

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT PRISON MONITORS (IPM) MID YEAR -REPORT

April - September 2025

		2025	2024	2023
	Volunteers across 17 prisons	118	109	98
	Visits conducted	589	561	515
	Hours spent monitoring	2120	1930	1825
	Requests received from prisoners	910	737	679

The previous two national IPM mid-year reports highlighted persistent concerns across Scottish prisons including overcrowding, regime limitations, progression barriers, staffing shortages, the prisoner complaints system, medication dispensing, and the rise in cost of living. This year's report tells a similar story, with many of these issues remaining unresolved.

Overcrowding remains the most pressing issue. Numbers are rising inexorably across the estate and look set to break the all-time high recorded in 2012 of 8,420. The impact is felt across all establishments. Once again, IPMs sound the alarm: it is unconscionable that in 2025 prisoners are still being asked to share cells that Victorian society deemed suitable for only one person. The consequences extend beyond cramped conditions. Overcrowding undermines safety, limits prisoner access to the daily regime and restricts prisoners' opportunities for integrating successfully into society on release. HM Chief Inspector of Prisons for Scotland has emphasised the paralysing nature of overcrowding, affecting every aspect of prison life

The Scottish Prison Service faces structural challenges, including limited space and staffing shortages, which hinder its ability to deliver on its mission to provide person-centred, inclusive, trauma-informed, and rights-based services that promote the health, safety, and wellbeing of all those in custody.

The IPM team is disappointed that little progress has been made. In some cases, conditions have deteriorated. The issue is not only the rise in the number of prisoners, but the increasingly complex population, including more prisoners on offence-protection and those with links to serious and organised crime, which further challenges the ability of prisons to keep people safe.

Society faces a stark choice: either reduce reliance on imprisonment or invest in additional capacity. The current state of affairs is not tenable.

IPMS are concerned that individual prison arrangements to shorten the core day in efforts to offer greater regime predictability may worsen existing tensions. We urge local prison management to ensure that prisoners are at the heart of any changes, and that lessons from COVID-19-era restrictions are not forgotten.

Drugs in prison remain a serious concern. While early signs of work to reduce supply are encouraging, and efforts to reduce demand are welcome, addiction services require significantly more investment.

We welcome the Scottish Human Rights Commission's (SHRC) report [Access to Justice for Prisoners: The Complaints System](#) (August 2025). IPMs have consistently raised concerns about the prisoner complaints system since our first mid-year report in 2023, and in quarterly reports dating back to 2018. That meaningful action has not been taken over seven years is deeply concerning. We echo the SHRC's call for urgent reform, rooted in human rights and shaped by the voices of prisoners and their families.

IPMs have also raised concerns, via the Chief Inspector, about how segregation rules are being applied. In several establishments, prisoners have been moved between rules, which has elongated their time in segregation, without ministerial oversight beyond three days. We believe this breaches the spirit, if not the letter of the law, and the response to date has not led to a change in practice.

Despite these challenges, there have been positive developments. At HMP Greenock, weekly Risk Management Team meetings have led to more prisoners progressing to open conditions in the first half of 2025/26 than in all of 2024/25. Good practice was also observed in employability and recovery programmes, and IPMs noted many examples of officers treating prisoners with compassion and humanity. The rollout of the [UpSide](#) programme, supporting short-term and remand prisoners with throughcare services, is also welcomed.

All positive work is put in jeopardy by the pressures in the system which are not within the gift of the Scottish Prison Service to do anything about. Put simply, there are too many people in too few prisons, preventing the service from fulfilling its core duties to keep people safe and support rehabilitation.

Finally, the number of IPM monitoring visits and time spent in prisons increased in 2025 compared with 2024 and 2023ⁱ. This increase was matched by a rise in requests for our services, reflecting both growing awareness and need.

Prisoners can contact the IPMs by calling 0800 056 7476

ⁱ Data for all years covers only the six-month period April-September. Full year stats are available in HMIPS Annual reports. IPM/volunteer numbers as on 30 September 2025