

# POLICING AUTHORITY ASSESSMENT OF POLICING PERFORMANCE 2023

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AN TÚDARÁS PÓILÍNEACHTA  
POLICING AUTHORITY

March  
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### Who We Are

The Policing Authority was established as an independent statutory body on 1 January 2016 to oversee the performance of the Garda Síochána in relation to policing services in Ireland.

Our Mission is to hold the Garda Síochána fairly and transparently to account in the interests of all, particularly the most vulnerable.

The [Garda Síochána Act 2005](#), as amended (the Act), provides for an extensive range of functions for the Authority, some of which were previously the responsibility of Government or the Minister, including:

- Oversight of Policing
- Public Engagement and Awareness
- Appointments of senior members and staff of the Garda Síochána
- Research

Further details about the remit and full functions of the Authority are [available here](#).

## Chairperson's Foreword



This report is being published following the enactment of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024, which is due to be commenced later this year. Under this Act, the Authority functions will merge with the Garda Inspectorate to form a new organisation, the Policing and Community Safety Authority. This new body will retain responsibility for policing oversight and inspection, but will have a potentially transformative remit to oversee community safety.

I believe this is a significant and far-reaching development in Irish policing. It is evident from the Authority's ongoing community outreach work that communities across Ireland want greater collaboration between the police, wider public services, and their communities. People want the Garda Síochána to prevent and detect crime but also to ensure that people, especially the most vulnerable, are protected. They also want trust and confidence in the Garda Síochána to be maintained and built upon across all communities.

This will only be possible through a strong relationship between communities and the Gardaí. Indeed, this community ethos was the founding principle of the Garda Síochána. In the words of the first Commissioner, Michael Staines, "The Garda Síochána will succeed not by force of arms or numbers, but by their moral authority, as servants of the people."

It is often said that all Gardaí are Community Gardaí. While Gardaí strive to have a community policing ethos in how they approach their work, it is not necessarily accurate or helpful to describe all Gardaí as Community Gardaí. Community Policing is a dedicated, specialist and vital role. It should be recognised as such. It requires certain skills and expertise in engaging with and supporting communities. Roles that require a commitment of time for members to undertake these duties.

Community Gardaí should be the most frequent point of contact for the public with the Garda Síochána in our day-to-day lives. They are the backbone of Irish public life that many of us rely on in moments of crisis because they are the face of Irish policing in every community across the country. We know them by their first names. We know them from the sidelines of pitches, bingo halls and school halls. We know them from the quiet cup of tea in the community centres and chats on the streets. They build our trust, promote community relationships and deescalate tensions. We are indebted to them.

However community policing resources are often the first to be cut when resources are tight. Regrettably, that is the case again now.

Without a doubt, the most frequent feedback the Authority receives throughout the country is that there is an absence or lack of Community Gardaí. I am deeply concerned about this.

The Authority has listened to communities across Ireland. We consistently and constantly hear the same thing, regardless of whether the community is urban or rural. The communities tell us there is a lack of informal engagement and not enough visible Gardaí working with and among communities to hear and respond to their concerns. The public want more community policing. When they do not

have it, it leads to negative impacts for trust, relationships, feelings of safety, and crime prevention and detection.

The Authority understands that there must also be specialist units which are resourced and equipped to respond to crime in modern Ireland. These specialist units are largely unseen or ununiformed, tackling crimes that were not as prevalent in our parent's generation such as online sexual abuse, fraud and online criminality. The Authority commends these specialist units for their dedication and growing successes in dealing with the often horrific nature of these crimes, particularly sexual offences.

However, the Authority believes that a balance must be achieved between regular members that respond to calls for service, those that provide specialist services, and those that are tasked with Community Policing roles.

The Garda Síochána cannot respond to issues of crime, anti-social behaviour, and wider issues that impact our sense of safety alone. That is why a model of community safety which will be introduced later this year is important and welcomed. This will put a greater onus on wider organisations to work with the Garda Síochána and crucially, the Garda Síochána to work with them. The Authority believes this should offer the opportunity for communities to have a greater voice on the issues affecting them. It is vital that this voice is heeded and made central to the work of the organisation.

It is also imperative that the voices of those that find themselves victims of, or are affected by, Garda misconduct are heard. It may be a small percentage of the Garda workforce who misuse or abuse their power and position. However, as recent cases – including those of sexual abuse, coercive control, and other serious crimes – have shown, they can have a destructive and traumatic impact on not only the public, but to the vast, vast majority of the Garda Síochána who are appalled at this behaviour and who have successfully brought convictions against their colleagues.

Important work has been progressed in 2023 to improve service, advance community safety and improve the response to misconduct. There remains work to do on these priority areas.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Elaine Byrne', with a long, sweeping underline that extends downwards and to the left.

**Dr Elaine Byrne BL**  
**Chairperson**

## 1 Introduction

This *Assessment of Policing Performance* is the latest in a series of bi-annual reports produced by the Policing Authority assessing Garda Síochána performance. They are provided to the Minister for Justice, the Garda Commissioner, and other stakeholders, and made publicly available through the Authority's website. The reports are important in providing transparency to the communities that the Garda Síochána serves, the Garda workforce, and other stakeholders about policing performance, the oversight of policing, and the outcomes of that work.

Given the broad range of functions and operational activity undertaken by the Garda Síochána, the report does not set out to capture all of Garda performance. Instead, it highlights major, notable or important achievements, as well as providing commentary on areas of particular challenge or risk.

### Report Structure

Following this introductory section, Section 2 provides an overview of the progress made and challenges faced in implementing the Garda Síochána's *Policing Plan 2023* – the annual plan that set out what the organisation hoped to achieve in 2023.

Section 3 provides an in-depth assessment of performance against each of the five Policing Priorities 2022-2024 through a high-level commentary on the key measures of success and consideration of a number of key issues arising.

Section 4 considers the above, and provides its conclusions in the context of the planned commencement of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 later this year.

### How We Assess Performance

The Authority's primary mechanism for monitoring and assessing performance is through monthly meetings with the Garda Commissioner, a minimum of four of which are held in public each year.

The Authority's *Policing Strategy and Performance* and *Organisation Development* committees also review performance across the breadth and depth of the functions of the Garda Síochána as they relate to policing services and the management and development of the organisation.

Staff of the Authority also engage with the Garda Síochána at national, regional, divisional and station level on an ongoing basis.

The Authority also assesses performance through a programme of stakeholder engagements. These include Joint Policing Committees and a wide range of groups and organisations at national and local level. This programme of engagement and outreach seeks to listen to and understand the lived experience of policing from both a service delivery and community perspective, as well as the perceptions in the community as to its effectiveness. The Authority published an overview of the feedback and experiences of communities with whom it engaged, during 2022, in February 2023. This 'What We Heard' report is [available here](#).

Throughout the year, the Authority also reviews and analyses internal and external reporting from, and about, the Garda Síochána, as well as monitoring wider international trends and research concerning policing, some of which commissioned by the Authority as part of its wider Research Strategy.

## 2 Policing Plan 2023

The Garda Síochána’s annual Policing Plan is set out by the Commissioner ahead of each calendar year. It is made up of targets that represent the areas of focus for the organisation’s management and workforce for that year. The Plan is approved by the Authority, with the consent of the Minister for Justice, and used as a lens through which performance can be measured for that year.

The Policing Plan 2023 is the second of three annual Plans that will give effect to the Garda Síochána Strategy Statement 2022-2024. In its *Assessment of Policing Performance 2022*, the Authority noted:

*“...while progress has been made across a range of areas and important work done [in 2022], the significant resourcing constraints identified by the Garda Síochána do not offer confidence as to its ability to carry this level of achievement into 2023...”*



Figure 1: Garda Síochána RAG Status update against the Policing Plan at the end of 2023

This proved true and, at a high-level, progress was limited by resourcing challenges. As can be seen above, while 10 of the 23 targets in the Plan were reported as achieved by the end of 2023, the remaining 13 were either only partially (eight targets) or not achieved (five targets).

‘Resourcing’ (centre) indicates to what extent the necessary resources (i.e. Garda members and staff, ICT infrastructure, etc.) are in place to allow for the achievement of each of these targets. As per the above, only five target areas were considered adequately resourced at year end. This, in the main, is the cause that constrained overall achievement.

It is important to note that despite this, even in the areas where targets were not achieved, important progress was made, e.g. in areas such as tackling organised crime, implementing important change projects in the areas of data and technology, and improving their capacity to respond to cyber crime. The reporting of targets as partially or not achieved does not reflect a lack of willingness or effort. In fact, in many cases these are areas where members and staff have achieved important progress or delivered services in spite of critical deficiencies. Rather, it provides an honest reflection of where the organisation is facing challenges.

Attention must also be given to the fact that, as shown above (right), there were a majority of targets that also require ‘dependencies’ (enabling legislation, input of partners, etc.) to progress. In the context of the move to a formal model of community safety (see section 4) – which recognises the fundamental fact that policing and community safety requires the wider input of health, education, local authorities, community workers, etc. – it is important to consider what this says about the need for wider services to work in partnership with the Garda Síochána.

Accordingly, the specific impacts of these considerable resourcing constraints on policing services, the external dependencies that also affected implementation of the Plan, and detail of the successes achieved in spite of these challenges, are considered in more detail in the next section.

### 3 Progress under the Policing Priorities

The Policing Authority has a statutory function to determine or revise, following consultation with the Commissioner, Policing Priorities for the in Garda Síochána.

The current Priorities establish what the Authority wants the Garda Síochána to give the most attention to in the period 2022-2024. They assist the Commissioner in identifying areas that require extra focus and/or investment of resources to improve the service delivered to the public and the enhancement of the Garda organisation. They are:

- Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable
- Supporting and Ensuring Community Safety
- Tackling Organised and Serious Crime
- Rights Based and Ethical Service Delivery
- Development of the Capacity to Strategically Manage Garda Resources

Each Priority includes: the articulation of a desired outcome; a number of key functional areas where the Authority believe there is particular attention required; and a number of measures of success which serve as key indicators of progress.

The Authority has updated the Priorities as of the end of 2023, to include new measures of success under *Supporting and Ensuring Community Safety* concerning roads policing, and under *Development of the Capacity to Strategically Manage Garda Resources*, to cover workforce health and wellbeing.

The Priorities, much like this report, do not assume to cover the full range of activity taken on by the Garda Síochána and its workforce. Rather they are designed to highlight areas that require particular attention. Likewise, there is undoubtedly considerable work being done to support individuals and communities across the country that cannot be captured in this report.

Accordingly, the assessment of performance against these Priorities in this section seeks to highlight major, notable or important achievements, as well as the identification of areas of challenge or risk. It also includes commentary on notable achievements or challenges relevant to the Priorities, but beyond the scope of the measures of success themselves.

Further information on the Priorities, including key areas of focus and outputs or outcomes by which the Authority will measure success against them, is [available here](#), and throughout the report.

***“20. The Authority shall, in accordance with this section and with the approval of the Minister***

***(a) determine, and from time to time revise, priorities for the Garda Síochána in performing its functions relating to policing services, and***

***(b) establish, and from time to time revise, levels of performance (“performance targets”) to be aimed at in seeking to achieve the objective of each priority referred to in paragraph (a)...”***

*Section 20 of the Garda Síochána Act 2005, as amended.*

### 3.1 Protecting and Supporting Victims and the Vulnerable

The Authority, under this priority, envisages the delivery of a policing service to victims of sexual crime, domestic abuse, and coercive control that is victim-centred, trauma-informed, effective in preventing and detecting these crimes, vindicates human rights, and trusted by victims.

Nationally and internationally, it is understood that sexual offences go largely under-reported. The CSO Sexual Violence Survey 2022 found 47% of victims had never disclosed their experience to anybody (let alone file a report with police) and 20% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment in the previous year, but just 6% of those had reported it to police.

As such, while the longer-term increases in recorded incidents (see figure 2 below) are of course concerning, given the under-reported nature of sexual offences, the long-term increase in reporting of sexual offences should be viewed as a positive. That is to say, that the increase in recorded incidents is believed to be correlated to an increased confidence in reporting crime and confidence in the policing, and wider criminal justice, response. This aligns with feedback the Authority has heard, and continued to hear in 2023, concerning the long-term improvement in policing in this area and the related increase in victim confidence.

In this context, Ireland is currently experiencing a sustained growth in the number of recorded sexual offences. As can be seen in the graph below (figure 2), with the exception of 2020 and the associated lockdowns, 2023 is the first year in the last ten where there has not been an increase in recorded incidents. There was an approximate 11% decrease in recorded incidents, and early data for 2024 would suggest that this decrease has continued. However, as can also be seen in figure 2 below, despite the decrease, there is still an overall increase from pre-2019. The Authority has requested that the Garda Síochána analyse this data and, where possible, ascertain potential causes for this decrease. It is understood that a potential contributory factor is limitations on Garda resources leading to challenges in identifying and commencing investigation on proactive investigations, such as child pornography cases which require investigating members to investigate suspected cases and record an incident if there is illegal material found.

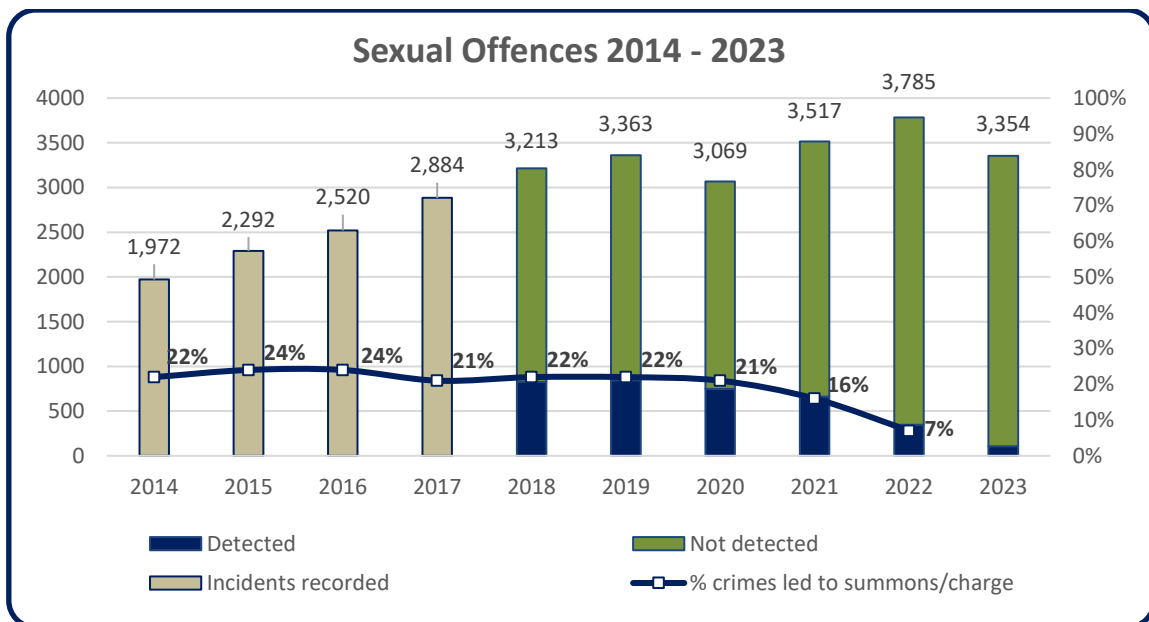


Figure 2: Number of Sexual Offences Recorded and Detected, 2014 – 2023. Source: CSO



## Incident Detection and Outcome

Often there is significant attention given to the detection rates of sexual offences and other crimes. While an important metric, it is important to note that such crimes are characterised by complex, and often lengthy, investigations and court processes. As such, the detection rate tends to be extremely low (3-5%) in the first 12 months, rising as investigations and court processes are progressed and completed. However at 20-25%, detection rates in Ireland, which are largely similar or better than those seen internationally, remain at a comparatively low level, relative to other crime types. This is due to a variety of factors, from availability of evidence to matters relating to victim and witness participation.

In order to better understand these factors, and potentially identify ways to increase the detection rate over time, the Garda Síochána has commenced recording outcomes on all crime incidents. Following an initial pilot concentrated on sexual offences which launched in summer 2022, this has been underway nationwide for all crime types since late 2023. This is an important development and a significant achievement for the Garda Síochána; one which will hopefully yield information that allows for improved criminal justice processes (including but not limited to policing), improved victim supports, and, ultimately, increased detection rates.

## Child Sexual Abuse

Included in these overall increases in recorded incidents is a medium-long term increase in the number of recorded incidents of child sexual abuse, including incidents of the possession of child sexual abuse material. Again, this is understood to be, at least in part, due to an increased rate of reporting. However, as with the overall figure for sexual offences, there was a decrease in recorded incidents in 2023 – most notably recorded incidents of child pornography offences – that is understood to be directly linked to constraints on Garda capacity. This arises as when suspected offences are flagged to the Garda Síochána, including from international partners alerting suspected access to child abuse material online from Ireland, they can only be recorded as an offence once the report has been reviewed by a Garda member. Therefore, if there are challenges around Garda resources, this can result in delays in assessing reports, and therefore less incidents being recorded. Ultimately, this means the reduction in recorded offences does not necessarily reflect a decrease in the amount of child pornography material that exists, but an inability of the Garda Síochána to assign resources to review reports.

This is occurring in the context of the Garda Síochána continuing to implement, along with partners, the recommendations arising from a 2017 Garda Inspectorate Report, *Responding to Child Sexual Abuse*. In 2023, there has been continued progress on implementing the recommendations, led by the Garda National Protective Services Bureau. The Authority believes that the continued high level of importance placed on the crucial area of child protection at strategic leadership level, has led to continued improvements to service and therefore on impacts for victims. Several important achievements in 2023 include the development of a joint TUSLA-Garda Síochána electronic child abuse notification system (eCANS) and a data sharing agreement, both of which are vital to ensuring that there is an effective interagency response to any child protection concerns.

There are however continuing challenges in a number of areas, many of which relate to resourcing. In particular there continue to be reports of delays in some parts of the country in the examination of victims aged under 14 due to a lack of 24/7, national access to specialist child-focused Sexual

Assault Treatment Units (SATU). In particular this is raised outside of the major urban areas of Dublin, Galway and Cork. There are also concerns regarding the timeliness with which child victims undergo specialist interviews conducted by suitably trained personnel from the Garda Síochána and TUSLA.

Given the nature of these crimes, there are critical dependencies on health and child protection partners. The Authority is aware of the strong inter-agency relationship between the Garda Síochána and TUSLA and processes that have been concentrated on and improved upon in recent years. In the main Garda members engaged with have reflected the crucial role and dedication of staff in TUSLA and noted how they are critical to the victim support and criminal investigation processes. However, the Garda Síochána and TUSLA are on the record in respect of their own capacity constraints, and as such represent areas where wider resourcing issues are frequently reported by Garda members and wider stakeholders as affecting outcomes for victims.

The Authority is aware that there is competition for resources in all areas, in particular in respect of the implementation of ICT programmes. The response to child sexual abuse is no different, and the Authority is aware that there are requests for ICT resources in this area which may be effective in mitigating human resource constraints in the GNPSB while also contributing to safeguarding member welfare – e.g., by automating victim identification processes. As with all new technology in policing this should be subject to strong governance to ensure that their use is ethical, proportionate and legal, and that any data retention is consistent with the Garda Síochána data retention policy.

**Domestic Violence and Coercive Control**

Similar to sexual offences generally, the rate of contact made with the Garda Síochána concerning domestic abuse and number of coercive control incidents both continue to increase (see figure 3). This follows the establishment of specialist Divisional Protective Services Units, the introduction of a specific Garda operation, Faoiseamh, for domestic abuse in 2020, and the creation of a statutory offence of coercive control in Ireland on 01 January 2019.

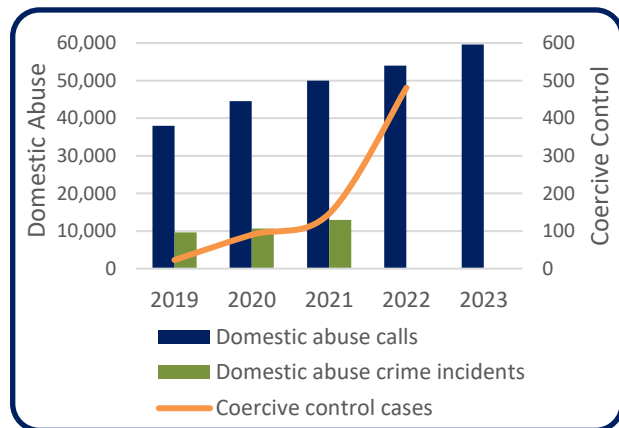


Figure 3: Measures of Reported Domestic Abuse 2019 – 2023. Source: Garda Síochána, Houses of the Oireachtas. Some data for 2022/2023 is not yet available.

**Service to Victims**

Given these increases discussed above, it is vital that the service provided to all victims is consistent and appropriate. This is true for victims of all crime types, but especially important in the context of domestic, sexual and gender-based violence (DSGBV). And while the services to victims have improved in recent years, including in 2023, there are further advances to be made.

Victims of DSGBV

All forms of domestic abuse are significantly under-reported crimes and ones that are extremely difficult for victims to report and progress through the criminal justice procedures.

As such, these sustained increases in reporting are important markers of success and represent the continued positive effect of increased Garda focus on these areas in recent years. Focus that has also led to justice for many victims through court prosecutions and convictions. The Garda Síochána has maintained rates of call-backs to victims of domestic abuse, within seven days, at an improved level. These levels were approximately 75% in the period 2022-2023, compared to an average of under 45% in 2016-2021. That said, there remains room to improve on this rate, and also in ensuring that the quality of contact remains high and the frequency is sufficient. There has been a recent drop in the average number of contacts with each victim that the Authority will continue to monitor.

While commending both the success of Operation Faoiseamh and praising the volume of call-backs to victims, the Authority has previously highlighted inconsistency in the response to incidents of domestic abuse including the enforcement of domestic abuse orders. Feedback from stakeholders working in the area throughout 2023 indicate that these issues persist across the country.

It is also noted by the Authority that the *Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (GREVIO) recently identified a number of areas for improvement in the response to domestic violence and Ireland's implementation of the 'Istanbul' Convention. These include ensuring that internal policy on domestic violence requires Gardaí to systematically carry out a risk assessment when reports of abuse are received, proactively monitoring and promptly enforcing interim, emergency barring orders and other protection/restraining orders, and that proportionate sanctions for these orders are effectively applied in practice.

The Authority's experience of engagement across the country with victim's organisations is consistent with these GREVIO findings. There is particular concern that breaches are not always policed and that there are delays in the servicing of orders which leave victims in a vulnerable position.

Domestic abuse orders are vital to the safety of victims of domestic violence including by prohibiting or limiting certain behaviours and achieving physical distance between a perpetrator and a victim. The Domestic Violence Act 2018, makes a breach of an order an offence liable on summary conviction to a class B fine or to imprisonment of a maximum period of 12 months, or both. It is vital for the safety of victims and consistency of service, that these issues are addressed.

#### Victims of All Crime

The Commissioner's Report to the Authority in August 2023, commenting on the recently released Public Attitudes Survey (PAS) results for 2022, noted that the results highlighted a need to continue to improve service to victims. It was stated that the Garda Síochána will continue to place a key focus on informing victims on how their case is progressing. The results underline the need for such. PAS 2022 found that 418 (5.4%) of the 7,699 respondents were victims of crime. The most common crimes experienced by victims were burglary (21%), criminal damage (19%), and assault (17%). Of these victims, 83% reported their most recent crime to Gardaí, of whom:

- 61% felt the Gardaí **responded quickly**;
- 72% were given Garda station **contact details** (63% in 2021);
- 71% were given the **name** of the investigating Garda member;
- 47% were given incident **PULSE number** (30% in 2021);
- 65% reported that they received **follow-up contact** by phone or in person;

- 41% were given details of available **victim supports** (34% in 2021); and,
- 43% felt they received **sufficient information**, 30% 'too little' and 26% received no update.

While there have been improvements on PAS 2021, and previous years, it remains of concern to the Authority that there continues to be significant proportions of victims that are receiving insufficient levels of information and support. Particularly in the context of the hesitancy to report some of the most serious crimes, as discussed earlier.

Beyond the PAS, this is consistent with what the Authority has heard from stakeholders throughout the country. In rural areas for example the Authority was consistently told of low levels of reporting. This finding is consistent with the *Irish Farm Crime Survey* which was undertaken by Technical University Dublin and the Irish Farmers Association (published June 2023).

Positively, the Garda Síochána has participated in a working group in 2023 which is tasked with reviewing how the Garda Síochána communicates and provides information to victims of crime. This has resulted in the development of a survey which was distributed to over 1,000 Garda members and Garda staff to gather the views of those who provide specific services for victims of crime. It is hoped that this will help to identify ways in which to improve services to all victims.

### **Organisational Capacity**

As the Authority has previously noted, increased reporting is placing growing demands on the organisation. In this context of growing demand, the resources available within the specialist Divisional Protective Services Units and in victim support roles are severely impacted by current resourcing challenges and remain insufficient to meet demand. As noted at the beginning of this section, this can have impacts on the recording and timely investigation of crimes. It also can have considerable impact on the health and wellbeing of the members who are experiencing consistently large workloads, dealing with serious and potentially disturbing crimes.

While specialist units and bureaus concerned with DSGBV are central to the organisational response and have led much of the progress outlined, they are not operating alone. It is vitally important that every member of the Garda Síochána possesses the necessary knowledge and ability to appropriately respond to victims, especially those of DSGBV. In this vein the training and development of members is crucial in ensuring a greater consistency of service to victims. This is frequently cited by stakeholders as an issue in relation to the advice given to victims around the application for and law concerning barring and protection orders, as well as the serving and enforcement of these orders.

Garda members in turn need support, and the organisation must continue to improve capacity to address current deficits in the number of specialist interviewers and available interview suites, which are resulting in investigative delays. Related improvements in device examination is covered below.

### 3.2 Tackling Organised and Serious Crime

**Desired Outcome:** Under this Priority the Garda Síochána is working to prevent and disrupt the activities of organised criminals, including those of international networks, engaged in national and transnational crime and reduce their impact on communities.

The Garda Síochána continued to have considerable success in response to organised crime in 2023. In part this is evidenced by the seizure of drugs, assets and cash by the Garda Síochána and its partners. This includes a number of high-profile, large seizures.

As can be seen in table 1 below, the €211m worth of drugs seized in 2023, represents almost 40% of all drugs seized since the formation of the Garda National Drugs and Organised Crime Bureau (GNDOCB) in 2015. These seizures, and those made in other jurisdictions, not only impact Ireland but also the networks and drug supply in other European countries. In this regard, perhaps more significantly than the quantities seized, is the fact that each large-scale seizure also represents the disruption of organised criminal groups’ supply chains. In this respect the Garda Síochána and its national and international partners continue to have notable success as evidenced by seizures, arrests and prosecutions.

GNDOCB Seizures	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Illicit drugs (estimated value)	€75.6m	€28.2m	€21.3m	€36.7m	€63.7m	€57.0m	€211.0m
Threat-to-life Interventions	26	13	14	2	2	3	0

*Table 1: Reported Seizures and Threat-to-life interventions by GNDOCB 2017 – 2023*

Similarly the rate of murders linked to organised crime remain low, and situations requiring threat-to-life interventions (intelligence indicating an imminent attempt on someone’s life) by the Garda Síochána remain at significantly lower levels than they had been in the decade prior to 2020. The positive impact of this on communities should not be underestimated, nor the efforts made to reduce these incidents and keep them at these levels. As the Authority noted in the previous iteration of this report (published December 2023), the impact of the policing response to organised crime and violence in Drogheda – and the role of partners and the community-at-large – in recent years has been one of seismic impact for the town and its communities.

#### Drug-related Intimidation

Despite these successes, there remains a prevalence of drug and drug related crime in communities across the country, who consistently raise this as an area of concern with the Authority. Foremost of concern is drug related intimidation (DRI). This is the use of violence, other criminal behaviour, or the threat of such, to coerce people into paying debts (real or inflated) or undertaking criminal activity, such as storing drugs in the home. It is a pernicious crime, and one that is characterised by low levels of reporting out of fear. Victims are not just those who have built up drug debts, but often their wider circle of family and/or friends.

Where a victim has been involved in drug use, often the decision not to report can be based on a fear of consequences for criminal activity undertaken that has resulted in the accumulation of debt, or as a consequence of coercion. While this might be the case, it is crucial that there is an approach to DRI that recognises the individual as a victim, regardless of the fact that they may also be a suspect. As a victim of DRI, they possess the same rights and confer the same responsibilities on the Garda Síochána as any other victim.

Ensuring an appropriate policing response to DRI is and will remain a persistent challenge for the Garda Síochána. There cannot practically be a permanent presence for each victim, nor can the Garda Síochána provide advice on whether or not victims should pay debts to organised crime groups or undertake criminality on their behalf. Members consistently speak of the difficulty in engaging with victims on this basis, and on effective ways to encourage reporting. That said, there have been recent increases in reporting, and notable successes, charges and convictions achieved.

Despite this, the issue of under-reporting is recognised as a significant challenge for the Garda Síochána and it is evident that policing in a vacuum cannot wholly prevent or solve DRI – or wider drug and drug related crime. In recognition of this, under the National Drug Strategy the *Drug Related Intimidation and Violence Engagement* (DRIVE) programme is being rolled out nationwide by the Department of Health. DRIVE is a multi-agency approach involving policing, health, and community support. Primarily it will offer support to victims of DRI, and provide agencies, including the Garda Síochána with more information on the scale of the problem and provide a forum for a multi-agency response centre on victim support and education. In 2023, the DRIVE committee were engaged in educational roll-out nationally with the Garda Síochána, along with other agencies and community and voluntary groups were represented at all DRIVE information events across the country.

**Acquisitive Crime**

In respect of acquisitive crime (theft, burglary, etc.) there are two clear trends of note (see figure 4 below). Firstly there is a long-term, sustained reduction in the number of burglaries. In part this is due to the ongoing, annual undertaking of Operation Thor – a Garda operation focussed on burglary prevention and on disrupting organised crime groups that engage in burglary – and its continued success. It may also be reflective of changes in the activity undertaken by OCGs (organised criminal gangs), with engagement suggesting that groups are moving towards the lower risk, higher reward crimes of drug and drug related crime, and online fraud and other economic crimes. Secondly, there has been a recent spike in the number of theft from shop incidents. This is being seen in other jurisdictions and the Authority welcomes the commencement of Operation Táirge in December 2023. This is aimed at detecting and preventing organised retail crime.

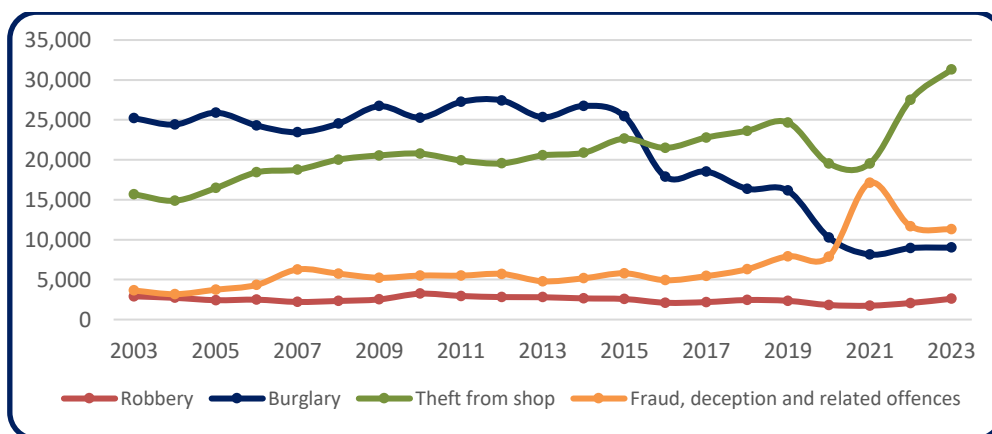


Figure 4: Acquisitive Crimes 2003 – 2023. Source: CSO

The Authority will continue to engage on these trends and the ongoing progress made under these operations.

**Fraud and Economic Crime**

As can be seen in figure 4, economic crime (fraud, deception and related offences) has grown significantly since 2017, with a noticeable spike in 2021 during COVID-19. This is driven by a range of different crime types, for example in 2023 there was a notable increase in phishing incidents and investment fraud.

Fraud and economic crime is often perceived as ‘victimless crime’, or that ‘white collar crime’ only affects big business or the wealthy. The reality is that on an individual level many of those directly targeted by OCGs operating in this area are the vulnerable in communities. Older persons are disproportionately impacted as victims, frequently being targeted and losing significant amounts of money compared to other groups in society. This also extends to younger people who are expressly targeted by OCGs to become money mules. This is the practice by which OCGs use the bank accounts of young people to move money, often in exchange for a fee. Increasingly those targeted are not only college-age students but those in secondary school. For young people this engagement in criminal activity has significant life consequences, including a potential criminal record which can impact travel, future access to financial services, etc.

There has also been a significant increase in blackmail/extortion offences of which young men represent a high proportion of victims. In the main, the incidents of this type reported relate to threats to distribute sensitive material (images/videos recorded online etc.).

Beyond these direct attempts to defraud individuals, economic crime underpins crime generally. The fact is criminal activity is largely driven by economic gain. The prevalence of drugs in Irish society, the production of child sexual abuse imagery, and the trafficking of human beings all yield financial gain for OCGs.

This money has to be received, moved and laundered. Increasingly it is converted to cryptocurrency. For the Garda Síochána, it is crucial that there is the capacity and capability to track and investigate this movement of these proceeds of crime. Strikingly, as per figure 5, there has exponential growth being experienced in respect of suspicious transaction reports: banking/payment transactions that are reported to the Garda Síochána and other police services by Irish or international banks, buildings, and other financial bodies/professionals as being potentially connected to criminality.

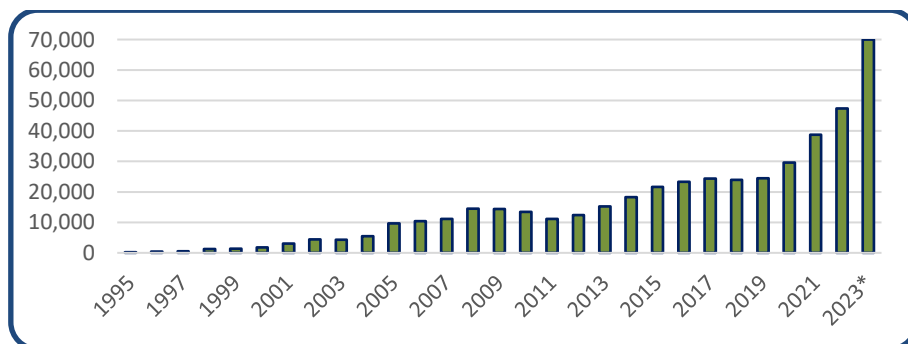


Figure 5: Number of Suspicious Transaction Reports received by the Garda Financial Investigations Unit 1995 – 2023. \* Data to November 2023. Source: Garda Síochána

For the Garda Síochána each of these reports requires review, and thereafter may be recorded as connected to criminal activity and require investigation. These long term trends are also seen internationally and are expected to continue to grow. Particularly as Ireland is home to a large

financial services sector and hosts a growing number of international and financial/technical “fintech” institutions.

Beyond the growth in scale, the complexity of these crimes and the ease with which cash and crypto assets are transferred is placing ever increasing demands on the Garda Síochána and represents an evolving and considerable challenge for the organisation. It is a challenge that is not being met with a commensurate strategic increase in resources. While there have been a small number of increases in members allocated to the Garda National Economic Crime Bureau, the current numbers fall well below the resourcing deemed necessary to allow the organisation to respond to the trends.

As the Authority has noted previously, the findings of the *Hamilton Review of Structures and Strategies to Prevent, Investigate and Penalise Economic Crime and Corruption*, published in 2020, were clear about the need for “a substantial, sustained and ring-fenced increase in resources (including both additional Garda Detectives and civilian specialists)” due to the “impediment to the ability of the bureau to carry out its functions effectively.” Such an increase would need to consider both the estate and IT needs of the bureau both to effectively deal with their current functions but also to consider the evolving nature of economic crime worldwide. The Authority still awaits the related medium-term resourcing plan for GNECB, which was due by Q2 2021.

It is of concern to the Authority that there is no apparent priority or urgency given to economic crime. Currently, there are complex investigations remaining in divisions which should fall under the purview of GNECB, however they lack the resourcing to take these incidents on. This does not negate or take away from the important success that these local units or the national unit has had, but it is reflective of a lack of specialist capacity. In the context of the money and technology that is invested by criminals to protect and move their money, it is a worrying operating basis for the Garda Síochána to not also be investing in their capability and capacity.

### **Cyber Crime**

In respect of cyber crime, the increases in resourcing (members, staff and technology) in recent years at the Garda National Cyber Crime Bureau (GNCCB) continued into 2023. There has been a related continued decrease in the case load of devices being examined or awaiting examination from in excess of 700 in 2022 to less than 250 at the start 2024. This is a significant success in a short timeframe for the Garda Síochána and has had notable impacts. These include a quicker processing of cases, which in turn aids overall investigative timelines, and the ability to support a broader range of investigations. In terms of the former, this has been notable in respect of child sexual abuse material investigations. DPSUs have noted the increased analysis of devices and return of identified images – although, as covered in the previous section, it is recognised that the capacity challenges affecting DPSUs mean that the ability to deal with the volume of material and cases is constrained. This can result in overall case timelines continuing to be elongated due to capacity, and therefore there is a risk that victims continue to face lengthy waits for an outcome of their reported incident.

In respect of the latter, GNCCB reports that the additional capacity and clearing of caseload has allowed for a greater ability to support other cases, including providing specialist digital first responders on searches to ensure the appropriate seizure of devices and evidential material. It will also allow for the further development of other functions in providing a consistent support across all technical examinations including mobile phones and CCTV footage. However, it is noted that GNCCB has suffered delays in establishing hubs in Cavan and Dublin (anticipated in 2025), and significant challenges in attracting suitably qualified specialist staff due to the competitive recruitment market.



### 3.3 Supporting and Ensuring Community Safety

**Desired Outcome:** To deliver meaningful community safety, in the context of this priority, the Garda Síochána must understand and respond to anti-social behaviour, crime, and associated quality of life issues for communities. It needs responses in conjunction with Garda Síochána partners in a way that prevents crime, reduces fear, and results in a better quality of life for communities.

The Authority believes that a crucial element of community safety is that it is based on an understanding of community concerns and challenges and works to prevent and respond to them. In keeping with this the Authority undertook 74 engagements throughout 2023 with a wide range of stakeholder groups, over half of which occurred in Dublin’s North East Inner City, Drogheda, and the divisions of Mayo/Roscommon/Longford and Waterford/Kilkenny/Carlow. These engagements follows the publication of ‘[What We Heard 2022](#)’ in February 2023. A report which provided a thematic summary of the 34 engagements undertaken over the course of 2022 with communities, stakeholder groups and organisations. The Authority also commissions research, including that focussed on the experiences and perceptions of minority and hard to hear communities. Research commenced in 2023 on the experiences of Brazilian and people of African descent.

This approach is intended to better understand the lived experience of policing within these communities, gain an insight in the relationships that exist between communities and the Garda Síochána, and understand where there examples of good practice and/or areas of challenge. The themes arising are used to inform this and other reports, as well as to engage with the Garda Síochána locally and nationally on the way in which communities are served.

In the main, it is clear that within local communities there is a strong trust and confidence in the Garda Síochána and that service delivery and community engagement, despite recognised resourcing and related visibility challenges, is largely fit for purpose when it comes to community policing and engagement. This is also largely consistent with the results of PAS 2022 (see table 2).

Question and overall result (when ‘don’t know’ is included)		Victims of Crime	Young people (16 – 17 years)
<b>National crime</b> is a serious problem	73%	73%	64%
<b>Local crime</b> is a serious problem	19%	40%	16%
<b>Fear of crime:</b> a lot/some fears about crime level	36%	61%	18%
Fear of crime has little/no <b>impact on quality of life</b>	79%	51%	89%
<b>Satisfaction:</b> very/quite satisfied with service	75%	53%	87% (72%)
<b>Trust:</b> mid/high trust in the GS	90%	76%	90%
Gardaí will treat you with <b>respect</b>	91% (90%)	80%	86% (75%)
Gardaí in area treat everyone <b>fairly</b>	76% (75%)	62%	74% (61%)
Gardaí can be <b>relied upon</b>	73% (72%)	59%	84% (71%)

Table 2: Selected Results of the Garda Public Attitudes Survey, 2022.

However, there are also noticeable negative perceptions and experiences of policing too, including in particular the experiences of young people within certain communities, the Traveller community and other minority communities. Frequently, these relate to the approach and tone of policing experienced with specialist units, in contrast to the positive regard within which community policing members are held. While it may be assumed that this arises from the nature of enforcement activity that these units undertake, the Authority’s experience is that many communities are supportive of,

and indeed want to see more, enforcement but in a manner which is appropriate and proportionate. As such, while the efforts made in terms of community outreach, engagement and listening undertaken by the community engagement units and bureau are extremely valuable, the Garda Síochána must find a method by which these learnings can be applied to the wider organisation.

There are also clearly national concerns across communities regarding road safety and the recent increase in protest activity, to which policing is a central component.

### **Children and Young People**

Approximately 25% of Ireland population is under 18. On an hourly basis, members of the Garda Síochána are engaging with these young people as victims, as suspects, as witnesses, and, more informally, as members of the community. Regardless of the reason for contact, all of them are vulnerable by virtue of being children.

In carrying out its oversight to date, the Authority has taken a particular interest in the policing service offered to children. The extent to which the service they receive is aware of their particular needs and vulnerabilities, and the nature of their relationships and interactions with the Garda Síochána, are key components of this oversight. Unfortunately, the Authority is aware – particularly where young people may be engaged in crime or anti-social behaviour – of inappropriate behaviour, up to and including allegations of physical violence and intimidation, perpetrated by Garda members on young people. There is no scenario within which verbal or physical abuse directed towards young people is appropriate. Garda members will always be the adult in the interaction and should also have the benefit of experience and training.

Given the above, the Authority continues to stress the important need for a Garda Síochána strategy around children and young people – a commitment to standards and approaches to dealing and engaging with children. The Garda Síochána has confirmed in late 2023 that a plan for children and young people is being produced and the Authority looks forward to engaging on the process of design and production. On this, and all strategies and plans, it is vital that the Garda Síochána ensures it engages in rigorous consultation with stakeholders. This will allow the organisation to ensure that policing services are informed by the lived experiences of the community and is based on, and tackles, the challenges faced by them.

#### Children as Suspects

The Authority has also engaged with the Garda Síochána on delays in the processing and prosecution of criminal cases involving children and recent findings of ‘blameworthy prosecutorial delay’ by the Courts. This is the inappropriate delays of criminal prosecution by the Garda Síochána or other arms of the State, resulting in individuals being charged as an adult for crimes committed as a child – i.e. they have turned 18 in the period between the criminal activity and their appearance before the Courts.

This is important as the Children Act 2001 provides for a number of specific provisions for children accused of a criminal offence including the right to anonymity. However, the date of eligibility for these entitlements is the date of trial not the alleged offence. Therefore, delays can lead to the prosecution of children and young people as adults for offences committed before the age of 18.

In the cases of criminal offences alleged to have been committed by a child or young person, according to the Irish Supreme Court, there is a special duty on the relevant State authorities, over

and above the normal duty of expedition, to ensure a speedy trial. Therefore, the Authority stresses that it is of importance that these cases are progressed in a timely manner. The Garda Síochána, moreover, should monitor any trends and examine and review instances of blameworthy prosecutorial delay to identify and address issues which contribute to delays – including engagement with partners in the criminal justice system.

### **Diversity and Minority Communities: Access to Services**

In respect of diverse and minority communities, the Authority previously commented on the progress made in respect of hate crime reporting and response and the level of community engagement undertaken at a national and local level. Through Garda reporting and stakeholder engagements throughout 2023, and in previous years, the Authority is aware of the scale of engagement that is undertaken by community policing units and other members of the organisation. In the main this is viewed as positive by diverse and minority communities, but with a recognition that for a variety of reasons – some of which are cultural and historical – there are certain levels of distrust and wariness towards policing. Similar to community feedback generally, the feedback from minority and diverse communities shows a clear difference in perception of community policing units compared to other units within the organisation. The continued cessation of activity of the National Diversity Forum – an advisory body for the Garda Síochána, consisting of diverse and minority community representatives – makes it difficult to fully address these issues.

A recurring issue reported to the Authority by those working with diverse and minority communities from a community work and victim support perspective, is the availability of translation services. It is clear that there are considerable deficits in terms of access to translation and that beyond investigative delays, this has impacts on the willingness and ability of members of the community, including victims, to engage with the Garda Síochána. In an increasingly diverse society this is a basic requirement of the police service.

Similarly, in respect of access to services and the experiences of disabled people, the Authority notes the recent audit by the National Disability Authority of the Garda Síochána's website. The audit identified the need for improvement and the existence of a considerable number of critical and serious errors which may impact the ability of users with disabilities to navigate and access information. The website's Accessibility Statement, moreover, contains only some of the content required under the Directive. Digital accessibility is an important obligation for the Garda Síochána and vital in ensuring that everyone including persons with disabilities, can perceive, understand, navigate, and interact with vital online information and websites and apps. The Authority will engage with the Garda Síochána on improvements in this regard over the coming months.

### **Traveller Community**

Of particular concern to the Authority is the experience of the Traveller community with the Garda Síochána in certain parts of the country. As the *Traveller Access to Justice Report* researchers from the University of Limerick found in their 2021 report, there are critical issues of inappropriate treatment, racial profiling, and over-policing that characterise the experience of Travellers when it comes to policing. This results in a very harmful level of mistrust that prevents victims and witnesses of crimes engaging with the organisation. Most concerning, are reports of frequent engagements

between armed members of the organisation with children from the Traveller community and the targeting of members of the Traveller community with disproportionate policing activity.

The experiences of the Traveller community tell us that this is not unique to policing and is symptomatic of their wider experiences of Irish society. But policing's role is to protect and respond to the needs of all communities equally. At present the Garda Síochána does not appear to be fulfilling this role in respect of Travellers and this is something that requires an urgent and focussed response from the organisation. The Authority is aware and has engaged with the Garda Síochána on areas of good practice and good community engagement with the Traveller community and will continue to engage with national management on methods by which such practice can be learned from and used to improve the service across the country.

### **Mental Health Response**

The Authority noted in the Assessment of Policing Performance 2022 that it was concerned

*"...in relation to the capacity of the Garda Síochána to meet the current demands placed on it to respond to mental health crises. Gardaí are not trained as mental health responders, but they are consistently being put under extreme pressure and challenge to respond to mental health related incidents, often in the absence of medical professionals. This is not a tenable situation and places the members involved, as well as the person experiencing such a crisis, in a position of risk. The Garda Síochána, working with the HSE, is seeking to address this current risk through a Community Access Support Teams (C.A.S.T.) pilot being undertaken in the Limerick Division. The pilot features a specialist uniform unit who work with health professionals to provide a rapid and integrated 24/7 response to persons with mental health issues. The Authority funded a symposium in April 2022 to look at international best practice in respect of co-response models to support the design of the pilot and will remain actively engaged as it is run; including monitoring the pilot as an example of multi-agency working that might usefully be replicated across other functions of the Garda Síochána".*

Engagement with Garda members and community stakeholders across the year reinforces these concerns. Members are increasingly being faced with mental health crises response – with some members estimating that 30% of their calls may relate to or feature incidents caused by mental health related factors. In this scenario the organisation is not being properly supported by the wider state infrastructure and members are responding in the absence of other, more appropriate services. This includes the holding of those suffering mental health incidents in Garda stations and custody suites due to a lack of available medical personnel or referral mechanisms. Relatedly, the pilot cited in the above extract – will see a psychiatric nurse accompany a Garda unit to calls relating to mental health on certain nights and shifts – has been significantly delayed due to the unavailability of the necessary HSE resources.

### **Public Order and Protest Policing**

The increase in protest activity across the country, but particularly in Dublin has been stark in 2023. Nationally, there were approximately 375 protests in Ireland in 2022, around 300 of which took place in Dublin. In 2023, this rose to over 700 nationally, of which more than 550 occurred in Dublin.

The right to protest is a fundamental and important right, and in the main most protest activity is peaceful and occurs without incident. The Authority has engaged with the Garda Commissioner on

the approach to policing the protests and has discussed the balancing of rights that has been undertaken. However, clearly Ireland has seen a growing public expression and manifestation of hatred, xenophobia, negative stereotyping and sweeping statements attacking or casting in a negative light, vulnerable groups and minorities. Including in the format of protest activity.

In this regard, the Authority notes that the balancing of the right to protest and free speech with the protection of the vulnerable is not an easy task, particularly in the face of hostility, some of which is directly targeted at Garda members in the performance of their duties. However, there are obligations on the police and other relevant authorities under the European Convention on Human Rights to prevent the infliction of hate-motivated violence whether physical attacks or verbal abuse and to investigate the existence of any possible discriminatory motives behind these.

These considerations are foremost in the Authority’s engagement with the Commissioner on protest policing, and even more so in the context of the entirely illegitimate activity seen in Dublin on 23 November 2023 and in respect of the various arson attacks on property that have taken place across the year. Accordingly, the Authority continues its oversight of public order policing, including in response to a Ministerial request in the wake of 23 November, and plans to publish a dedicated report on this subject in Q2 2024.

**Roads Policing**

As Figure 6 shows, 2023 saw a higher rate of deaths on Irish roads than any of the previous 10 years, with the exception of 2014. There was also a slight reduction in serious injuries suffered as a result of road collisions, although this occurred in the context of a longer-term increase.

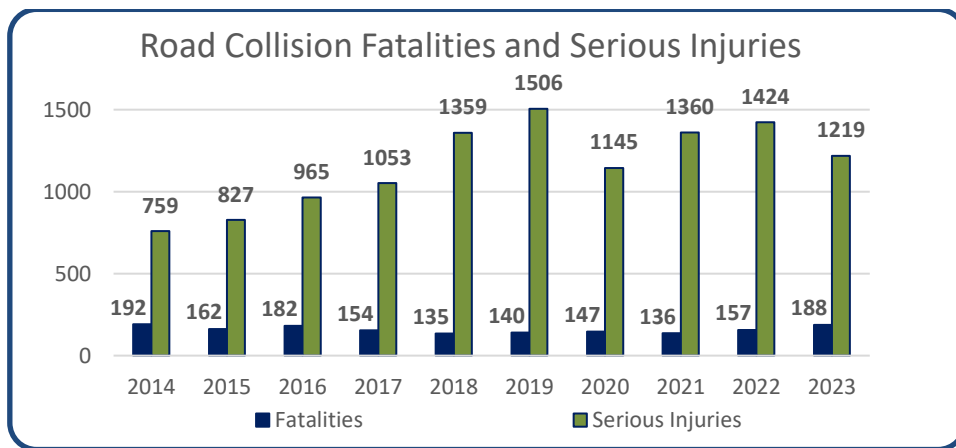


Figure 6: Number of Fatalities and Victims of Serious Road Collisions 2014 – 2023. Sources: RSA, Garda Síochána

As noted at the beginning of this section, the Authority has amended the Policing Priorities to include two new success measures pertaining to Roads Policing:

- Improve road safety in conjunction with partners through the provision of new technologies, public awareness and education, and increased information sharing.
- Demonstration of a strategic and operational approach to roads policing activity, including enforcement, that is evidence-based, consistent, and responds to local and national trends.

The first of these measures reflects the multi-agency nature of road safety, an approach that is also at the heart of the National Road Safety Strategy. This covers existing and future inter-agency work to ensure that education and information campaigns targeted at groups, such as young male drivers, motorcycle users, older pedestrians, etc., i.e. those at increased risk of injury or death. It also covers the vital introduction and use of modern, best-practice technology to ensure road safety and assist in the effective policing of the roads network.

The second concerns the need to ensure that the Garda Síochána alters its approach to reflect trends such as increased prevalence of driving under the influence of drugs, the growth of distracted driving, the increased rate of pedestrian road deaths, etc. While in respect of driver education, public awareness, and introduction of technology, the Garda Síochána is reliant on partners, the general strategic approach to enforcement activity is the decision of Garda management nationally and locally. In this vein, there has been the positive use of Operation Surround, large scale checkpoints and testing, and the increased use of drug testing devices at the road side in 2023. However, the Authority is aware that in respect of the regular units undertaking roads policing activity, the current pressures on the frontline in terms of reduced resources and increased demand is such that there is less of an ability to allocate the regular to roads duties.

In terms of the rise of drug driving detections, the Authority is aware of local concerns in many divisions as to the lack of availability of doctors to administer blood tests on suspects arrested on the roadside. Currently, the Garda Síochána following a roadside test and arrest, must have a doctor undertake a blood test to confirm the presence of drugs or alcohol. This is required to progress with charges. However, there is a widespread challenge in accessing doctors in a timely manner and as such there are suspects of drink or drug driving that are required to be released without charge after a number of hours without test.

There has also been a documented decrease in the number of members allocated to roads policing units nationally. However it is important to note that there is no strong evidence that changes in roads policing members' numbers have a strong influence on road collisions and that 25% of roads policing enforcement is undertaken by members on regular units – this rises to 75% of all drink driving offence detections. This makes the above point regarding a lesser capacity to assign regular units to roads activity concerning.

Vitality the Garda Síochána has continued to undertake very significant increases in the technology available to members to undertake roads policing. As of the end of 2023 members can now access driver insurance, tax, and licensing details at the roadside as well as being able to check the details of those engaged with against the PULSE system to see if there are outstanding warrants or other relevant details recorded. This is achieved through the mobility device, a Garda-issue mobile phone that has access to relevant Garda systems and dedicated apps to improve roads policing, as well as other policing functions.

With partners, plans have also been progressed to rollout further average speed cameras following the success of the two located in the Port Tunnel and on the M7 and there has been in increased investment in GoSafe speed vans, allowing for increased use nationwide. This will align with the planned updates to speed limits that are expected later in 2024. Updates which the Garda Síochána believe will have a considerably positive impact on road safety.

Finally, in response to the trends seen regarding drug driving there have also been approximately 32,000 roadside drug testing devices issues to members in 2023 which has seen sustained increases on the success of recent years in detecting drug driving.

### 3.4 Rights Based and Ethical Service Delivery

**Desired Outcome:** In setting this priority, the Authority recognises the need for the Garda Síochána to deliver a policing service in a manner that ensures that all those who come into contact with the Garda Síochána are dealt with in a way that: understands and respects diversity; vindicates and protects human rights; is consistent with the Code of Ethics; and, is centred on the Garda Decision Making Model.

The Authority is currently undertaking an in-depth assessment of the systems and processes in place for performance management and discipline within the Garda Síochána. This includes the way in which internal or external complaints are handled and the processes through which Garda members and staff are investigated, suspended, and/or dismissed.

This is some of the most vital oversight the Authority has engaged in. Each and every member of the Garda Síochána, by virtue of their position, has a significant amount of power. The power of arrest and detention are foremost in this but also there is a societal standing and influence that comes by virtue of being a member of the Garda Síochána. As any policing organisation is. It is an unfortunate reality that there are those within the Garda Síochána that abuse this power and position.

As has been seen, this can include the most serious crimes such as assault, sexual assault, coercive control and be done for a variety of reasons, including personal and/or financial gain.

Thankfully such individuals are small in number, but given the power and influence of these members, they can have significantly negative impacts on the lives of those who are victims of their wrongdoing – including their friends and family, colleagues within the organisation, victims of other crimes that come seeking protection and support, and vulnerable members of society. Such individuals are not suited to being in the Garda Síochána.

In this vein, the establishment of the Garda Síochána's internal Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU) in recent years was an important milestone, although there are concerns held regarding its capacity.

It is in the interests of all, including those within the Garda workforce, that there is a robust, thorough and efficient process in place to investigate any suspected wrongdoing and respond appropriately. However, as noted in previous reports, and discussed in public with the Commissioner, the Authority has a number of concerns around the current processes, including:

- the absence of a performance management culture and system in the Garda Síochána, meaning that poor or inappropriate behaviours is difficult for managers to address;
- the resultant, and potentially inappropriate, use of the disciplinary system to compensate for the absence of a performance management system;
- the lengthy periods of time that the disciplinary processes take;
- the related duration of suspensions;
- the impact that the lengthy processes can have on members and staff under investigation and the complainants/victims;
- the suitability of the existing structures and processes, including Boards of Inquiry and Boards of Appeal, to allow for the effective and appropriate issuing of sanctions on members and staff found to be in breach of regulations; and,
- the lack of in-career vetting to ensure that members are not moving roles to avoid disciplinary consequences and to ensure that no new circumstances in their lives is putting their suitability to a new role at risk.



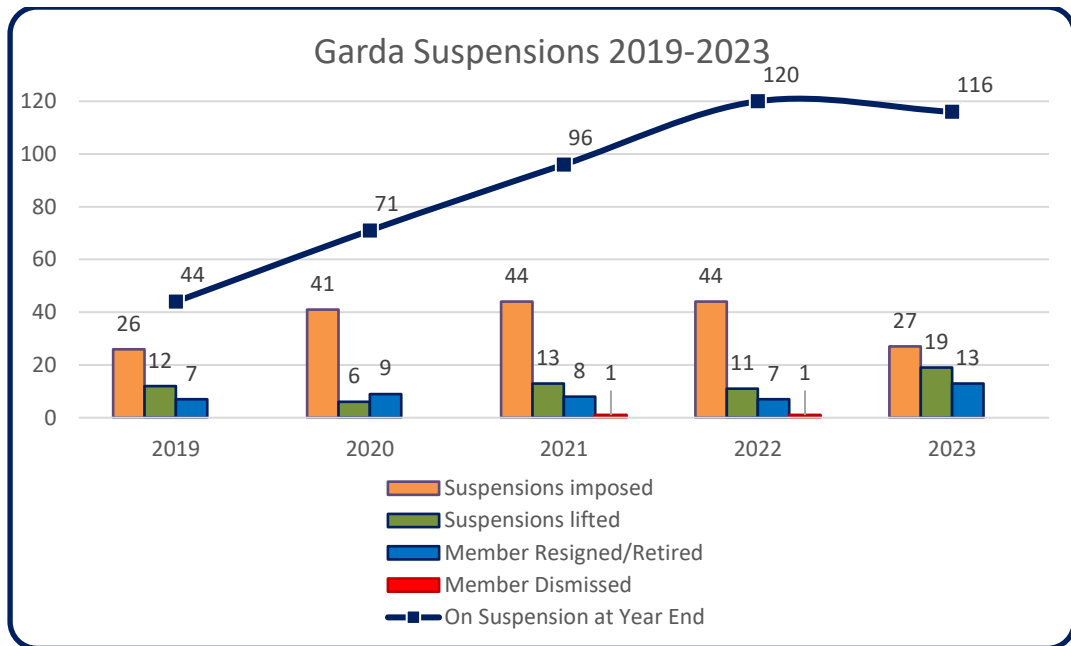


Figure 7: Garda Suspensions Data 2019-2023 (Source: Garda Síochána)

Figure 7 provides an overview of the number of Garda members and staff suspended in each of the past five years, as well as those that have had their suspensions lifted, those that opted to resign during the discipline process, and those that left during it. While a number of these may be investigated and cleared of wrongdoing or inappropriate actions, it is a matter of public record that there have been serious criminal acts undertaken by members and staff of the Garda Síochána. Acts that have resulted in conviction before the Courts and the handing down of prison sentences.

Positively, as the graph shows there has been a reduction in the number of suspensions. There has also been a number of important investigative successes related to suspensions, including convictions in the Courts. However, it is noted that there were also a number of losses for the Garda Síochána in court, which is of concern.

Relatedly, the Authority notes that in 2023 there was the introduction of drug testing for applicants to the Garda Síochána, a new suspensions policy was advanced and is near completion, and there was an increased level of training delivered for members of Boards of Inquiry. In the context that the Board of Inquiry is a key element of the disciplinary process, completing this training was a significant achievement.

#### Procedural Fairness

The above notwithstanding, every member that is under investigation and/or suspension also has the right to expect that they are dealt with in a fair and efficient manner. At present this is not perceived to be the case and it is clear from engagement with members throughout the year, as well as in previous years, that there is a lack of confidence in the system. This is in the main attributed to the lengthy timelines involved, which includes delays throughout the system, not just within the Garda Síochána, and results in processes running into years. This can have a very detrimental impact on those under investigation and their alleged victims. It is within the interests of all involved, including the Garda Síochána as an organisation, that the processes are improved and made more efficient.

The Commissioner, the representative associations and other stakeholders are all on the record concerning the need for an overhaul of the disciplinary system. It is hoped that the necessary changes will occur with the enactment of the Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 later this year. This Act is supported by new disciplinary, conduct and performance regulations that are being drafted by the Department of Justice.

### **Human Rights**

Human rights obligations placed on all police services are central to ensuring that there is fair, equal and appropriate treatment for all individuals and communities. This includes obligations on police officers to uphold the human rights of individuals. In an Irish context, these are the rules that set out how the Garda Síochána should, and must, treat and protect victims, suspects and all other members of the community. As has been seen earlier in the report, human rights considerations are present in all areas of policing, e.g. roads policing, the investigation of sexual offences, etc. As highlighted this includes areas where services can be improved. A greater understanding of human rights law can help this improvement and is therefore an important element of training and specialist support for all members and staff.

Accordingly, in recent years, the Garda Síochána has established a Human Rights Unit, hired an expert Human Rights Advisor, and formed a Strategic Human Rights Advisory Committee – made up of expert representatives external to the Garda Síochána to advise the Commissioner and the organisation. Previously, the Authority expressed concern as to the extent to which this infrastructure are effectively used or embedded within the organisation’s wider policy drafting, formation and review processes.

As identified in the Human Rights Strategy 2020-2022, the Human Rights Unit was established in October 2018 to support the organisation’s development of an adequate human rights infrastructure to enhance the understanding and knowledge of human rights as well as capacity in training, policy and service delivery. However, despite an initial identification of the need for 14 staff including lawyers and graduates with legal and human rights qualifications and expertise, the Unit has not grown in capacity and size. At present, it comprises of approximately a third of this full time staff requirement, supporting the Chief Superintendent. While efforts have been made in recent years to recruit legal qualified staff, the terms and conditions on offer are understood to have been insufficient to attract suitable candidates.

The adequate resourcing of the Unit is vital to ensuring that the Garda Síochána’s current Human Rights Framework—considered the key human rights reference for all Garda activity—as well as wider guidance, policy and procedures are informed by and based on relevant, up to date human rights standards. This has significant legal importance to the approach taken in respect of a range of policing functions, including: arrests and detention, the treatment of suspect and victims, the timeliness of investigations, and the policing of protests and public order events.

As such, it is of vital importance that the Human Rights Unit is a key reference point for the rest of the organisation during the introduction and use of new technologies to assist and augment the use of police powers. However, due to its size and siloed nature, the unit’s potential to contribute in this vital aspect does not appear to have been realised to-date. Given the current pace of technological advancement in policing and the nature of the vulnerability of many that come into contact with the policing service, it is vital that proper care and attention is given to ensuring new technology is appropriate, proportionate and human rights compliant in all aspects. The Authority has

recommended the creation of a set of agreed principles that all new technology will be designed to be consistent with before implementation, and will continue to engage with the Commissioner on this.

#### Human Rights Training

The Authority has welcomed the provision of the training module 'Policing and Human Rights Law in Ireland', created and delivered in collaboration with the University of Limerick.

There is now a need for the Garda Síochána to assess and monitor the impact of this training on the organisation including on frontline policing and incorporate this learning on the future provision and design of human rights based training.

The Authority also wishes to stress the importance and necessity of adequate, up to date human rights material in training in the Garda College, continuous professional development and training for key aspects of frontline/operational policing including responses to domestic violence, custody and the use of force.

#### Strategic Planning

In respect of an approach that ensures the centrality of human rights considerations, the Garda Síochána has obligations under section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC) Act 2014 (Public Sector Duty).

This requires public bodies to set out in their strategic plan, an assessment of the human rights and equality issues it believes to be relevant to its functions and purpose, the policies, plans and actions in place or proposed to address these issues, and report on progress in annual reports. In the implementation of the Public Sector Duty, therefore, cohesion and alignment between the Strategic Plan and other strategies that focus on human rights, diversity, inclusion, young people and victims is of paramount importance.

This offers a vehicle for the addressing of much of the above from a strategic perspective. While, in the view of the Authority, the current strategy does not adequately address this obligation, the Authority will be engaging with the Garda Síochána as the draft Strategy 2025-2027 is prepared this year.

### 3.5 Development of the Capacity to Strategically Manage Garda Resources

**Desired Outcome:** Under this Priority, the Authority recognises the critical enabling role that resources have in delivering against the other Priorities. As such it identifies the need for the Garda Síochána to ensure that resources – finance, ICT, and capital assets – are appropriately and strategically managed and deployed to support Garda Members, Garda Staff, and Garda Reserves. It is imperative that the workforce is appropriately trained, skilled, managed, and supported to provide a service that responds to the crime environment and the needs of the public.

As noted at the outset Garda resourcing represents the most significant risk to the organisation as whole and also across most, if not all, of its constituent divisions, bureaus and units.

#### Human Resources

As can in figure 8 below, while there is currently a comparatively high workforce of members, staff and Reserve members this is in the context of a record, and growing population. A population that is increasingly presenting with an increasingly complex needs across all communities including: an increase in mental health related incidents, a growing diversity of population, rising levels of socio-economic challenges, etc. It is also the case that the influence and sophistication and influence of technology is greater than at any point previously, which brings a range of societal challenges, including for policing.

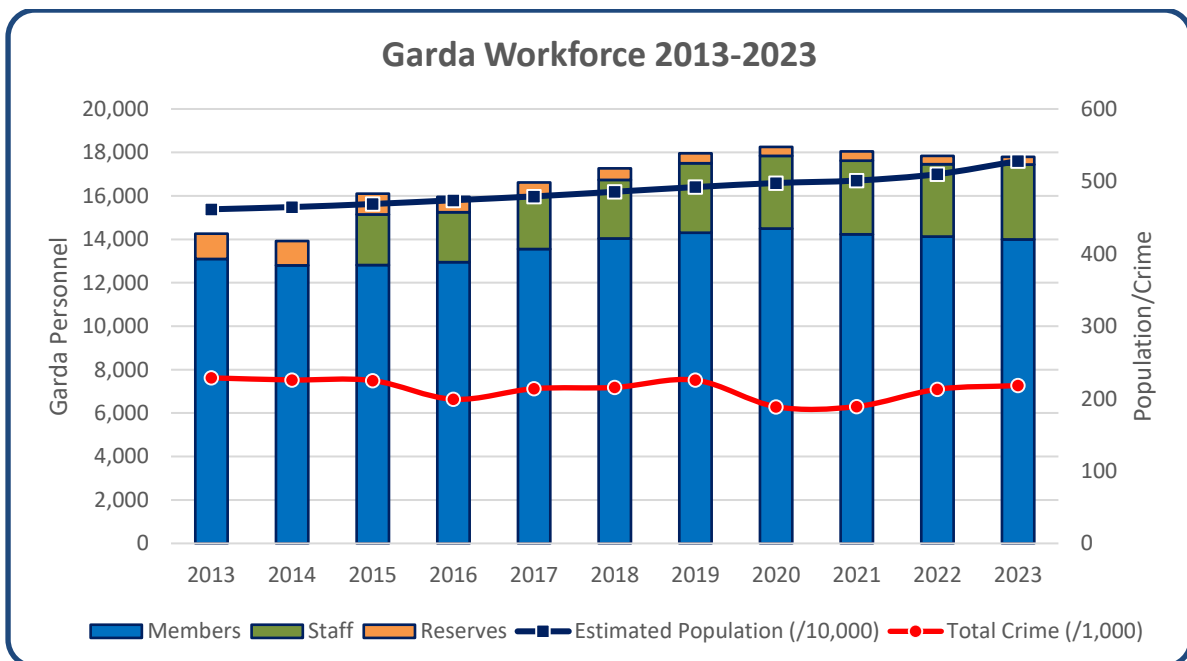


Figure 8: Garda Personnel Numbers, National Population Estimates and Total Reported Crime Levels 2013 – 2023. Sources: Garda Síochána, CSO.

As such while recorded crime is largely steady, or decreasing in many categories, the demand on the Garda Síochána is increasingly complex and concerns matters of community safety. These can include perceptions of safety, social unrest, societal or inter-community tensions, anti-social behaviours, mental health incidents, etc. That is to say although they may not be recorded as crime, the nature of Irish society is that the Garda Síochána continue to be the primary response agency.

This results in sustained or increased numbers of calls for service, in many cases for matters that many would not consider traditional or core policing duties.

In respect of crime it is also the case that, as is clear though out, the nature of modern crime is that it is increasingly complex – e.g. the use of secure devices or crime committed remotely through devices. As such it requires a policing response that is increasingly specialist and in many cases, less visible than policing traditionally has been.

It is for all of these reasons, and considerations of recruitment and retention as set out below, that the continued non-delivery of a strategic workforce plan for the organisation in 2023 is a major setback. For an organisation as large and complex as the Garda Síochána a strategic workforce plan is a vital guiding document that allows management to identify areas that currently, or in the future, will require resources. Although it is anticipated in early 2024, the fact it has been outstanding for the lifetime of the Authority means that it will remain an area of utmost concern until finalised, shared and implementation has commenced.

Given the range of challenges noted against the previous priorities this document must consider the workforce that is needed for the Garda Síochána to meet its demand for the medium-term, i.e. at least covering the period 2025-2030. The Government Decision of 2016 regarding the Garda workforce set a provision for 15,000 members, 4,000 staff and 2,000 Reserves. In the context of the current numbers – approximately 14,000 members, 3,500 staff and 350 Reserves – it is likely that this 2016 estimation may not be fit for purpose. As such, given the scale of wider investment in technology, training and equipment that is required for any increase in workforce, the strategic plan must present a robust and evidence-based argument for workforce requirement.

Recruitment and Retention: Garda Staff

As well as a long term increase in the Garda workforce, figure 8 also shows a slight decrease over each of the past three years – owing largely to slower than anticipated intake of members and staff, an increased rate of departures for both, and a slight reduction in Reserve numbers.

While the rate of staff growth has been dramatic over the past 10 years, this is reflective of the critical role that specialist staff play in contemporary policing, be it in management, administrative, or investigative support functions. For example, there is a need for HR and finance specialists to manage the €2.3 billion budget and 17,000 strong workforce. Likewise there are experts in cyber technology, forensic accounting, data analysis and those with legal expertise that are key to progressing investigations and the presentation of evidence in court. As table 3 shows, there is a growing attrition rate of staff across recent years, culminating in roughly 6% of staff exiting the organisation last year.

Garda Staff Transfers Out 2020-23				
Transfer type	2020	2021	2022	2023
Civil Service Mobility	7	42	115	131
Transfer on Promotion	13	47	66	65
Transfer (open competition)			6	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>210</b>

Table 3: Garda Staff Attrition 2020 – 2023. Source: Garda Síochána

Increasingly, these exits include those who have long years of service in the Garda Síochána and are in key senior positions across divisions and national management roles.

In the main this is as a result of the continued uncertainty regarding the new Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024 which will effectively alter their terms and conditions. Although from engagements with the workforce it is clear that the impacts of losses means that those remaining are taking on increasing workloads, which can also, in part, contribute to attrition. The Authority would again encourage that the relevant partners meaningfully engage with the Garda Síochána, its staff and their representatives, to offer greater clarity on these matters, and if possible address their concerns. In the absence of such engagement, it is clear that there will continue to be significant attrition of staff. There are currently approximately 900 staff on transfer lists.

Garda staff are now an inherent part of the organisation both in providing business services and in operational policing. The attrition of staff from core roles results in the filling of such roles with Garda members. Apart from the loss of these staff members, it extracts trained Gardaí from roles that require sworn policing powers resulting in significant under-resourcing of key frontline policing like the regular units, or community policing.

This is affecting policing services and the ability of the organisation to manage itself. Including the filling of administrative roles with Garda members, likely in the region of hundreds of members when full time roles and part-time aspects of administrative duties are considered.

Recruitment and Retention: Garda Members

As covered in detail in the 2022 iteration of this report (April 2023), and as can be seen in the table below, the closure of the Garda College in Templemore due to COVID-19 and the associated restrictions had a critical impact on the amount of trainees taken in and graduating. This impact continued in terms of graduations in 2023, and will continue to have a residual impact on 2024 graduations.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Recruitment Target	n/a	400	600	800	800	800	700	620	800	1000
Recruitment into College	200	351	651	811	799	600	275	384	116	746
Passed Out (graduated)	n/a	296	393	883	789	605	522	148	370	388

Table 4: Garda College intake and output 2014-2022

However, recruitment into the College has returned to pre-2020 levels and it is anticipated this will continue in the coming years. This should stabilise the recent reduction in overall Garda numbers, and as graduations increase in the coming years should allow for an increase in overall numbers to begin. However, given the rise in numbers of retirements and resignations this will likely result in a net increase per year of under 500, i.e. even the maximum graduation of 1,000 trainees is likely to be met with an attrition of approximately 500 members leaving the organisation on retirement or resignation. This is important as it allows for the realistic planning of allocation of resources.

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Resignations	26	20	24	41	77	72	69	95	109	169
Retirements	248	236	227	225	215	220	247	291	339	319
Total	274	256	251	266	293	292	316	386	448	488

Table 5: Garda Resignation and Retirements (voluntary and compulsory retirements) 2014-2022

Regarding attrition, the rising numbers of retirements are anticipated and will continue in the coming years as members become eligible for early retirement or reach their compulsory retirement age. Given the increase in Garda recruitment in the 1990's and the eligibility for retirement after 30 years, along with the current age cap of 60 (planned to rise to 62), this is unavoidable and part of a natural cycle.

In respect of resignations, the Authority awaits the results of the exit surveys which commenced in 2023 to gain further insight to the reasons for attrition but notes that at 1.2% of the total member strength in 2023, the resignation rate compares favourably with other police services.

### Information and Technology

In recent years, an incredible volume of modernisation and change has been led by Garda ICT leading to significant benefits to the policing services offered to communities. This has continued in 2023, resulting in a consistent delivery on the investment that has been made in new technology. However, it remains an urgent priority that this pace of change is maintained, or improved upon, by the continued or improved allocation of the necessary financial and human resources to ICT functions.

As noted at various points above, there continues to be a major positive impact achieved across a range of frontline policing services – such as cyber crime, roads policing, community policing, etc. – due to the introduction of new technology. This includes the mobility devices, enhanced software and hardware to access devices, but also the introduction of major change projects which are increasingly modernising the organisations internal management and administrative capacity. This in turn allows greater release of resources from time consuming paper-based systems, allows enhanced management of investigations and resources, and improves the ability of Garda management at all levels to plan and undertake policing activity.

In 2023, this includes:

- the delivery of the Roster and Duty Management system, which allows for improved allocation and tasking of members on duty;
- GardaSAFE (see below);
- the introduction of a new range of management information for Chief Superintendents within divisions;
- the continued rollout of the Investigation Management System, a tool that allows for the enhanced governance and management of investigations, including the tracking of key investigative activity by investigating members, supervisors and reviewers; and,
- The preparations for a trial of body worn cameras for Garda members in four Divisions, which will take place in Q2 2024.

### GardaSAFE

In 2023 the Garda Síochána completed the full implementation of the GardaSAFE system. As per the Garda Síochána:

*“What this new system means for the public is, now, when they call their local Garda Station and their call requires the dispatch of a Garda resource (e.g. Garda in an Official Patrol Car, Unmarked Garda Car, Armed Support Unit), the call will be transferred to a qualified call taker at the Regional Control Centre. This call taker will handle the call and provide the fastest and most suitable Garda response”.*

*“The public should always call 999/112 in an emergency or urgent situation. These calls will be linked directly to our Regional Control Centres where again the fastest and most suitable Garda response will be provided”*

While the systems is new and as such still embedding, the Authority notes the significant achievement this represents for the organisation and the potential benefits it offers in improving the response to calls from the public. Included in this is the manner in which it offers a solution to issues that arose and were subject to recommendations following the independent investigation into the closure and cancellation of 999 calls, commissioned by the Authority. The GardaSAFE system is an important tool in ensuring that the issues raised are addressed and ensure that similar failings in response to calls does not reoccur.

That said, there are a small but important number of challenges being faced. These concern the interpretation of policy rather than with GardaSAFE, i.e. they are matters of decision making and use of discretion rather than any issue with the technology.

In the main, there appears to have been something of an overcorrection regarding cancellation/closure of incidents. Like any public service the Garda Síochána receives a certain percentage of calls that may be misdirected. As was mentioned earlier in the report, there is also a cultural default of contacting the Garda Síochána. As such, there are many calls for service that are not necessarily best served by a policing response. It is also the case that some calls are duplicates of other calls, can contain insufficient or incorrect information, or are time sensitive but not necessarily urgent. For example, a call concerning suspicious activity while potentially useful information for the Garda Síochána, is a moment in time incident and it may not be an effective use of time and resources to send a Garda car to respond the following day.

Likewise, calls that do not include locations specific information can result in the Gardaí being sent to a broad location defined by the nearest phone mast that the call came into. The policy in place is aware of this, and therefore allows for the appropriate consideration and potential cancellation by a sergeant in the control room that receives the call. However, at present members are being assigned to any and all calls with minimal cancellation. The Authority has heard significant frustration from Garda members and management across the country indicating that valuable Garda time and resources are being spent responding to calls that should in their view have correctly and appropriately been cancelled. This creates additional demand for responses that cannot yield a useful policing outcome for the community or members of the Garda Síochána. For example a call



indicating a suspicious car in a particular area 24 hours previously. In rural areas in particular this is cited as impacting on the ability to respond to current incidents. The reasons proposed were that following the publicity surrounding the inappropriate cancellation of incidents to the CAD 999 system, there is now a reluctance to cancel any calls and this overcorrection is having a negative impact on service provision. There are also concerns expressed that if this is not addressed it is and will impact on the roll out of the Investigation Management System in that it will take in all the incidents, even those that should have been cancelled, driving up the number of investigative jobs and responses required of Gardaí.

It is quite right that there is a robust policy that ensures calls are not inappropriately cancelled, but likewise this also means that there must be the use of a policy that allows for cancellation once there is a reasonable explanation for doing so.

### Data and Information

In tandem with the above, the Garda Síochána, mainly through the Garda Statistical Analysis Service (GSAS) and the Garda Information Services Centre (GISC) has continued to improve and develop its data assets. This includes the improvement of data quality through recording processes, review activity, etc. In turn this allows for a greater range of information products to be designed and provided to management to allow for more informed decision making on responding to crime, community safety concerns, or organisational challenges. Most notably, the CSO in 2023 lifted its 'reservation' on crime data. This means that the CSO is assured that the quality and robustness of the Garda processes means that data collected and shared by the Garda Síochána is reliable. This is an unusual, almost to the point of being unique, achievement across the UK and Ireland and is a testament to the progress made in recent years.

### Change and Communication of Change

While the above progress is extremely positive, beyond the design and implementation of these ICT projects, the Garda Síochána as an organisation is not effectively communicating the need and benefits of these new systems and processes to either its own workforce, stakeholders, or the community generally. For example in the absence of clear, strategic communications around GardaSAFE, there is a general lack of awareness surrounding the benefits of contacting the Garda Síochána via 999/112 and how this is meant to allow for the improved allocation of resources to ensure an appropriate response. Rather this is a sense internally and externally that this is a purely administrative change that removes local contact with stations.

Likewise, the introduction of the Investigation Management System (IMS) has been a source of significant concern to members across the country. There are widespread fears of members being overloaded with 'tick box' tasks and over the top recording in respect of volume crime. In the absence of effective strategic communication, this allows false narratives and widespread misunderstanding of the system to occur and a lack of awareness of the benefits of the system – including the positive experiences of those that already have the system in place. We have observed and heard very positive experiences from the early adopters of IMS, but this is not being communicated throughout the organisation – thus the narratives of the problems of the early versions of the system substantially endure in the organisation despite significant changes being made as a response to the feedback from Garda members actually using the system.

Broadly, this creates an environment of resistance to change that is centred on the unknown. These new technologies and systems are being put in place to improve policing. To improve the job of the Garda workforce and the service received by communities. They are based on international best practice in policing and represent an improvement on current paper based and out of date systems. There is also extensive work done by ICT to tailor them to an Irish context and better suit the Garda Síochána. These are the messages that are not being relayed to the workforce or the general public. In the absence of this approach, the significant work undertaken by ICT risks continuing to be undermined by ineffective communication.

### **Finance**

The Garda budget is in excess of €2.3 billion. The adequacy of such is subject to annual advice to the Minister by the Authority. In the main the advice to the Minister in recent years has concerned the pressing need for, and clear value add of, increased investment in technology. As noted above Garda ICT has consistently delivered where investment has been made. Given the historic chronic underinvestment in technology for the organisation this continues to be a pressing area for ring-fenced resourcing.

Beyond this, the ability of the Authority to comment on Garda finances is limited by the severe lack of available management information, including to the Commissioner and other senior management, owing to the out-dated and anachronistic financial infrastructure. There is also a critical lack of staffing in the finance section, and a rate of high attrition. This is resulting in the organisation struggling to meet its basic financial governance and reporting requirements. This is one of the most pressing risks to the organisation requires urgent and immediate attention.

### **Operating Model**

The Garda Síochána has also continued the rollout of the new Operating Model, and anticipates full delivery by mid-2024 after which time attention will turn to ensuring this is working effectively and as planned. The Model, no less than any of the services or change initiatives throughout the report is affected by the current resourcing challenges. The commentary on change management and communication is also extremely relevant to the Model and resourcing. The Operating Model does not by design limit or impact local resourcing. Rather the issues regarding Garda numbers, as covered above, are simultaneous being experienced along with the rollout of the Model. The Model is also being delivered in a time of increased specialisation and as such is designed to enable this but does not drive it. Rather this is driven by the need for specialist units that deal with complex and serious sexual offences, who are suitably skilled in cyber or fraud investigation, or that are focussed on areas such as drug crime or road safety. This is the reality of modern policing and the Model is important in reflecting and responding to that reality.

The Authority remains of the view that the continued commitment, focus and agility by organisation in the rollout will allow the Operating Model to ultimately deliver the positive impacts and envisaged benefits to the community. Accordingly, the Authority's oversight of the rollout and the impacts it has will continue.

## 4. Conclusions: Preparing for Community Safety

Following its enactment by the President in February, the [Policing, Security and Community Safety Act 2024](#) is intended to be commenced later this year. The Act includes provision for a number of wide-scale changes to policing and policing oversight in Ireland, including:

- the establishment of a Garda Board, to provide internal governance, advice and oversight;
- increased delegated functions for the Garda Commissioner – including Garda Member and Staff appointments – to allow them greater autonomy to manage the organisation;
- the transfer of all Garda Staff to public servants of the organisation; and,
- The amalgamation of the Policing Authority and the Garda Inspectorate to form *An tÚdarás Póilíneachta agus Sábháilteachta Pobail*, the Policing and Community Safety Authority.

Perhaps most relevant to the themes raised in this report, the Act also allows for the formal establishment of a model of community safety in Ireland. As per the Act, this is intended “...to improve the safety of, and the perception of safety in, communities through collaboration between relevant Departments of State and public service bodies at national and local level and to provide for community engagement in the prevention of crime and harm...”.

In a nut shell, this recognises that community safety and effective provision of a police service to society cannot be delivered by the Garda Síochána alone. It therefore allows for the creation of a wider infrastructure at local and national level to plan, deliver and support action to improve the safety of communities. This includes a National Office for Community Safety that will provide national strategic direction and support across all relevant public service bodies to improve community safety, and Local Community Safety Partnerships (LCSPs). These LCSPs will provide a forum in each Local Authority area, made up of the necessary statutory and non-statutory groups, with a remit to focus on improving policing and community safety in that area.

The Authority welcomes this move to a community safety model, and recognises the potential it has to improve policing and policing outcomes for communities. It is the Authority’s view that there are two central enablers that will be vital for the success of this model from a policing perspective - improved inter-agency working and enhanced engagement with communities and stakeholders.

### **Inter-Agency Working**

Throughout this report there have been frequent references to interagency working, such as services to victims, roads policing, response to mental health, etc. These have been cited both in terms of positive experience and development, but also in respect of areas where there is considerable challenge and a need for greater collaboration.

Ultimately, while there is an obvious role for policing in responding to the issues of drugs in society, the safety of our roads, and those experiencing mental health crises, etc. these are not issues that can be addressed by policing alone. The root causes will not be solved by seizures, arrests, incarceration or other criminal justice outcomes in isolation. They require a collaborative approach to prevention through community outreach, education, medical support and intervention that supports and works in tandem with policing.

As such, it is of utmost importance that not only do the Garda Síochána work to improve their approach to collaborative and partnership working but also that the wider agencies that are necessary to provide a fit-for-purpose response to policing and community safety challenges commit the necessary resources and effort to supporting the Garda Síochána. Central to this model are partners such as TUSLA, medical professionals and the HSE, Local Authorities – across their full range of functions – and third and private sector groups across all communities.

The considerable success that can be achieved through an efficient collaborative approach can be seen through the impact of the Drogheda Implementation Board, which the Authority discussed with the Commissioner at its meeting in public in Drogheda in June 2023 – and covered in the previous iteration of this report, available [here](#).

### **Engagement with Communities and Stakeholders**

The Authority has engaged extensively with communities and the Garda workforce in recent years, and thereafter with the Garda Síochána on the outcomes of this engagement. On each occasion, the Authority also encourages to the Garda Síochána to enhance its own approach to listening to, engaging with and learning from the communities it serves, as well as within own organisation.

Community needs and the approaches to policing across the country are wide-ranging and diverse but not totally unique and there are many areas and instances of good practice that can inform wider policy and other local approaches. Key to an improvement in listening to communities and stakeholders is need to open up to and accept that hearing criticism and acknowledging weaknesses allows for a greater level of trust, buy-in and ultimately allows improvement of policing services.

Communities want to work with and engage with the Garda Síochána. In the main, criticism or feedback is designed and aimed to ultimately improve awareness and allow for the addressing of issues. Too frequently this is met with a defensive response from the Garda Síochána. If community safety is to be effective as a model, including to deliver benefits to the Garda Síochána, this will require an increasingly open, reflective and nuanced approach to such engagement.

### Engagement on Resourcing

From reading this report, it will be clear that resourcing continues to be the major issue impacting across all functions of the Garda Síochána. Some of the contributory factors, such as the competitive employment market, impacts of legislation, etc. are outside of Garda Síochána control. However, there is an opportunity for the organisation to maximise their input to the process and improve their approach to engagement on resourcing.

Primarily, a clear articulation and quantification of need regarding the Garda workforce, through a strategic workforce plan, is urgently required. It is vital that this is married with comprehensive, forward-looking training, estate and ICT plans. The clear articulation in recent years of the policing need for investment in ICT – and the impacts of the investment made – indicates the significant impacts of a strategic and clear approach to planning and engagement with the necessary stakeholders.

## Conclusion

As a national police service the Garda Síochána faces an increasingly diverse and complex range of calls for service. The move to community safety offers a model that may offer an enhanced ability to work with partners across the public sector and within communities to address these issues more effectively – including allowing for increased preventative measures.

Within this there is a need to reflect and learn. Community safety is ultimately about local identification of issues, joint working to deliver solutions, and ongoing prevention. This is enabled by the above. As the Authority heard in Drogheda, the community safety style approach mean that the Garda Síochána felt “we’re not on our own anymore”, that there was a wider range of agencies and partners working to ensure improvements in the lives of the community. This requires the Garda Síochána to seek support, to understand and engage on feedback, to work in tandem, and be open to adapting their own approaches to deliver for the community.