prisoners. In-depth interviews were conducted with 13 prisoners. Two further interviews were conducted with senior staff from the Midlands Prison.

The interviews with the prisoners were guided by a pre-prepared series of questions. The interview was in a conversational style, its direction guided by the prisoners' responses. As no recording device is permitted in the prison, the prisoners' responses to the questions were transcribed by the interviewer or her assistant. Some of the sentences were later reconstructed to provide clarity to the meaning intended by the prisoner.

## 2.5 Research Questionnaires

In addition, 14 other prisoners who had expressed an interest in the study, completed a questionnaire which was a much shorter version of the interview questions. The data gathered from the responses to these questionnaires has been used in the writing of this report.

## CHAPTER THREE

# International, European and National Legal and Policy Standards

### 3.1 Introduction

Though prisoners are deprived of their liberty, it does not mean that they should be deprived of other human rights. In fact, they retain all of their rights to the greatest possible extent. Several international, European and national legal and policy sources seek to ensure that prisoners are treated with human dignity and respect for their human rights.

### 3.2 International Human Rights Framework

Ireland has ratified several international human rights treaties, which impose binding obligations on Ireland. These treaties are:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights,
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment,
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, and
- International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Several United Nations (UN) documents also contain detailed guidelines for protecting the rights of persons deprived of liberty. Perhaps the most important international guidelines are the [2015 United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners \(A/RES/70/175\)](#), also called the *Nelson Mandela Rules*. These guidelines are not legally binding but are highly authoritative and can guide the State in protecting the human rights of prisoners.

The Nelson Mandela Rules contain broad and detailed rules on the treatment of prisoners, relating to, for example, accommodation, healthcare, exercise, contact with the outside world, and discipline and sanctions; they also include specific rules for different categories of prisoners. Of these, only those most relevant to prisoners' access to information and services need to be summarised here.

The Nelson Mandela Rules include among their general principles the need to use the period of imprisonment to ensure the reintegration of the person into society upon release (Rule 104), as well as the principle that “[t]he prison regime should seek to minimize any differences between prison life and life at liberty that tend to lessen the responsibility of the prisoners or the respect due to their dignity as human beings” (Rule 5).

In relation specifically to prisoners under sentence, the Nelson Mandela Rules include the following among the guiding principles:

- Before the completion of the sentence, it is desirable that necessary steps be taken to ensure for the prisoner a gradual return to life in society. This aim may be achieved, depending on the case, by a pre-release regime organized in the same prison or in another appropriate institution, or by release on trial under some kind of supervision which must not be entrusted to the police but should be combined with effective social aid. (Rule 87)
- The treatment of prisoners should emphasize not their exclusion from the community but their continuing part in it. Community agencies should therefore be enlisted wherever possible to assist the prison staff in the task of social rehabilitation of the prisoners. (Rule 88.1)
- There should be in connection with every prison a social worker charged with the duty of maintaining and improving all desirable relations of a prisoner with his or her family and with valuable social agencies. Steps should be taken to safeguard, to the maximum extent compatible with the law and the sentence, the rights relating to civil interests, social security rights and other social benefits of prisoners. (Rule 88.2)

Under the title “Treatment”, the Nelson Mandela Rules recall that the “treatment of persons sentenced to imprisonment or a similar measure shall have as its purpose, so far as the length of the sentence permits, to establish in them the will to lead law-abiding and self-supporting lives after their release and to fit them to do so” and state that “the treatment shall be such as will encourage their self-respect and develop their sense of responsibility.” (Rule 91).

Finally, the Nelson Mandela Rules also include specific provisions on “Social Relations and Aftercare”. These provisions stipulate, *inter alia*, that:

- From the beginning of a prisoner’s sentence, consideration shall be given to his or her future after release and he or she shall be encouraged and provided assistance to maintain or establish such relations with persons or agencies outside the prison as may promote the prisoner’s rehabilitation and the best interests of his or her family. (Rule 107); and that
- Services and agencies, governmental or otherwise, which assist released prisoners in re-establishing themselves in society shall ensure, so far as is possible and necessary, that

released prisoners are provided with appropriate documents and identification papers, have suitable homes and work to go to, are suitably and adequately clothed having regard to the climate and season and have sufficient means to reach their destination and maintain themselves in the period immediately following their release. (Rule 108.1)

### 3.3 Regional (European) Framework

Ireland has also ratified several Conventions adopted by the European Council, including the European Convention on Human Rights (the ECHR), the European Social Charter, and the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. All these Conventions apply to prisoners too.

The European Council has also issued several recommendations on the treatment of prisoners in detention, and other aspects of penal policy. Among these, the [European Prison Rules](#) (adopted in 2006, and revised and amended in 2020) represent a widely recognised, comprehensive, and up-to-date set of key legal standards and principles related to prison management, staff and treatment of detainees. Like the Nelson Mandela Rules, they are not binding on the State but can guide its actions.

The European Prison Rules emphasise the need to respect the human rights of all persons deprived of their liberty (Rule 1), with prisoners retaining all rights not lawfully taken away by the decision sentencing them or remanding them in custody (Rule 2). Life in prison should be as close as possible to the positive aspects of life in the community (Rule 5), and detention should be managed so as to facilitate the prisoner's reintegration into society (Rule 6). Moreover, cooperation with outside social services and, as far as possible, the involvement of social society in prison life, shall be encouraged (Rule 7).

The European Prison Rules provisions on the conditions of imprisonment include rules on contact with the outside world, providing that "prisoners shall be allowed to communicate as often as possible—by letter, telephone or other forms of communication—with their families, other persons and representatives of outside organisations, and to receive visits from these persons." (Rule 24.1). Moreover, the European Prison Rules contain specific provisions for sentenced prisoners. On the objective of the regime for sentenced prisoners, the Rules stipulate that "the regime for sentenced prisoners shall be designed to enable them to lead a responsible and crime-free life" (Rule 102.1). On the implementation of the regime for sentenced prisoners, the Rules provide that as soon as possible after admission to prison, "reports shall be drawn up for sentenced prisoners about their personal situations, the proposed sentence plans for each of them and the strategy for preparation for their release" (Rule 103.2).

The European Prison Rules also contain detailed rules on the release of sentenced prisoners, including that:

- Sentenced prisoners shall be assisted in good time prior to release by procedures and special programmes enabling them to make the transition from life in prison to a law-abiding life in the community. (Rule 107.1)
- In the case of prisoners with longer sentences, in particular, steps shall be taken to ensure a gradual return to life in free society. (Rule 107.2)
- This aim may be achieved by a pre-release programme in prison or by partial or conditional release under supervision combined with effective social support. (Rule 107.3)
- Prison authorities shall work closely with services and agencies that supervise and assist released prisoners, to enable all sentenced prisoners to re-establish themselves in the community, in particular with regard to family life and employment. (Rule 107.4)
- Representatives of such social services or agencies shall be afforded all necessary access to the prison and to prisoners, to allow them to assist with preparations for release and the planning of after-care programmes. (Rule 107.5)

When implementing European Union Law, Ireland is also bound by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

### 3.4 National Level

The most important laws that protect human rights made at the national level include the Constitution (Bunreacht na hÉireann) and the [European Convention on Human Rights Act 2003](#). The latter implements the standards set out in the European Convention on Human Rights in Irish national law. This enables these rights to be considered before Irish Courts.

In Ireland, the [Prison Rules 2007](#) (as amended) set out the rules and regulations concerning the various conditions in prisons. The drafting of these Prison Rules was influenced by the 2006 European Prison Rules. A [review of the Prison Rules](#) is currently in progress, particularly in light of the publication of the updated European Prison Rules in 2020.

Under Rule 44, letters sent by prisoners to certain organisations or bodies will not be opened before they are sent. Prison staff will post them without delay (IPRT and ICCL, 2021). These include letters to the prisoner's solicitor (legal advisor), the Minister for Justice and the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission.

### 3.4.1 PUBLIC SECTOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUALITY DUTY

Since 2014, the Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty ('Public Sector Duty') has been part of the legislative framework governing human rights and equality in Ireland. Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 ('2014 Act')<sup>1</sup> imposes a legal obligation on public bodies to consider the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of those to whom they provide services and staff in the process of their daily work. It puts equality and human rights in the mainstream of how public bodies execute their functions.

Public Sector Duty requires public bodies to undertake an assessment of the equality and human rights issues pertaining to their purpose and functions, to devise an action plan to address the issues raised in the assessment, and to report annually on progress and achievements concerning the identified actions. To fulfil this requirement, the Commission's guidance recommends that public bodies consult with staff and service users to identify issues and actions, monitor progress and consult research and other reports from civil society organisations<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, the relevant public bodies should also have regard to the findings in this report when performing their Duty.

The Irish Prison Service Oversight Agreement 2022-24 between the Department of Justice and the Irish Prison Service provides that the latter will have full regard for its obligations under section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. Strategic Objective 5.6 of the Irish Prison Service ("the IPS") Strategic Plan 2019-2022 is to continue to meet their obligations under the Public Sector Duty.

The Duty also places a legal obligation on public bodies who may interact with the IPS, such as regulatory and oversight bodies, or prisoners in a service user capacity such as the Department of Social Protection, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Legal Aid Board, the National Driving Licence Authority or the Revenue Commissioners. This obligation equally applies to the Central Bank as a regulatory body for banks in Ireland. In the performance of their functions, all these bodies must also ensure due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect the human rights of staff and service users.

The Oversight Agreement 2020-22 between the Office of the Inspector of Prisons (the OIP) and the Department of Justice provides that the Inspector will have full regard for his/her obligations under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014. The IPS Framework for the Inspection of Prisons in Ireland includes the Duty as one of its indicative measures in assessing the environment during prison inspections.

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1 See [Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014](#).

2 Further information and guidance on the Duty can be found at: <http://www.ihrec.ie/our-work/public-sector-duty>.

The Duty was referenced in a recommendation in the OIPs COVID-19 Thematic Inspection of Limerick Prison on 6 - 7 April 2021. The OIP included the duty concerning the Irish Prison Service providing information to certain cohorts, such as foreign national prisoners and prisoners with disabilities.

The following recommendation was made by the OIP:

*“Recommendation 2: In order to ensure effective information provision to all prisoners, in line with Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act, the Inspectorate urges Limerick Prison to promptly introduce information dissemination by way of TV channel. The information provided on the channel should be in a language and form that can be understood by prisoners and may require complementary modes of information dissemination.”*

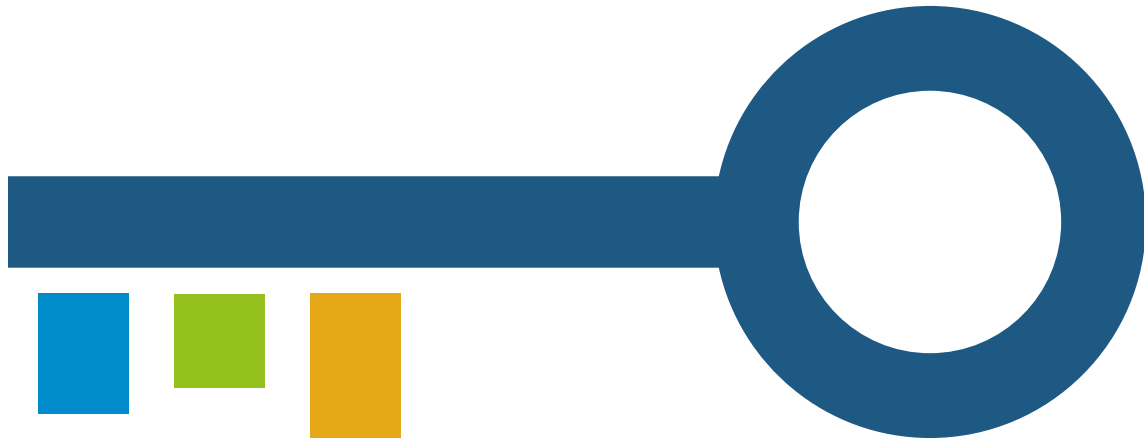
All the aforesaid bodies must assess, address and report on human rights and equality issues in a publicly accessible manner in strategic plans and annual reports. The implementation of the Duty can ensure that gaps in the accessing of information and State Services can be identified as human rights and/or equality issues and subsequently rectified.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission guidelines emphasise the importance of duty bearers consulting with rights holders and their representative organisations to enable a participatory evidence-based approach to the implementation of the Duty. Consultation with Civil Society Organisations can also be utilised to identify clear sources of information to inform scrutiny of issues or gaps, which can ensure an evidence-based approach to the assessment and to prioritising issues.

The Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission recommends that public bodies such as the Irish Prison Service should adopt an evidence-based approach to assess such gaps and issues and consult with prisoner representatives. The Commission’s guidance on the Duty recommends the following:

- Assessment of equality and human rights issues is conducted, and its ongoing review is integrated into the strategic planning cycle.
- The necessary leadership and ownership at the management level for the Duty is established.
- An internal working group or structure for the Duty is created or identified.
- The necessary knowledge and skills among those responsible for the Duty are developed.
- Adequate data and information on the identified groups are gathered and reviewed.
- All the organisation’s functions are included in the assessment.
- The relevant equality and human rights issues for action are prioritised.
- The annual report details the achievements and progress concerning the actions identified in the assessment.





### 3.4.2 CITIZEN INFORMATION BOARD

In line with the Government's policy of improving customer service in public service organisations, CIB is committed to the provision of clear, comprehensive and accurate information in a manner which is both sensitive and efficient, and respectful of diversity. It aims to make its service fully accessible and to give people choice in how they engage with its services. CIB is also committed to working closely with other organisations to deliver citizen-focused public services.

As discussed, all public bodies in Ireland have a responsibility through the Public Sector Duty to promote equality, prevent discrimination and protect the human rights of their employees, customers, service users and everyone affected by their policies and plans. This duty applies equally to the Citizens Information Board as it does the Irish Prison Service.

Equality of access to information, advice and advocacy is a core principle of the Citizens Information Board (CIB) and the services it provides and funds. It aims to ensure equality of access by providing services in person, by phone and online. To this end, CIB has policies and procedures in place to promote equality and human rights for clients. CIB also funds research into the effectiveness of current social policy and services, in order to highlight the concerns of service users to policy-makers. In 2022, CIB published research reports which looked at the information needs of vulnerable migrants and also at the extent and nature of digital exclusion among users of public services in Ireland.

## CHAPTER 4

# Findings

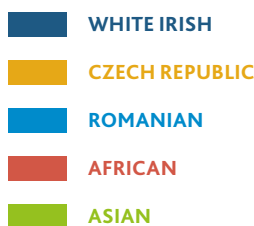
### 4.1 Introduction

The research explored the experience of prisoners in the Midlands Prison when they needed to access the services provided by outside State Services and other vital services, such as banking, while they were in prison. It looked at the process, from the initial thoughts of the prisoners about needing to access these outside services, to how they decided to approach accessing the services and how each prisoner's story unfolded.

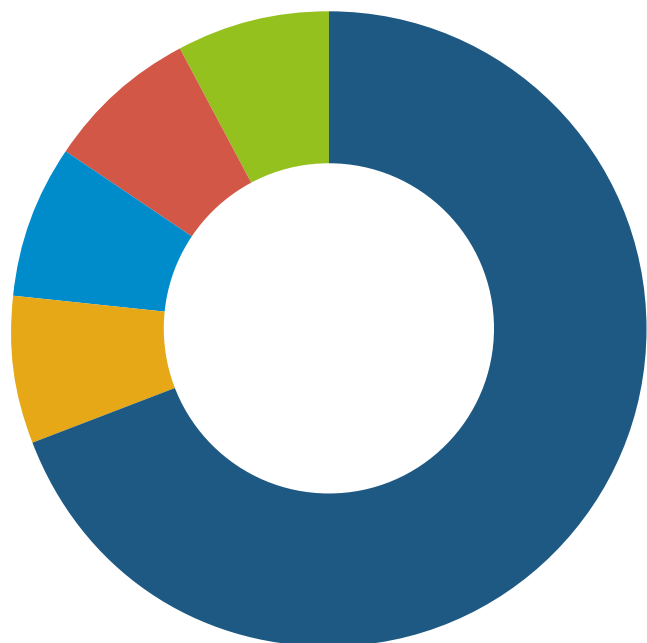
The sample size for this research project was limited to 14 short questionnaires and 13 face to face interviews, which is acknowledged to be relatively small compared to the number of prisoners in the Irish Prison System. However, the commonalities emerging from the prisoners' stories must not be discounted. The anticipation of having to access an outside State Service or other vital service providers while in prison created feelings ranging from anxiety to distress in the prisoners. It proved to be a vastly different experience from having to access any of these services from the outside, as outlined by the prisoners.

### 4.2 Profile of Research Participants

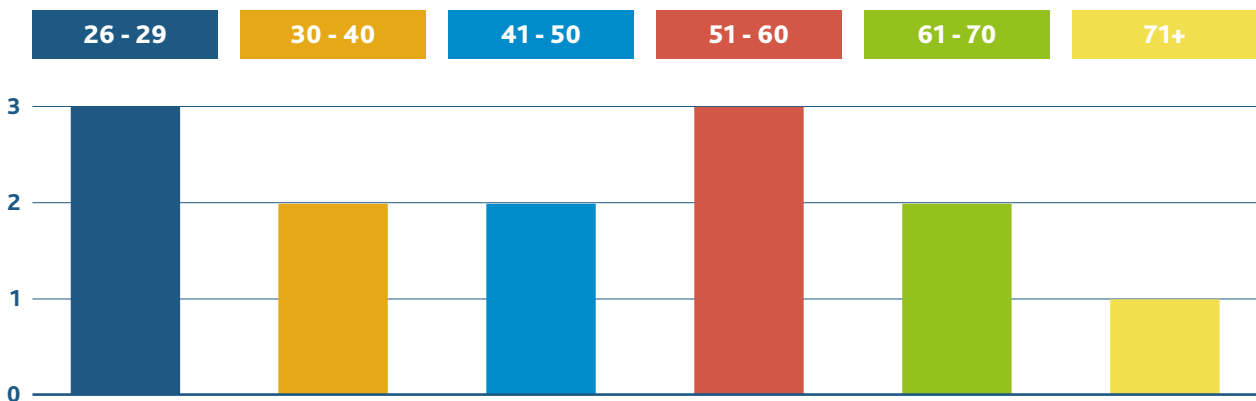
#### ETHNICITY OF RESPONDENTS



Of the 13 prisoners interviewed for this research project, 9 were Irish. There was 1 participant of each of the following nationalities: Czechoslovakian, Romanian, African and Asian.

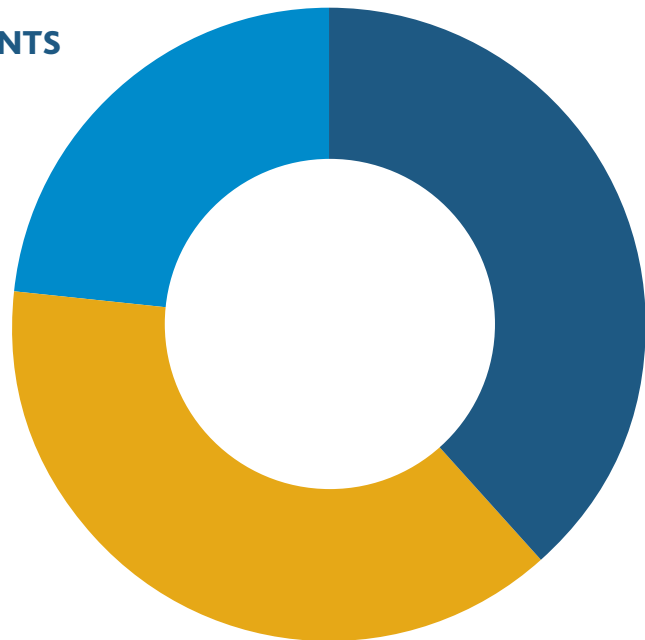


### AGE PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



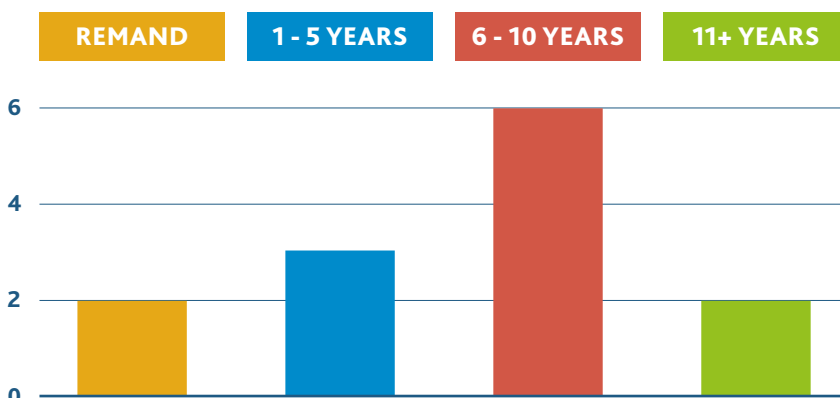
The research participants varied in age from 26 to 71+ years.

### EDUCATION PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



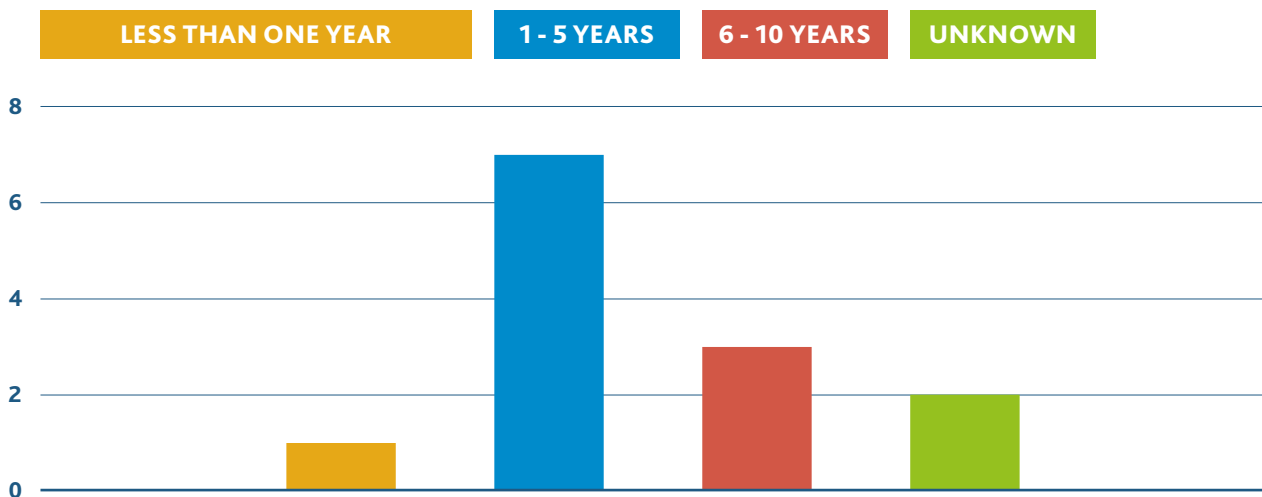
All research participants had a basic level of education. While 3 of them had completed only Primary Education, 5 had attended the 2nd Level, and 5 had attended College/University.

### LENGTH OF SENTENCE



While 2 of the research participants were on remand, 3 were serving a sentence between 1 – 5 years, 6 were serving between 6 and 10 years and 2 were serving sentences of 11+ years.

## TIME LEFT TO SERVE



1 research participant was in the last year of his sentence and 7 had between 1 and 5 years of their sentence left to serve, 3 had between 6 and 10 years left and 2 participants had no release date.

### 4.3 Preliminary Research Findings

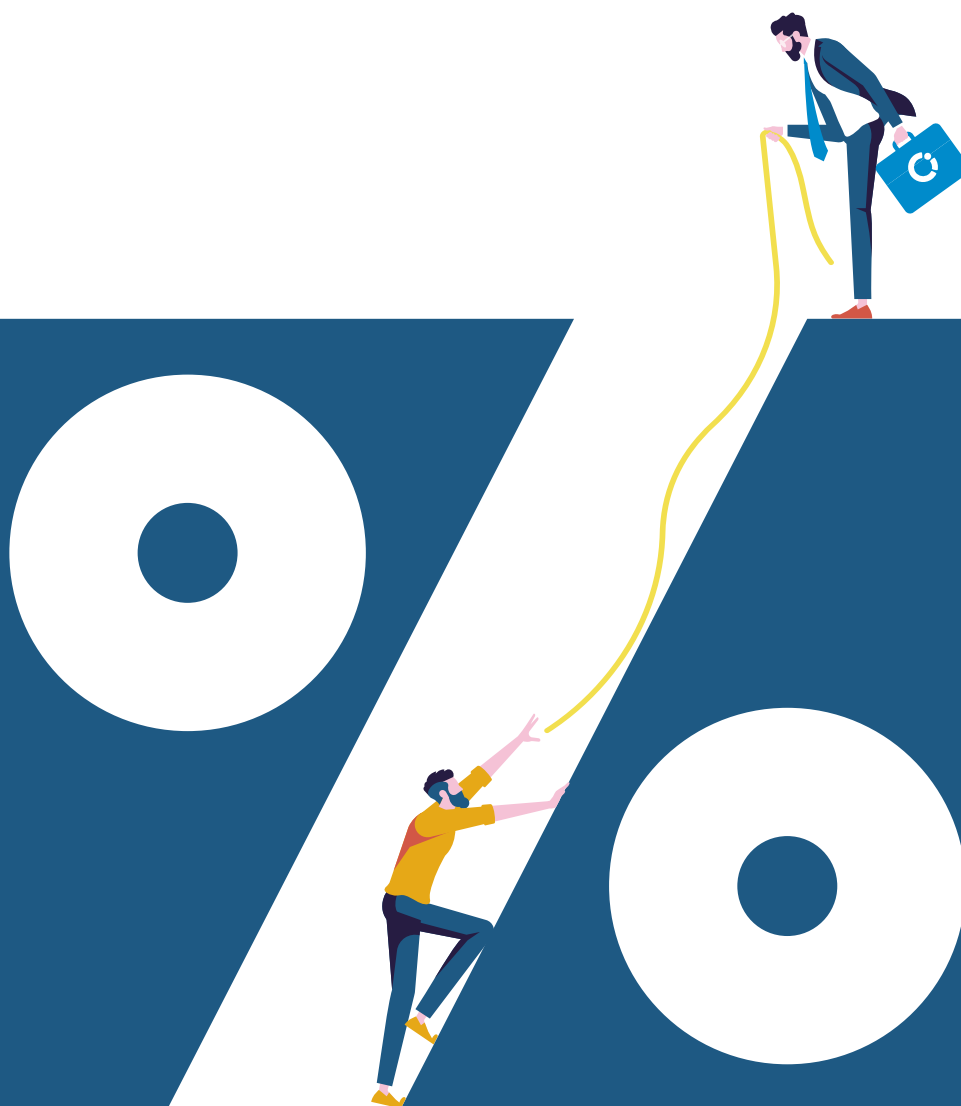
How the prisoners initially decided to approach accessing outside services ranged from trying to do it themselves, seeking help from the prison staff and prison-based services, seeking advice from fellow prisoners and help from family on the outside. None of the prisoners interviewed dismissed the need to access outside services, which all of them sought a way to access.

The prison staff was very helpful when approached by the interviewed prisoners, making inquiries for the prisoners or referring them to what they considered to be the appropriate service. Some prisoners' family members were able to assist them in contacting outside State Services or other vital service providers. The initial contact with the outside services did not prove to be a major problem for the prisoners interviewed. However, to actually avail of the service provided by the outside State Service and other vital service providers, the prisoners had to either access them through the prescribed route or submit specific documentation.

The routes prescribed for availing of the services provided by outside State Services and other vital services are online, in person, or in some instances, over the phone. These routes are not 'user-friendly' to the prisoner community. For security reasons, online access is extremely limited; in general, prisoners cannot leave the prison to attend the office of an outside State Service or other vital service providers, and phone usage is restricted, with a time limit on the calls.

In some cases, outside State Services and other vital service providers could progress a request to avail of their services if the prisoner could provide specified documentation. For example, the prisoner may need to get an expired document updated, access a Personal Public Service Number, or a copy of a Birth Certificate, or to reopen/open a bank account. Prisoners do not have ready access to personal documentation, a lot of which, depending on the length of their sentence, may have expired. This creates an additional problem of trying to access the outside State Services just to retrieve or renew this documentation.

A large percentage of the prisoners interviewed were referred by the prison staff to the Citizens Information Service (CIS), which provides an In-reach Service in the Midlands Prison. In advocating for the prisoners, the CIS encounters the same barriers as the prisoners.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# Research Analysis and Discussion

## 5.1 Introduction

The principal aim of this research project was to capture the subjective experience of prisoners in accessing information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital services, while they were in prison. The research focussed on 4 main areas:

- The importance from the prisoner's perspective of having access to outside State Services and other vital services while in prison.
- Barriers encountered by prisoners in accessing outside State Services and other vital services.
- What would make it easier for prisoners to access outside State Services and other vital services from prison?
- Prisoners' overall satisfaction with the services offered by outside State Services and other vital service providers.

Multiple questions were designed to encourage the prisoners to speak about their experiences concerning the above areas.

Two senior staff in the prison were also interviewed and the questions posed to these staff members mirrored the first three of the aforesaid areas and were designed to gather their views on the difficulties prisoners might experience in accessing information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital services.

## 5.2 Views of Prisoners

### Question 1: Do prisoners feel it is important to keep their vital personal services and documentation updated while in prison, as they would have on the 'outside'?

When asked how important they felt it was for prisoners to update their vital services while in prison, (Banking, Taxation, Local Property Tax, Household bills, etc.) or documentation (driving licence, passport, drug refund scheme, medical card and public service card), as they would have done on the outside, all the prisoners were convinced of its importance, as the following verbatim<sup>3</sup> comments from the 13 prisoners illustrate.

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<sup>3</sup> Verbatim comments are used liberally in this report, with some paraphrasing when required, for clarity.

**Prisoner 1.** *'Yes, absolutely. It will save you a lot of hassle when you get out. I am going through a divorce now and I need to move on with the proceedings and not be waiting until I get out. I am serving 8 years and that's a long time to have a divorce hanging over you.'*

**Prisoner 2.** *'It is very important to keep all services and documentation updated. When I return to normal life, I want to have things in order. All my documentation could very easily slip out of control, and I would have to start reapplying for the usual items, such as a passport, driving licence, and a bank account.'*

**Prisoner 3.** *'Yes, it is very important for socialising when released. I would need a passport for ID and a driving licence to drive. It is important to have everything up to date.'*

**Prisoner 4.** *'Yes, it is very important. We are still human beings, and we will be released someday and we will have to reintegrate into society. It is very stressful the way we cannot access services. We are restrained; we cannot do anything. Our human rights are taken away.'*

**Prisoner 5.** *'Yes, it is very important. I am an Asylum Seeker, and I have one child who has Autism, born in Ireland. I need to get an Irish Residency Permit, but I must be present in person to get the card. It is a big worry for me, not being able to get that card.'*

**Prisoner 6.** *'I feel it is very important to keep things right. When I am released, I want to have things in order. It will make it easier to integrate into society. My driving licence has expired, and it is hard to get a licence now, what with doing a theory test and so many lessons.'*

**Prisoner 7.** *'Yes, because all documents are needed when you are released. It may be too late to renew a driving licence, or a passport and you might have to start the application process all over again, all because you did not renew your licence in time.'*

**Prisoner 8.** *'Yes, I think it is very important. I will need to get my bank account reopened before I leave prison. How else can I manage my money or pay my bills? I had an account, but it has been closed because I had no money going in or out of the account. My medical card has expired, and I will need to get that renewed to get my tablets and it would be a bit late trying to sort that out when I get out.'*

**Prisoner 9.** *'Yes, you have to have your information updated for when you are getting out.'*

**Prisoner 10.** *'Very much so, especially 3 things – banking, pension and a driving licence/passport. Banking is a major problem for anyone who does not have a bank account, especially old-age pensioners. A lot of men lose their pensions for years.'*

**Prisoner 11.** *'Yes, I think it is absolutely vital that prisoners keep their documentation updated. My driving licence and passport expire soon, and I will need to keep them updated. It will make things a lot easier for when I get out of prison.'*

**Prisoner 12.** 'Absolutely. You will need everything updated for when you get out. It can be difficult to do as you might not have family or people do renew things for you, or you might not have access to your documents while locked up'.

**Prisoner 13.** "Yes, if you don't keep things up to date, it can cause you a lot of hassle when you get out. Your medical card might have expired, and you might need to go to a doctor, and you might not be able to afford a visit to the doctor without a medical card. If your Public Service Card has expired, you might have difficulty getting a payment. You have a lot of time to think about things and they play on your mind'.

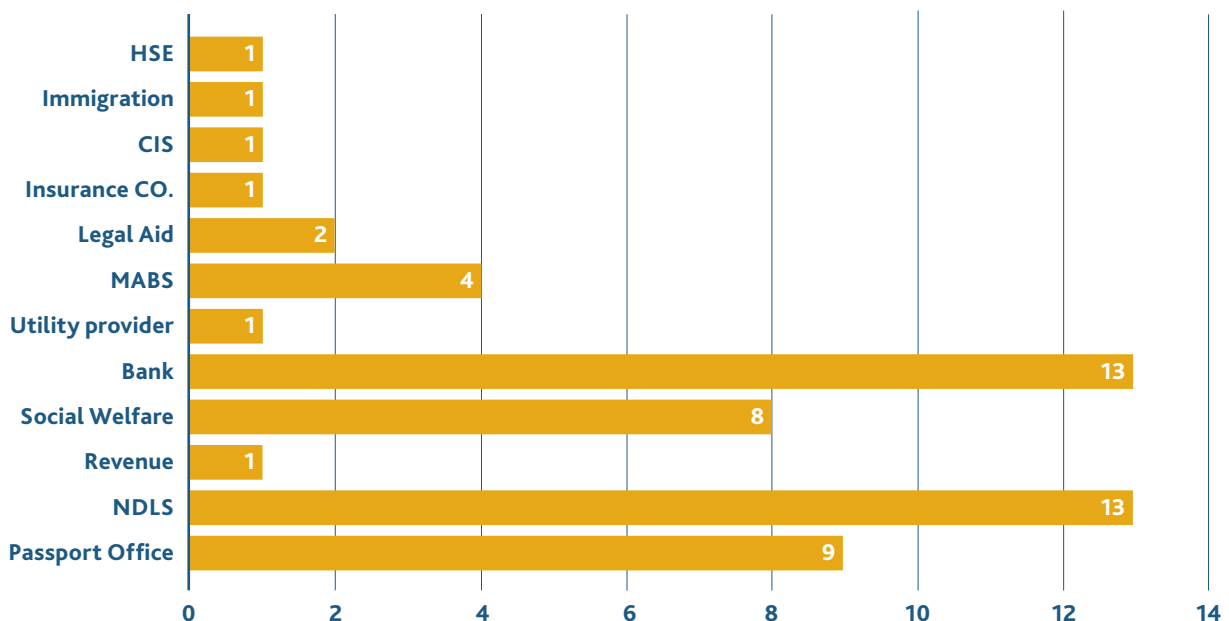
The prisoners interviewed believe that keeping their vital personal services and documentation up to date will help their entry into 'normal' life easier and more structured. Conversely, they feel they will be at a disadvantage if they do not have their vital services and documents updated.

### Question 2: Which outside State Services, if any, did prisoners use during their time in the Midland Prison?

When asked if they ever needed to use an outside State Service or one of the other vital services during their time in the Midlands Prison, most of the prisoners said they had either used an outside State Service, or other vital services or were currently using one.

The following were the outside State Services and other vital services that prisoners needed to access, and the reason therefore, as mentioned in their interviews and questionnaires:

### OUTSIDE STATE SERVICES AND OTHER VITAL SERVICES THAT PRISONERS NEEDED TO ACCESS





- **Passport Office:** for the renewal of Irish and foreign passports, a child requiring a new passport.
- **National Driving Licence Service and Road Safety Authority:** for the renewal of driving licences.
- **Banks:** to check the status of the bank account so that they could have their State Pension paid into the account or to open a new bank account and contact the bank to notify them of a change of address.
- **Department of Social Protection:** applying for a State Pension and querying a Disability Allowance issue; information on Carer payments; renewing Public Service Card.
- **Immigration:** to get an Irish Residency Permit card.
- **Revenue:** Income Tax refund.
- **MABS:** Mortgage problems/advice; gambling problem; need help with money management.
- **Legal Aid:** to get a divorce and 'move on with my life'; advice on relationship problems.
- **Phone and Internet provider:** what to do about unpaid bills; set up phone and internet post-release.
- **Probate Office:** what to do, as the prisoner is the executor of his late mother's will.
- **Citizens Information Service**

The prisoners expressed their frustration at not being able to access the service provided by the outside State Service or other vital services during their time in the Midlands Prison.

### Extracts from prisoner responses:

*'My driver's licence expired, and I wanted to renew it, as I didn't want to have to do the theory test again. It was a nightmare! I had to go through the RSA instead of the driving licence centre. They renewed the licence but insisted on putting the prison address on the licence, even though I had an address outside. Imagine me driving to a checkpoint when I am released and the Garda looking at the address on my licence—'Midlands Prison'.*

*'A lot of problems arise when you go to prison. You lose more than your liberty. I lost my job, my income and I nearly lost my home'.... I am well able to look after my affairs on the outside. It is a different story from in here... I have always looked after my own affairs...I would just call the bank or maybe phone them. I wouldn't send an email, I am not great on computers'*

## DIFFERENT WAYS PRISONERS ACCESSED STATE SERVICES AND OTHER VITAL SERVICES WHEN OUTSIDE PRISON

All the prisoners interviewed said they would have looked after these tasks themselves when outside prison.

State Service or other vital service	How prisoners would have accessed State Services and other vital services when outside prison
NDLS - Renewing a Driving Licence	Call at the National Driving Licence Centre or online renewal - 'phone them first'.
Passport Office - Renewing a Passport	Contact the Passport Office or renew by Post.
Bank-Banking matters, Mortgage issues	Call at the Bank in person or contact them by phone.
Law Centre - Divorce	Phone Legal Aid office and ask them to mail a form or call at their offices to get a form to make an application.
Medical Card Unit - Medical Card renewal	The Medical Card section would send me a letter telling me how to renew my Medical Card.
Client Identity Services–Public Services Card renewal	Call at Social Welfare office to have Public Service Card renewed.
Department of Social Protection - access a disability payment	Phone the Social Welfare office or search online for an application form.
Immigration Service - Asylum Seeker	Make an appointment with Immigration Officer.
Department of Social Protection - apply for State Pension	Call CIC or Social Welfare Office to ask about my pension.

### Question 3: What were the prisoners' immediate thoughts when they first realised that they would have to contact an outside State Service or other vital service from prison?

The prisoners felt stressed, anxious or distraught when they first realised that they would have to contact an outside State Service or other vital service from prison.

## PRISONERS' FEELINGS ON REALISING THEY NEEDED TO CONTACT AN OUTSIDE STATE SERVICE OR OTHER VITAL SERVICE PROVIDERS FROM PRISON



**Prisoner 1.** 'I was *distraught*. I felt *panic*! I was worried and very frustrated. I was also very angry that I couldn't help myself'.

**Prisoner 2.** 'I am feeling *very anxious*, as I am 4 weeks from release. With my Medical Card and Social Welfare card both expired, I am worrying if I will get my Social Welfare payment or be able to go to the doctor. I really need to go to the dentist!' <sup>4</sup>

**Prisoner 3.** 'I felt *stressed* and *anxious* about how I might contact Legal Aid from here. I feel bad that I can't do it myself and guilty about having to ask my mother for help; she has enough to deal with'.

**Prisoner 4.** 'I am *concerned* and *anxious* about having money on my release from prison. The lack of information creates fear'.

**Prisoner 5.** 'There must be *someone who can help*. It is very difficult in here as there is such a lack of information on how to do things, where to go, or whom to go to. I know from talking with other prisoners that there are many services you just cannot access from prison. There is a big feeling of being let down'.

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<sup>4</sup> Prisoner was advised to contact Resettlement Coordinator prior to release to obtain a temporary medical card.

**Prisoner 6.** *'Panic! I'm stuck in here! What do I do now?'*

**Prisoner 7.** *'I actually thought the prison authorities would have allowed me bail to go to the Immigration Office. I feel very frustrated.'*

**Prisoner 8.** *'I don't know how I will do all this. Who will I ask for help? The Class Officer told me about the CIS coming into the prison, and maybe they might help.'*

**Prisoner 9.** *'I felt very frustrated and annoyed that I couldn't sort this myself. It is very difficult to sort out things when you are in prison—a whole lot of walls up and around you.'*

**Prisoner 10.** *'I will ask Mr X. He is fantastic and no matter what you want to get done, he will help you.'*

**Prisoner 11.** *'It is hard to describe. It is a cocoon in here. It is another loss that adds to your sense of loss. There is a lot going through my head, but I need to start somewhere.'*

**Prisoner 12.** *'I struggled with this. I am very anxious about how I might renew my licence from here. Imagine what it must be like for the lads who can't read or write! I would consider myself intelligent and it is a challenge for me.'*

**Prisoner 13.** *'Anxiety and panic! I felt the pressure of it all and a sense of having no control. I didn't know where to turn.'*

#### **Question 4: What barriers hampered or made it more difficult for prisoners when dealing with outside State Services?**

In response to this question, most of these prisoners identified the reality of prison life as a significant obstacle i.e., *'just being in prison'*. This meant that they could not access email, personal documents and photocopying service, and had very limited use of the telephone and no personal access to services.

#### **BARRIERS TO DEALING WITH OUTSIDE STATE SERVICES OR OTHER VITAL SERVICES FROM PRISON**

All the prisoners interviewed said they would have looked after these tasks themselves when outside prison.

## Barriers listed by prisoners (*Comments paraphrased for clarity*)

Being in prison is the obvious obstacle. It makes it difficult to sort out problems. It is very difficult to validate your identity when writing from prison with no personal documentation to hand. Being in prison, with such limited access to services outside, I can't go to the Immigration Office and present myself in person. It is so upsetting.

Unable to do things for myself in prison. Restricted in every way.

My rights are taken away. The prison is responsible for my care, so it is up to them to provide us with access to State Services. Unable to open a bank account, as I cannot be present in person.

Access is a big problem. I can't go to any office or use any computer or make telephone calls unless permitted by the prison staff. No direct access to Social Welfare or Medical Card Office.

No phone access. Six-minute phone calls make it difficult to deal with any office outside the prison. You also have to ask for additional numbers to be added to your phone, which causes further delay.

No online access. Not being able to go online to deal with matters via email is a huge problem. In other countries, prisoners can go online and send/receive emails, which cuts down on a lot of the stress for staff and prisoners. Not being able to send or receive emails makes it difficult to deal with personal matters.

Lack of direct access to outside State Services is a big problem. It is very difficult to deal with a personal issue in prison, as you have no direct contact with the service provider.

The prison service has no protocol in place for driving licence or passport renewal.

No direct way to contact the Legal Aid Centre.

Always have to go through other people to access services, with the uncertainty of not knowing the potential outcome.

Delay in getting information in the prison, which takes weeks.

No information on what to do to resolve problems.

Everything is so demeaning, such as gaining access to your personal documents in property.

Waiting for a CIS visit can be very slow. They didn't get in for a few weeks, so I had to wait. The list of people waiting to see them is getting longer.

I didn't know which service could help me with my problem.

No scanning, photocopying, or printing service is available here.

Impossible to contact the Embassy in person.

Language difficulties – everything takes longer when you don't speak English or have poor literacy skills.

I can't phone any service to get things ready for when I get out of prison.

An Executor is required to attend the Probate Office in person and the prison service could not facilitate this.

There is no way to contact the Passport Office; very difficult to get their number.

Officers can refuse requests for assistance e.g., 'not now, I'm busy'

No one knows whom to talk to in a prison. The outside world forgets you once you are in prison. It would be great to have someone on the landing to answer questions. Not aware of what services are available from prison or whom to speak to.

Impossible to open a bank account – I need to be present in person with ID.

Not having good 'schooling' is always a drawback. You need help and don't know how to do this sort of thing by yourself.

In brief, the main barriers identified by these prisoners were: being in prison with restricted rights, being unable to access outside service providers in the normal way, i.e., in person, online, or by phone, and the bureaucratic nature of the prison environment.

### **Question 5: In what ways is using an outside State Service or other vital services from prison different from doing so on the outside?**

Most prisoners identified at least one way in which they felt using an outside State Service or other vital service from the 'outside' was different, vis-a-vis accessing it from prison.

Extracts from prisoner responses:

- No permission is required. No restrictions to prevent access to service when outside.
- It is possible to call in person at a service provider's e.g., Social Welfare, Embassy.
- It is possible to get renewal forms or application forms myself.
- Possible to go online and renew documents.
- Possible to phone or call the Legal Aid Office.
- The opposite of everything that is not possible in prison.
- It is just different, as there is no avenue to make an application to renew anything in prison. You cannot do anything by yourself in prison.
- I can renew my driving licence online or call at the NDLS centre, when outside.
- In the prison, we can't go online, and phone calls are limited. On the outside, you can make an appointment or send an email. That is how people deal with services all the time outside, but no opportunity to do that while here.
- I would phone or email, the same as most other people, when outside.
- I would not have to ask permission from anyone to make an appointment, when outside.

Some prisoners identified the following factors which made it more difficult for them to deal with personal matters while in prison: not having relevant documents with them; their family not being able to help them collect the required documents; limited and inadequate phone access; limited and inadequate online access. The majority of these prisoners were also anxious about approaching anyone to seek help with their personal matters.

## Question 6: What would make it easier for prisoners to access outside State Services or other vital services for the information and assistance they need?

The prisoners identified several possible ways in this regard:

### Facilities that would make it easier to access services from the prison

- An office in the prison to deal with prisoners' needs.<sup>5</sup>
- A one-stop-shop for main services where a prisoner's representative could help us with forms and telephone numbers.
- A supervised office where prisoners could have access to some material on computers, such as access to Legal Aid, similar to the Portlaoise Prison.
- A full-time information office (like CIS), where prisoners could go and renew online or make phone calls to services, if required.
- Availability of renewal and application forms, and assistance in filling them in.
- Someone to help with the paperwork, and to get things done.
- Prisoners should be given an official prison document when writing to outside State Services to validate who they are and where they are.<sup>6</sup>
- A special facility in the prison to facilitate document renewal/update online.

### Accessing the services:

- Organise a day's release from prison for a personal visit to an outside service provider's office.
- Online access to outside State Services. Help prisoners in practical ways.
- More phone access to services and more assistance concerning phone calls. Permitting longer phone calls if necessary. Unsupervised phone calls to State Departments.
- A proper framework to get things done. Fewer prison restrictions.
- Occasional visits from outside State Services/Financial institutions where it would be possible to put your name for an appointment to see them about your problem.
- Regular banking service in the prison.

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<sup>5</sup> Services within the prison do provide support to prisoners in dealing with outside State Services such as Housing and Social Welfare when prisoners are approaching their release date.

<sup>6</sup> Prisoner was advised that he could request a certificate of imprisonment at any time during his sentence. This document acts as proof of imprisonment and proof of address when dealing with outside State Services or other vital services.

- Less divide between outside State Services and other vital services and prisoners. *'We can't go out, so they will need to call to meet us'*.
- Department representatives to attend the prison periodically.
- Have a prisoner representative to advise whom to contact, where to get forms and how to fill forms correctly.
- Organised programmes where outside services are readily available to prisoners, like the open prison. *'It would prepare prisoners for re-entering society'*.
- Support from prison authorities to liaise with an outside State Service or other vital services to renew documents such as a Passport, Driving Licence, or Public Service card.
- A training course in the prison on how to keep your documents updated and then a file for you to keep all your documents together.
- More awareness of and access to the Citizens' Information Service.
- Video links with all outside State Services and other vital service providers.
- Access to Legal Aid when court dates are due.
- Direct contact with outside State Services and other vital services.

### **Questions 7 & 8: Prisoners' satisfaction with the outside Services they accessed, or tried to access, during their time in prison.**

Most of the prisoners indicated they were very dissatisfied with the overall availability of outside Services for prisoners, largely because they were unable to contact these services due to prison restrictions. Further, some prisoners felt that these services are not interested in helping prisoners or providing them with their services. As far as these prisoners are concerned, these services do not exist, and this will not change until they have reasonable access to these services. Prisoners were not satisfied with the service provided to them by the following.

- National Driving Licence Service (very poor service)
- Revenue Commissioners (received tax refund by cheque which could not be cashed or lodged by the prisoner)
- Passport Office (impossible to contact)
- Bank or Building Society (the prisoner needs to deal with the bank but they do not offer a service to prisoners; no assistance is provided if a prisoner needs to open a bank account; advised to contact the bank when they get out of prison)



- Utility Provider, gas, electricity, phone, internet provider (impossible to contact)
- Legal Aid Service (difficult to contact)
- Foreign Embassy (impossible to contact)

The Citizens Information Service, the Department of Social Protection and the Health Service Executive were generally regarded as helpful organisations.

### Question 9: Do prisoners feel that outside State Services cater for prisoners?

None of the prisoners replied in the affirmative to this question.

*Prisoner 1. No. There is a wall between us and them. They need to come to us.*

*Prisoner 2. No. I don't believe they care about us really. Out of sight is out of mind. They don't think we have any needs.*

*Prisoner 3. No. There is no plan in place for us to deal with personal matters; therefore, these services are not catering to our needs.*

*Prisoner 4. No. We are not very important when it comes to services being provided.*

*Prisoner 5. No. I don't know but it is hard to get things sorted, like renewing a driving licence or passport.*

*Prisoner 6. No. The prison needs more structured programmes in place like in open prisons, to assist with the inevitable problems prisoners face while in prison.*

*Prisoner 7. No. We cannot contact them, and they don't really care.*

*Prisoner 8. No. We are a small minority. There is no need for them to bother about us really.*

*Prisoner 9. No. We cannot access them, and they have no real interest in looking after prisoners.*

*Prisoner 10. No. We have a black mark against us.*

*Prisoner 11. No. Their hands are tied and what can they do about it? A lot depends on the prisoners' circumstances when they come in (e.g., do they have an operative bank account?). The problem is we can't access these services while in prison like we would when outside prison.*

*Prisoner 12. No. but I wouldn't blame them. It is up to the IPS to change matters.*

*Prisoner 13. No. We can't contact them and most of them don't come to the prison.*

**Question 10: Have prisoners ever complained about any aspect of the service offered by outside State Services and other vital services?**

Only 3 prisoners had complained about some aspect of the service offered by outside State Service providers. The other prisoners felt that there was no point complaining, as no one would listen to them. Some of them indicated that they were 'not that type of person', while others said they wouldn't know whom to complain to. In brief, most of these men felt that '*prisoners don't complain*' and '*it is best to keep your head down as much as you can*'.

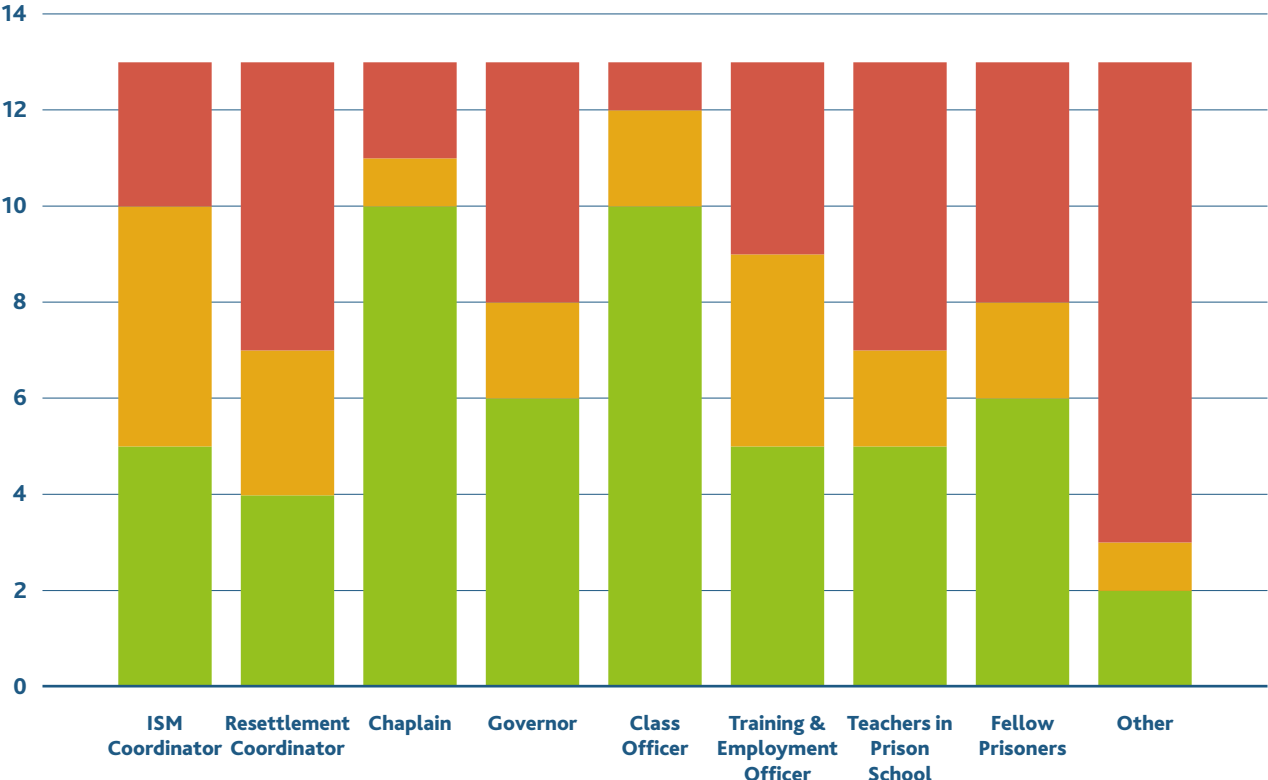
**Question 11: How do prisoners feel about approaching fellow prisoners, prison staff, or prison-based services for information required to deal with personal matters?**

All the prisoners who participated in the research had at least one person in the prison they felt confident in approaching for information on dealing with personal matters, including the Chaplain, the Class Officer, the Governor, fellow Prisoners, Teachers, the Resettlement Coordinator, the Training and Employment Officer, the Integrated Sentence Management Officer, and various Medical Staff. They also mentioned their Solicitor and family.

**WHO PRISONERS TURN TO FOR INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE ON DEALING WITH PERSONAL MATTERS**



This table shows the responses from the 13 prisoners interviewed.



Most prisoners interviewed turned initially to the Class Officer for advice or direction when they had a personal matter to deal with.

The following table shows the responses from the 14 prisoners who completed questionnaires concerning who they would go to in the prison for help with any personal matter, and why they would go to that person.<sup>7</sup>

Source of help	What the Prisoners said
<b>GOVERNOR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I was told to address all issues to the Governor.</li> <li>To discuss a problem the Class Officer couldn't solve.</li> <li>I would go to Governor.</li> <li>Good to help out at times.</li> <li>Maybe I might go to the Governor.</li> <li>The Governor should be able to help me.</li> <li>We don't get to see the Governor. It is only the Assistant Chief Officer we see.</li> </ul>
<b>RESETTLEMENT COORDINATOR</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To discuss and arrange for accommodation.</li> </ul>
<b>CLASS OFFICER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To deal with various day-to-day problems.</li> <li>They will help when asked.</li> <li>I would go to the Class Officer.</li> </ul>
<b>CHAPLAIN</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because confidentiality is guaranteed.</li> <li>I would go to Chaplain.</li> <li>They can be helpful at times.</li> <li>I miss Sr. Breda.</li> <li>Yes, definitely. They are good at communicating and if they say they will do something, they will do it.</li> <li>Yes, I would go to the Chaplain. It was the Chaplain I talked to when my grandad passed away.</li> </ul>
<b>TEACHERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because they are good to talk to.</li> <li>They might be able to help me find a job on release.</li> </ul>
<b>FELLOW PRISONERS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Because some can help when needed.</li> <li>I find comfort in speaking to other prisoners.</li> <li>There might be one or two inmates I would go to.</li> </ul>
<b>ISM OFFICER</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Yes. They know what to do for me.</li> </ul>
Other sources identified	
<b>FAMILY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>My family would be the ones I would turn to if I were to have a personal problem.</li> <li>I speak to my family every day. I know I can trust them.</li> <li>I often ring home to the family for help.</li> </ul>
<b>MEDICAL STAFF</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would talk to the medical staff.</li> </ul>
<b>NURSES</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would talk to the Nurses.</li> </ul>
<b>CITIZENS INFORMATION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I would talk to Gemma in Citizens Information.</li> </ul>

<sup>7</sup> Some participants identified more than one person.

The strategies prisoners adopted for accessing outside services ranged from self-help, seeking help from prison staff and prison-based services, seeking advice from fellow prisoners and asking family on the outside for help. All the prisoners interviewed were unanimous on the need to access outside services and were keen to find an effective solution to the barriers they encounter.

It is noted that prisoners might not recognise a prison-based service by its official name but if the service was referred to using the name of the service provider, such as Ms. Jones, they would recognise the service.

### 5.3 Views of Prison Staff

This section presents the views of two<sup>8</sup> senior staff employed in the Midlands Prison, who work closely with prisoners.

#### INSIGHTS AND EXPERIENCE

Both the interviewed staff felt it important for prisoners to be able to update their vital personal services and documentation while in prison, just as they would have done on the 'outside'. *'It can be a person's livelihood'*. For example, most prisoners need to access Social Welfare to prepare them for life after release.

One staff member recalls going outside their remit to help a prisoner make an application for Disability Allowance. What usually happens is that an Officer will find out what the prisoner wants and will reach out to the agency on behalf of the prisoner. While this is not always successful, the Officer was adamant that he/she would never ignore a request from a prisoner, once he asked for assistance.

Both staff members considered it difficult for prisoners to access information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital service providers. *'The process can be quite slow'*.

Some of the main barriers prisoners might encounter in accessing information and assistance from outside State Services and other vital services include the lack of Internet access, limited phone access, filling out forms, Covid-19, literacy issues, and a lack of personal support.

Since they do not have Internet access and only limited phone access while in prison, prisoners have to follow a defined process to contact an outside State Service or other vital service providers. *'It raises a lot of stress and anxiety because it reinforces the fact that he is confined and limited in what he can do'*.

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<sup>8</sup> This is a very small sample due to the primary focus on prisoners and the limited budget available for the research. Consequently, caution should be exercised when interpreting the research findings. Further research is needed with staff if a more detailed profile is required. The staff interviewed were a Resettlement Coordinator and a Chief Officer.

Neither staff member thought that the outside State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to engage with their services.

When asked why they believe it to be difficult for prisoners to deal with personal matters from prison, the two staff observed as follows:

- They don't have the documents required with them (1 agreed/ 1 disagreed).
- Their families may not be able, or willing, to help them gather the required documents. Some families have literacy issues
- They have limited phone access
- They can't call at the Office or Department in person
- They don't know whom to go to in the prison for help. This is a big thing for them. We constantly remind them to go through the Class Officer.
- They might feel frustrated, suspicious, and anxious about seeking help.
- They just don't know how to approach dealing with personal matters from prison.
- Access to workshops and the CIS Information Pack for Prisoners makes it easier for prisoners to get the information and assistance they need.
- More In-reach from outside State Services is required to make it easier for prisoners to get the information and assistance they need.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

## 6.1 Conclusion

The research conclusions presented in this report are straightforward. All 27 prisoners<sup>9</sup> and 2 prison staff were critical of the access prisoners have to outside State Services and other vital services, while they are serving prison sentences in the Midlands Prison. Overall, they believe it is very important for prisoners to update their personal documents and vital services, such as passports, driving licences and bank accounts. The response of prisoners to difficulties in accessing outside services is one of frustration, anxiety and even panic.

The prisoners identified several barriers that hampered their use of outside State Services and other vital services, such as prison life (too many restrictions), lack of online access, restricted phone use, and lack of access to a bank account or photocopying. The setup of outside Services is such as to make access to them virtually impossible for prisoners i.e., they cannot walk in, phone in, or avail of online access. They cannot go online, as Internet access is not readily available to them.<sup>10</sup>

For obvious reasons, a prisoner cannot attend outside State Services or other vital services in person, and prisoners' phone calls are limited to 6 minutes<sup>11</sup>. To even make a call, you must have the number on your phone card, restricted to a few phone numbers. To add a new number to your phone card, you must go and ask the Governor, at the Governor's Parade.

It is evident from the research that outside State Services and other vital service providers are not currently providing a 'user-friendly' access route to their services to the prisoner community. Though some outside services do try to accommodate prisoners who need to access their service, their offerings in this regard are very convoluted, complex, difficult and sometimes impossible to comply with. Fresh and out-of-the-box thinking is required on creating realistic access routes for prisoners to the services provided by outside State Services and other vital service providers.

It is also evident from the research that the full implementation of Rules 2, 5, 6 and 7 of the European Prison Rules, which allow prisoners to retain all rights not lawfully taken away by the decision sentencing them or remanding them in custody (Rule 2), that life in prison should come as

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9 The 27 prisoners include those who gave 13 in-depth interviews and completed 14 abbreviated interviews.

10 Online access is available to some prisoners who attend the prison school. However, this is restricted to limited sites, and even then, the teacher does the online search for the prisoner. Internet access is severely limited in prisons to prevent prisoners contacting victims or conducting criminal acts from prison.

11 6 minutes are not enough for any useful discussion.

close as possible to the positive aspects of life in the community (Rule 5), that their detention should be managed so as to facilitate the reintegration into society (Rule 6), and that co-operation with outside social services and, as far as possible, the involvement of social society in prison life, shall be encouraged (Rule 7) are not fully implemented at this stage.

The Irish Prison Service, all State Services, other vital services and the Citizens Information Board have a legal duty to implement fully the Public Sector and Human Rights Duty. Access to State Services which allow prisoners deal with their essential life tasks and to transition back into normal life is seen a basic human right. A prisoner is a person first and removing their ability to do these tasks is as a breach of their human rights.

## 6.2 Recommendations

The prisoners interviewed proposed different ways in which their access to the services provided by outside State Services and other vital services could be improved. They mentioned options such as a "one-stop shop", "a supervised office" and "a special facility in the prison to facilitate document renewal/update online", all concepts of the space they envisage they would go to when the need arose to access the outside services.

Prisoners proposed different access routes to outside services such as "day release to visit the outside service providers' office", "online access" to the services provided by the outside services, "greater phone access" to outside service providers, outside State Services and other vital service providers "coming into the prison" to provide their service directly to the prisoners, and "video link service" to the outside service providers.

Access to the documentation required to avail of a service provided by an outside State Service or other vital service provider proved difficult for some prisoners. The documentation required was often lost, expired, or not accessible. Retrieving, renewing, or updating such documentation would mean accessing the service provided by another outside State Service or vital service provider.

For example, to open a bank account to receive the State Pension Contributory, a prisoner requires a current photographic ID such as a driver's licence or passport. Such documentation may have expired, and a prisoner will need to renew it before he can open a bank account. In the process of trying to renew such documentation, the prisoner encounters further access barriers.

### 6.2.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The IPS, CIB, all State Services and other vital services should ensure they give full expression to their legal obligation to implement the Public Sector and Human Rights Duty under Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 (Public Sector Equality and Human

Rights Duty), take an evidence based approach to their equality and human rights assessment and action plan as recommended by the published guidance on the Duty, and ensure that the findings of this report inform their assessment and action plan.

As this research was conducted with a very small sample of prisoners it is recommended that there be continued investment in further research, together with the IPS, to determine if the experience captured in this research is commonplace across the whole prison community.

### **6.2.2 RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE IPS**

Fully implementation of Rules 2, 5, 6 and 7 of the European Prison Rules, which allow prisoners to retain all rights not lawfully taken away by the decision sentencing them or remanding them in custody.

This recommendation may be partially achieved by:

- An extended phone call should be facilitated if a prisoner needs to access an outside State Service or other vital service providers by phone, to avail of the service they provide.
- The IPS should provide limited online access to specific websites to enable prisoners to make online applications, where this is the only option available for accessing a service.
- Allow the implementation of a Professional Digital Intermediary Service to reduce prisoners' reliance on individuals such as family and prison staff. For example, operating as part of Citizen Information Services, the Professional Digital Intermediary Service would, with the consent and under the direction of the prisoner, take control of their data when completing forms online for them.
- This research should be replicated across the whole prison service to determine if the experience captured in this research is commonplace across the whole prison community.

### **6.2.3 RECOMMENDATIONS TO OUTSIDE STATE SERVICE PROVIDERS AND OTHER VITAL SERVICE PROVIDERS:**

Public bodies should openly and transparently implement their duty to accommodate those with diverse needs by:

- Having clear, transparent and visible alternative routes to online services.
- Being well informed of the exemptions that must apply to members of the prison community in the initial stage of engagement.
- A recognition of the limitations and vulnerability of this group of people; for example, they cannot meet face to face and may have no, or restricted, access to online services.



- An acknowledgement of the restricted environment of prisoners.
- An acknowledgement that the normal access routes to avail of outside services are, in general, not a realistic option for prisoners in closed prisons.
- A fresh approach to providing access to services to these citizens, based on listening and responding to their reality.
- The extension of services in to prisons on a regular basis.
- An allocation of dedicated resources to explore with IPS how outside State Services and vital services can be made available to the prison community.
- Service providers should be obliged to provide alternative ways of engaging with the prison community.
- Not treating less favourably those using alternatives to online access, for example ensuring there are no long delays and, in some cases, not having access to services at all.

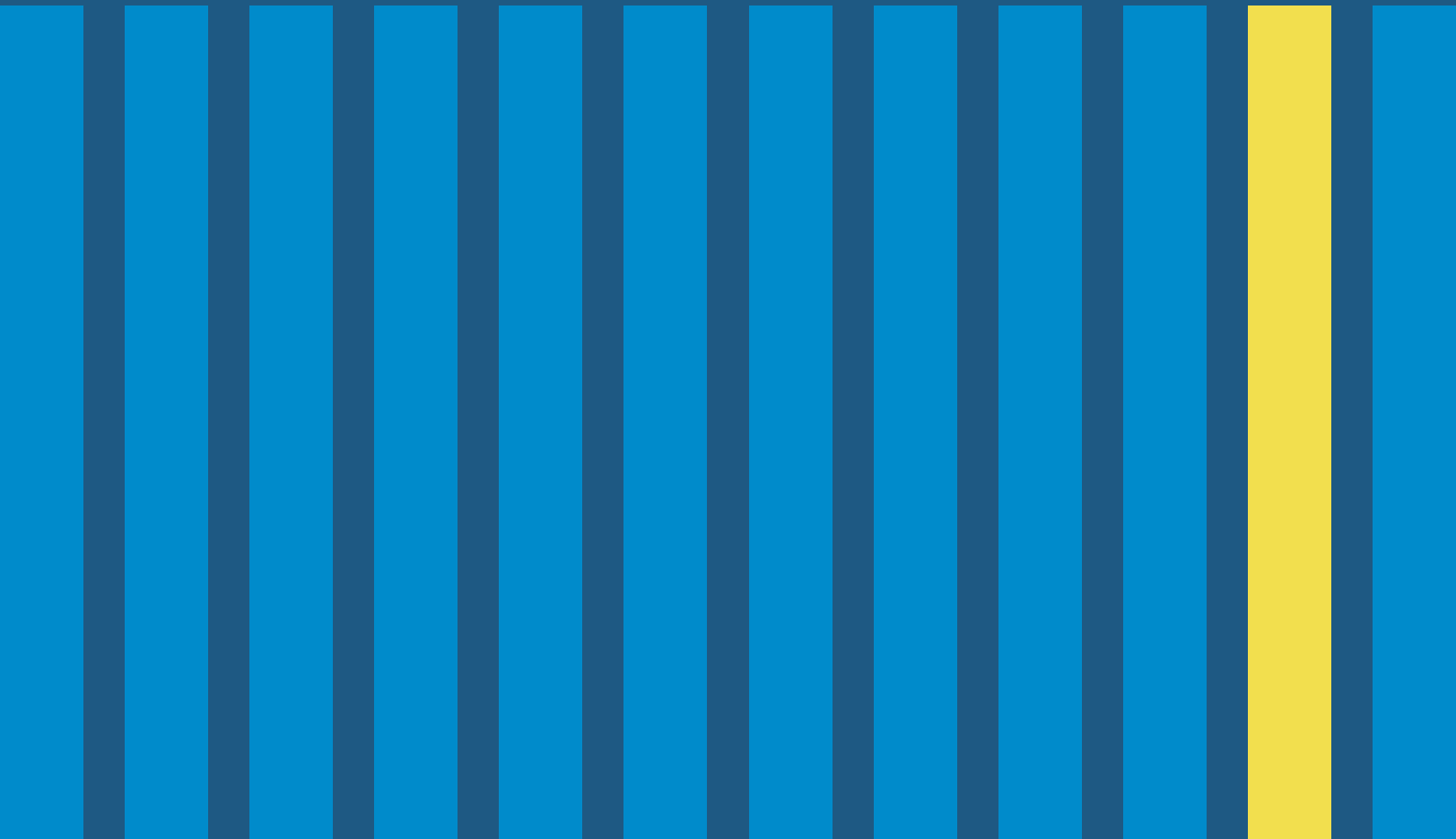
#### **6.2.4 RECOMMENDATIONS TO CITIZENS INFORMATION BOARD**

As said, the Citizens Information Board is not involved in direct service provision. This is provided by service delivery companies e.g. Citizens Information Services. However, these services are 100% dependant on central government funding channelled through CIB. In order to accommodate those with diverse needs additional central government funding needs to be provided. This could be done by funding via CIB:

- The development of a professional prison advocacy service across the network. Currently there is only one Prison Information Officer in the country who has 17.5 hours per week direct service provision available to prisoners. Servicing the information and advocacy needs of prisoners cannot be provided from current service provision.
- The development and implementation of a Professional Digital Intermediary Service to reduce prisoners' reliance on individuals such as family and prison staff. For example, operating as part of the Citizen Information Service, the Professional Digital Intermediary Service would, with the consent and under the direction of the prisoner, take control of their data when completing forms online for them.



# Appendix



## APPENDIX A

# Prisoner Case Studies

### Case Study: Prisoner 1

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I asked an Officer and the lad I was sharing the cell with for a bit of advice, and both recommended that I put my name down for the Citizens Information Service (CIS). I didn't know where else to turn.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

I was hopeful. The Officer was fairly confident the CIS would know what I should do.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I put my name down for the CIS and in fairness, they got MABS in to see me within 3 weeks. They really listened and understood what I was going through. MABS were very professional, and I got the help I needed.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

I am not sure if they had a plan as such, as I couldn't contact them directly. When the CIS contacted MABS for me, they were willing to come in and deal with me in the prison. They were open to dealing with prisoners.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

Well, I went to the Class Officer, who recommended I put my name down for the CIS. I asked the lad I was sharing the cell with, and he recommended them, and the Officer suggested they might be able to help me also. I didn't know where else to go.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

I didn't have a choice really. I was grateful the CIS were available in the prison. We all have to ask for help at some point in life and I was glad there was help available for me.

They made me feel more positive about the whole thing. They suggested I talk to MABS, and they got MABS to come and see me. The CIS were great. They got MABS in to see me in 3 weeks. I found MABS to be great too. They gave me a lot of professional help and support.

### **MORTGAGE AT RISK.**

**Professional help and support provided by MABS within 3 weeks.**

## **Case Study: Prisoner 2**

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I wrote to the Road Safety Authority (RSA) by snail mail. It took 8 weeks for a letter to get to a solicitor. I knew I had to go to the RSA as the Officer in the Magazine shop where I worked phoned the Driving Licence Centre for me and they advised that I contact the RSA. I got the address of the RSA from another Officer. The RSA wrote back and sent me a form. They wanted a utility bill but I explained in reply that I didn't have utility bills in here. I need to get an ID, but my old licence was in my property in the prison. So, I had to go to the Governor's Parade and request my licence from my property. It took a few weeks to get this. I then had to go to the Governor's Parade again to get a Postal Order for the fee to renew my licence, using my Grat account. I eventually got the form, fee and old licence posted to the RSA and they renewed my licence with the Midlands Prison address on it.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

Yes, I am like a dog with a bone when I want something done.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

The Driving Licence Service (NDLS) had to refer me to the RSA and in the end, I got the licence renewed but it took a lot of time and work.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

No. The NDLS couldn't deal with my application. The RSA just worked their way through it. Imagine asking someone in prison for a utility bill!

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I got help from a few different Officers – Governor, A Class Officer and the Workshop Officer. I wasn't sure whom I should go to, really.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

I resented having to ask. There was no other way of getting my hands on my old licence, the fee for the licence, the application form, etc. There isn't really a choice when it comes to things like this. If you want to get something done, you have to ask for assistance.

I found they were hesitant, depending on who you got. They weren't sure about how to get the licence renewed either, but in fairness, they made a few calls and made inquiries for me.

### **RENEWING DRIVING LICENCE.**

**The Driving Licence Service wouldn't deal with his application and the RSA asked him for a utility bill, but he was in prison and could not get one. None of the Officers knew how to renew a licence either, but they did try to help him, and they made a few calls on his behalf. The licence was eventually renewed with Midlands Prison address on it.**

## **Case Study: Prisoner 3**

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I rang home to get the old licence sent to me. I got the application form in the prison,

and it said that I needed an eye test and medical.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

I didn't think it would be a problem, but I had problems getting the documentation signed.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

The licence would have been renewed had I got the documentation signed. Eventually, I put my name down for the CIS.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

Definitely not. My application had to go to the RSA in Mayo, as the Driving Licence Service couldn't deal with my application.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

The Prison Officers here are great. They helped me in every way they could, but I had to send the form to the RSA in Mayo for some reason. I went to an ACO, and he was very helpful. He got me the form and information on renewing the licence. I sent off the form stating I couldn't get the relevant documentation signed and the application was sent back to me, and they kept the old licence. I wrote to them asking that they return it to me, but they refused. This will mean more work for me when I get out and try to renew my licence without my old licence. It is so difficult to get anything done.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

If you need something done in prison, you have to ask. You are not an independent person anymore. I knew I needed help from the CIS, so I put my name down. I needed help because I am in here. I had no problem asking the Officers as they are always so helpful. Everyone is approachable.

## **RENEW DRIVING LICENCE.**

**The Prison Officers were great, but the client couldn't get the required documentation signed. The RSA was not very helpful, and the NDLS would not process his application.**

## **Case Study: Prisoner 4**

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I decided to go to Officer X for advice, and he would know what to do. He is very helpful.

**Response:**

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

Yes, I do feel confident, knowing there is help there, someone I can go to. But I don't know if I will get my problem sorted.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I hope they will be able to help me, although I am not sure they will. I hear the lads say on the Landing that it is hard to get your licence renewed or your passport done from prison.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

I wouldn't think they have. People look down on prisoners and judge them. Services might not consider we are that important.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I just go to Officer X. When I first asked him for advice, he said to come to him if I needed any help or advice. He always helps me when I ask. I feel I can trust him. He is a decent lad.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

I don't mind asking him at all. He never makes me feel any way inferior. He is just very helpful. He is a clever person, and he checks things out.

## **RENEWING DRIVING LICENCE AND PASSPORT.**

**Officer X checking things out for the prisoner; making inquiries on his behalf.**

## **Case Study: Prisoner 5**

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** Well, I knew I couldn't contact the bank myself. I don't have their number anyway. So, I asked the Class Officer, and he advised I put my name down for the CIS.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

I am confident the CIS will be able to help me. Their information is based on facts. You could be told a whole lot of things in here and it might not all be true. They know their job.



**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I haven't contacted the CIS yet, so I am not sure how it will go. I think it can be hard enough to deal with the bank. We prisoners are just a handful of people, a couple of thousand. We don't matter that much.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

I wouldn't think so. There is no benefit for them. We are such a small number, and we are not the most popular.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

Well, I went to the Class Officer, and he told me about the CIS. You start with the Class Officer, then he might put you down to see the Governor on Parade. It is the only place you can go. We are prisoners and we can't deal with these things from in here. We are very limited, in what we can do for ourselves.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

To be honest, it is humiliating. I would rather not have to go near them, just keep my head down and serve my sentence. They are all right, just doing a job, but we are powerless in here. You spend a lot of time locked up thinking about all the things you can't do.

The Class Officer admitted he didn't know much about contacting the bank or opening an account from in here. He felt the CIS would be able to help me. I feel they will have all the facts.

## **CONTACTING THE BANK.**

**Referred to CIS. The Class Officer admitted he didn't know much about contacting the bank or opening an account from inside the prison. He felt that CIS would have the facts.**

## Case Study: Prisoner 6

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's** That was the problem. I don't know how to get in touch with the Tax Office from here.

**Response:** It is so different when the phone is removed, and you can't go down the street to the Office or send them an email. So, I asked the Class Officer for advice.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

Well, I didn't know if I could contact the Tax Office. I didn't feel very confident. You don't know how to approach things from in here. There is a lack of knowledge about how to approach your problems. It is all a bit surreal.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I did contact with the help of the CIS but in the end, I couldn't get my tax back because I had no bank account for the tax to be paid back into. I was sent a cheque, but I couldn't cash the cheque in here.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

No. What good is a cheque to a prisoner?

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I asked the Class Officer to guide me, and he suggested the CIS.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

I went to the Class Officer, as I didn't know whom else to go to. They are the nearest person to you. You see them most days. Not all Officers will help. I would rather not have to ask anyone because I don't like discussing my personal life with people I don't really know.

The Officer didn't know much about tax, but the CIS were very knowledgeable about the subject. They contacted Revenue and got it sorted, but I couldn't get a bank account opened. The CIS tried the local banks for me, but the banks refused to open an account.

**DEALING WITH REVENUE REGARDING A TAX REFUND BUT HE HAS NO BANK ACCOUNT.**

**CIS contacted Revenue but Banks refused to open a bank account. A cheque was issued but is no good because he has no Bank account.**

## Case Study: Prisoner 7

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I put my name down for the CIS, as advised by the Teacher and Class Officer, hoping they may be able to help me. I have no way of getting to the Immigration Office.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

I hope that the CIS can help me. Otherwise, I don't know what I will do. I have my name down to see the CIS.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

N/A

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

Not really. I cannot contact the Immigration Office from here. There is no method in place for prisoners to contact Immigration.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I went to the teacher, who suggested I go to the Class Officer.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

I went to the Class Officer – that's where you usually go first; after that, they may tell you to put your name down for the Governor or the CIS.

It was very easy. The Teachers are very easy to approach. They didn't know what to do about the matter, but they knew they could refer me to another service. They advised me to put my name down for the Class Officer and the CIS.

### **IMMIGRATION ISSUE.**

**Referred to CIS.**

## Case Study: Prisoner 8

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I mentioned it to the Class Officer, and he went off and looked up the number of the

Embassy for me. When I contacted the Embassy, they said they couldn't help me as I was in prison. I need to call in person. The Class Officer then suggested I put my name down to see the CIS.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

No. I am not confident about getting my passport renewed. I have been told that I cannot get my passport from the Embassy while I am in prison.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

They didn't want to help me as I was in prison. Having a passport is a human right, isn't it?

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

No, there is no plan or process in place to help prisoners to renew their passports or to update their documents.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I went to the Class Officer as that is what you do when you want assistance. You must go to them.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

You must go through the Class Officer or ACO or Governor to get assistance from the outside. It is the only way to get information or assistance. They might check it up on the computer or refer you to another service, like the CIS.

**RENEWING FOREIGN PASSPORT FROM PRISON.**

**Referred to CIS.**

## Case Study: Prisoner 9

**Query to** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set

**Prisoner:** out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's** To tell you the truth, I have no idea. I will probably ask the Class Officer what

**Response:** I should do.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

I am not sure how it works. Can you renew your licence from prison? Will the licence people know I am in prison? I'm told they will put the prison address on the licence.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I haven't made contact yet.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

It doesn't sound like they have a plan in place to renew prisoners' driving licences. Imagine putting the prison address on your licence.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I had planned to go to the Class Officer for advice, but now I think I will just ask him to put my name down for the CIS. I know you are good at helping people.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

You usually have to go to the Class Officer first and ask to see other services like yourselves. They (Class Officers) are 100%. I don't mind asking them at all. They usually say they will check it out, and in fairness they do. Sometimes they might suggest putting your name down for other services, like yourselves

**RENEWING DRIVING LICENCE.**

**Referred to CIS.**

## Case Study: Prisoner 10

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I asked the Class Officer, who referred me to the Governor's Parade to find out what services might be available to help me.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

No. I felt I didn't get a straight answer. One Officer tried to tell me that if I had a bank account, I would still be getting my Disability Allowance paid into it while in prison. My parents checked my bank account and no social welfare went in after I went to prison.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I am going to put my name for the CIS. They may be able to contact Social Welfare for me.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

No, I don't think so. At least not for the closed prisons, as it seems so hard to get information on accessing outside State Services from prison. If they had a plan that was used regularly by prisoners, it would be common knowledge. Nobody seems to know what to do if a prisoner needs to get documentation renewed while in prison.

I was in an open prison some years ago and there was a great connection between the prison and outside State Services, which was of huge benefit to prisoners. I did the theory test and the driving lessons from the open prison. The services were very respectful of us and really helpful. There were some great programmes to get prisoners ready for release in an open prison.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I went to the Class Officer and from there to the ACO on Governor's Parade. This is what you must do if you want a personal matter sorted. You must start by asking the Class Officer and then see where it goes from there.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

I feel a huge sense of loss of free will and loss of personal power having to ask for everything. It makes me feel like a child again.

I don't think they were very knowledgeable about the issues I brought to them. They could tell you anything and you would have no way of knowing if the information was correct. I was happy to hear I could put my name down for the CIS.

## **CONTACTING SOCIAL WELFARE ABOUT DISABILITY ALLOWANCE PAYMENT.**

**Referred to CIS.**

### **Case Study: Prisoner 11**

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I asked the Class Officer if he knew how I could access the Bank and find out about my account. He didn't know what I should do. I asked if I could contact someone higher up like the ACO. He said he would come back to me, but he never did.

Then I decided to write the letter myself. I was aware the bank might not take the letter seriously, so I asked the Class Officer if he could get my letter stamped for me. I meant an 'official prison stamp' but he just joked about all letters getting a stamp.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

No, I think the bank will ignore my letter, as there is no validation of where I am or my personal ID in the letter. I also wonder if the letter was posted at all.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I haven't contacted the Bank yet.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

Well, if they have, they must be keeping it a secret. Surely the Officers would know about it if it existed, considering they can be here for up to 30 years. Nobody seems to know anything when you ask them. We are in a bubble in here, cut off from the outside world. I was only aware of the service provided by the CIS when I saw the leaflet about the research. In an ideal world, services would be accessible to prisoners, but prisoners are a minority group.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I went to the Class Officer and the ACO. If you need anything, you have to ask the Class Officer and he might refer you to the higher ranks, no matter how insignificant it is.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

It is very frustrating to have to be asking the whole time, and when you ask, it can go either way. You have to ask for permission for everything.

I thought they would know how I could contact the bank for information on my account, but they had no knowledge of how I could do this.

One Officer told me that if the bank sent me a bank statement, it would have to go through the Censor's Office. Imagine someone looking at your personal bank statement. That is how exposed we are in here.

**CONTACT BANK TO GET INFORMATION ABOUT BANK ACCOUNT.**

**No progress in this case.**

## Case Study: Prisoner 12

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I didn't know which way to approach it. I did ask the ISM Officer and she couldn't help with the Legal Aid. I asked the Class officer and ACO also. They couldn't help either. So, I felt I had no option but to ask my mother to get the Law Centre to contact me. I felt ashamed of having to ask my mother.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

The Law Centre sent me a form, so I felt confident I could get Legal Aid.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I felt it might work. I was also hoping it might work as I thought it was my only option. I felt ashamed of having to ask my mother, though.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**



Yes, the Legal Aid Service tries its best to assist prisoners. There are no judgements, and they try their best for prisoners.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

You have to start somewhere, and you always have to ask for assistance no matter what you try to do. Usually, you would ask the Class Officer first, but I was seeing the ISM Officer that week, so I asked her. In the end, I approached the ACO, as he is easy to approach.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about your problem were they?**

I felt a little embarrassed, but I knew I could trust him, and he would help if he could. He didn't judge me or get into my personal stuff. He wasn't sure what I should do. Then I got my mother to contact The Law Centre for me and things changed.

**LEGAL ISSUE.**

**The prison staff was helpful, but in the end, the prisoner's mother had to contact the Law Centre for him.**

## Case Study: Prisoner 13

**Query to Prisoner:** You have no Internet access, and limited phone access while in prison. When you set out to contact the outside State Service, how did you approach it?

**Prisoner's Response:** I knew I couldn't do it myself, so I asked the Addiction Counsellor, and he suggested that I see the Resettlement Coordinator.

**Did you feel confident that you could achieve what you set out to do?**

No, I don't feel too confident about having the Medical Card and Social Welfare Card by the time I get out of prison. I saw the Resettlement Coordinator and was asked to sign something. I wasn't told what to expect or anything, so I'm a bit confused about it all.

**If/when you contacted the outside State Service yourself, were they able to help you with your personal matter?**

I don't know what's happening, to be honest. Maybe it will be sorted, and I will get the two cards, but I don't honestly know what's going on.

**Do you think the State Services have a plan in place for prisoners to renew their documents?**

No, I don't think they have. Nobody in here knows what to do. They are probably just waiting for us to contact them when we get out.

**Who in the prison did you go to for help? Why did you go to them?**

I asked the Addiction Counsellor what I should do, as I was worried about getting out and not being able to get my money or go to the doctor.

**What was it like for you to ask this person/service for help?**

**How helpful or knowledgeable about their problem were they?**

Didn't mind asking the Counsellor. But he couldn't help me and referred me to the Resettlement Coordinator. There is so much of that in here. You ask someone and they tell you they will refer you to so and so. Why don't the services that are here to help us let us know what they do, why don't they come to us? We are always having to ask, ask, and ask.

The Resettlement Coordinator seemed to know what she was doing. But she didn't explain much to me. She just said "right, sign there please"

**RENEWING PUBLIC SERVICE CARD AND MEDICAL CARD FOR RELEASE.**

**Awaiting an update from the Resettlement Coordinator.**

## APPENDIX B

# Suggested Further Reading

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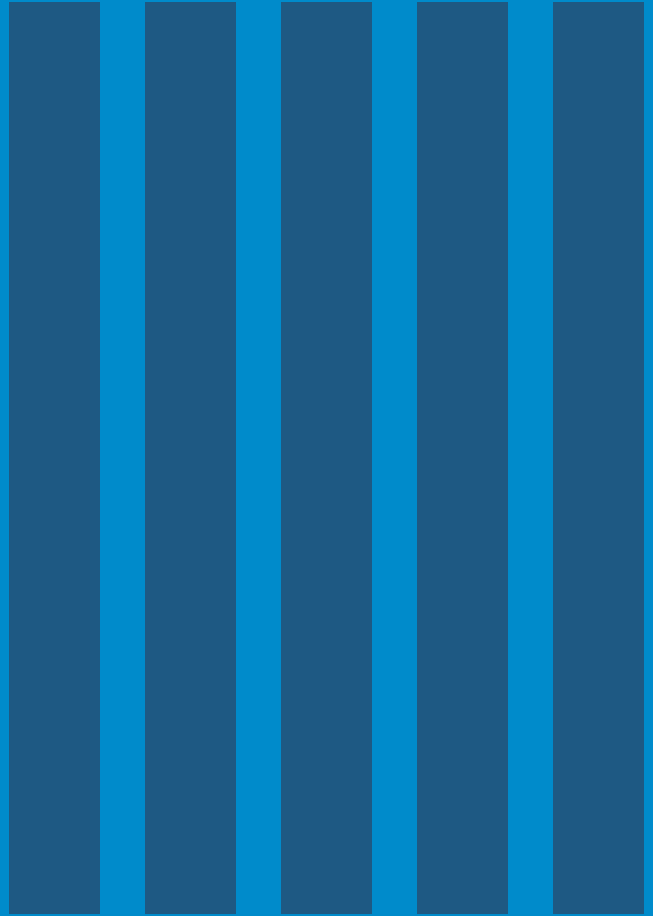
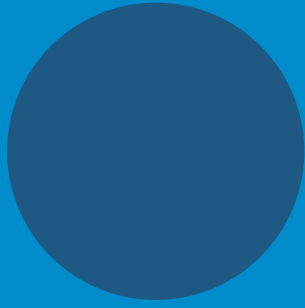
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