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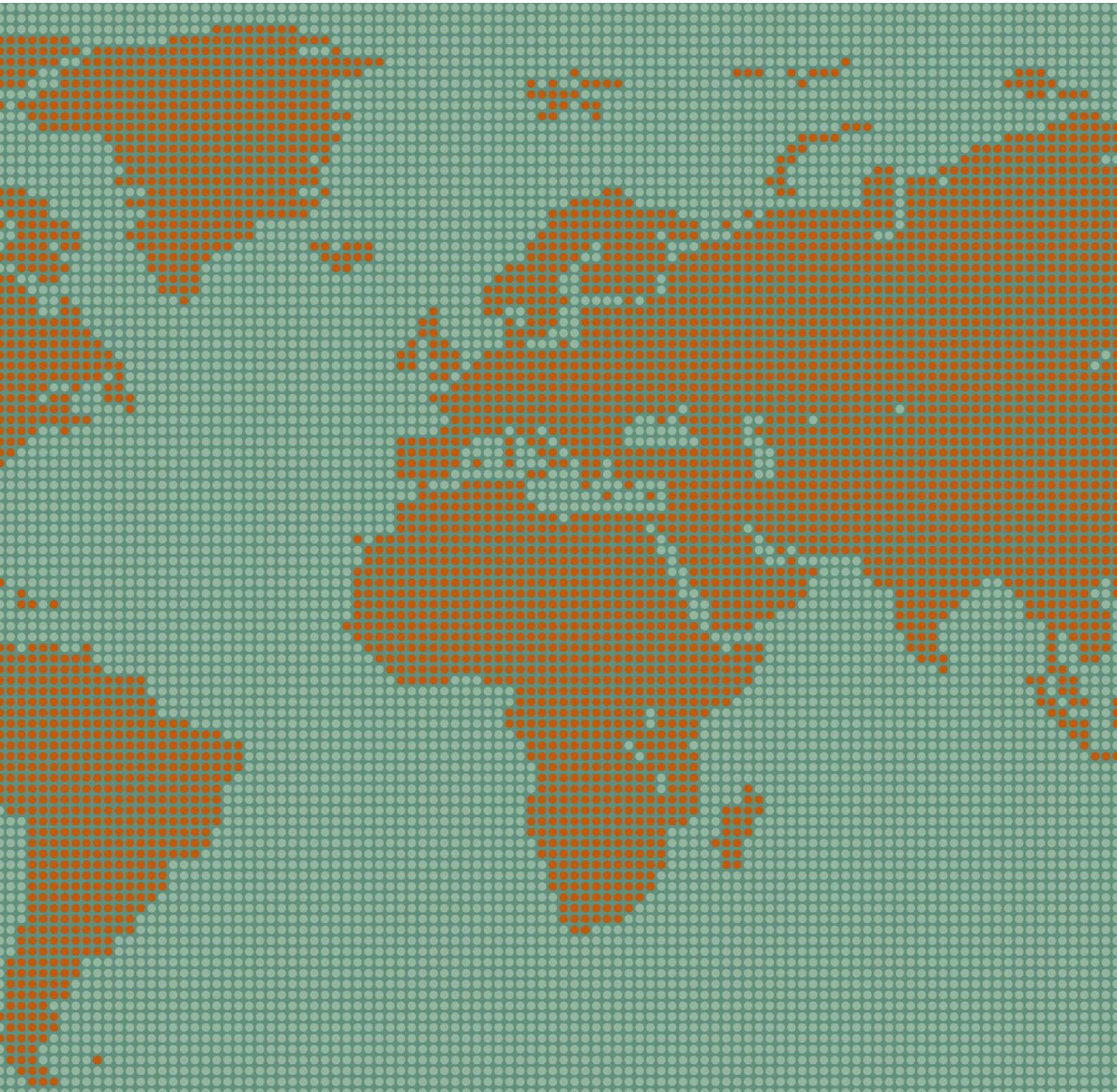
Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas

STRATEGIC PLAN
2024–2027



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FOREWORD FROM OUR CHAIRPERSON

I am delighted to present this strategic plan for the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO), covering the period 2024 to 2027.

It is estimated that at any one time there are in excess of one thousand Irish people in prison overseas. Irish people in prison overseas face significant challenges, including dealing with an unfamiliar legal system, discrimination and language barriers. Some people experience extreme hardship, with limited access to basic necessities, and in some jurisdictions prison conditions and safety are a major cause of concern.

The ICPO was established by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference in 1985 to respond to the significant challenges Irish people face in prison overseas. Presently, the ICPO has contact with over one thousand Irish people in prisons in more than thirty countries around the world.

The ICPO works with all Irish people and their families wherever they are and at all stages of the imprisonment process. The ICPO ensures everyone is treated as an individual and the service provided is tailored to their needs. We stay with people on their journey and maintain a presence as long as needed. We believe in treating everyone with respect and dignity, a core value that is deeply ingrained and is the cornerstone of our work.

> **'I do not have the words that are remotely adequate to express my heartfelt gratitude to you and all at ICPO for what you have done for me and it is with thanks to you and the ICPO that I no longer feel estranged from life.'**

For almost forty years, the ICPO has focused on providing information, support and advocacy to those we support and with this new strategic plan we aim to strike a balance between a measured growth in the provision of our services and maintaining the highest standards in our work, while also ensuring efficiencies and our future sustainability as an organisation.

We are on a journey. We have set ourselves some ambitious targets over the next four years but we do so in the knowledge that the need to provide services and support to Irish

people in prison overseas and their families continues to grow, and our determination to provide that support and deliver those services is stronger than ever. The strategic plan reflects the ongoing work of the ICPO and places an emphasis on one of our core values, which is putting the voice of those we support at the heart of our work.

On behalf of the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants (IECE), I would like to thank our team of professional and committed staff, our dedicated volunteers, our clients and their families for their participation and support. Heartfelt thanks to our partners for their generosity and expertise, and to all those who have contributed to helping the ICPO become the organisation it is today. As with all the work of the ICPO, the aspiration to realise the plans outlined in this document would not be possible without the support of our funders and of the IECE Council members.

We are grateful to Quality Matters, our consultants for the strategic management and facilitation of the development of this strategic plan. Sincere gratitude to all those who contributed their thoughts, insights and feedback to this process, especially our clients and their families; without your engagement this plan would not have been possible.

Guided by this strategic plan, our staff will develop and implement annual plans outlining specific activities and goals, along with the necessary tools to measure progress. We will regularly assess the effectiveness of our actions against these goals.

The strategic plan embodies our ambition and continued commitment to realising ICPO's vision, which is of a world where the human rights of Irish people in prison overseas are respected and their dignity is honoured. I hope that our strategic plan will encourage each of you to help us realise this vision.

Bishop Paul Dempsey

Chairperson of Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

About the Irish Council for Prisoners Overseas (ICPO)

Since 1985, the ICPO has been dedicated to supporting Irish people in prison abroad and their families, advocating for improved conditions and the protection of their rights.

Formed by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, the ICPO operates as a subcommittee of the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants (the IECE), which itself has been working to help Irish emigrants for over seventy years.

About our strategic plan

This strategic plan sets out the actions to which the ICPO commits over the next four years in order to reach our organisational goals. These goals, and the actions we agree to take, are the result of consultation with the IECE, staff and volunteers, people in prison who we support and their families, as well as external organisations that the ICPO works closely alongside.

> **'I was seriously considering giving up and putting an end to more pain and abuse, before I received your letter. So you can be happy and proud that at least you saved me from a long stay in hospital chained up.'**

Section one of this strategic plan presents information about the ICPO, the structure of our organisation, the services we offer, and our mission, vision and values. Section two explains the process of developing the plan, with section three setting out the strategic goals and the actions we will take to achieve them.

Summary of our goals

We have agreed ten strategic goals, which fall into three broad areas.

Goal	Description
Area 1: Support for Irish people in prison abroad and their families	
1.	Our goal is to enhance opportunities for Irish people in prison abroad to access information, education and wellbeing resources, while ensuring our approach in this area is inclusive and ensures accessibility.
2.	Building on our successful work with women in prison, our goal is to continue to address their needs, uphold their dignity, and support their wellbeing. We also aim to expand our focus to other people in prison with complex needs.
3.	Our goal is to review the resettlement supports provided by ICPO and assess the need for the introduction of a planned resettlement service, as well as improving efficiencies in our current practice.
4.	Our goal is to better understand the needs of the families we support, enabling us to enhance ICPO's services, engagement and outreach.
Area 2: Policy, advocacy and awareness-raising	
5.	Our goal is to enhance the visibility and awareness of ICPO among individuals facing prison sentences abroad, their families, and other stakeholders.
6.	Advancing our policy agenda and effectively advocating for the interests of Irish people in prison abroad.
Area 3: Operations, impact and oversight	
7.	Our goal is to monitor and manage staff workloads, while enhancing volunteer engagement within the ICPO.
8.	Our aim is to create a method for measuring our work that is practical, relevant and clearly captures the outcomes of our interventions.
9.	Our goal is to improve governance and the effectiveness of our Council by building their capacity and oversight, ensuring they are positioned to lead ICPO toward its strategic objectives.
10.	Our goal is to reaffirm our commitment to incorporating the voices, feedback, and experiences of the individuals we support throughout ICPO practices and processes.

1. ABOUT ICPO

Our organisation

The ICPO is the only organisation dedicated to supporting the most marginalised and vulnerable group of Irish emigrants: prisoners.

Established in 1985 by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and operating under the auspices of the Irish Episcopal Council for Emigrants (the IECE, herein referred to as our/the 'Council'), ICPO was created to address the significant challenges faced by Irish people in prison abroad. These challenges include navigating unfamiliar legal systems, language barriers, isolation, discrimination, hardship, and for some, the absence of basic human rights, including limited access to necessities such as food, water and medical treatment.

Our approach and ethos

ICPO's purpose is to reduce the burdens of imprisonment facing Irish people who are in prison abroad and their families. Our approach to fulfilling this purpose is rooted in pastoral care, which by its nature is devoid of judgement, without having regard to personal status, an individual's faith, or the reason for their imprisonment. In turn, this pastoral ethos informs our commitment to providing holistic and bespoke supports and guides our team in identifying and responding to the needs of those we support.

With treatment of people in prison and their conditions of imprisonment varying greatly across jurisdictions, ICPO's supports are deeply attuned to the diverse needs and vulnerabilities of those we support. Our practice and approach to the services we provide, for this reason, are person-centred and meet each individual where they are on their journey.

> **'They [the ICPO] are my lifeline … You're with people in a similar situation. They have the same worries, negatives and positives. You think your negatives are really bad, but when we speak about it, the negatives seem a little better, or more manageable … I am not alone. The fear, loneliness, and frustration in my situation can be overwhelming. Knowing the ICPO will always be here and not abandon me is what keeps me going.'**

Our team

ICPO staff are based in offices in Maynooth (Co. Kildare, Ireland) and London (England), each serving different areas. In England and Wales, where most people we support are imprisoned, staff in the ICPO London office provide essential services, including visiting people in prison, advocacy, providing advice and information, facilitating family visits, offering pastoral support and preparation for resettlement and support on release. Our London team is supported by staff from our Maynooth office, and by ICPO's family support worker, in their provision of services to people in prison across England and Wales.

Nearly half of the Irish prison population in England and Wales are members of the Irish Traveller Community, who face additional challenges in prison, including poor mental health and discrimination. The Traveller

> ‘Thank you so much for the birthday card. It is appreciated greatly. It is the first birthday card I’ve had in a while and I will be keeping it.’

Equality Project (which is part of the Irish Chaplaincy, UK) works alongside the ICPO London team with the support they provide to the Traveller population in prison.

The work of our ICPO Maynooth team closely aligns with that of the London team, providing comprehensive services and supports to Irish people in prisons, and their families, worldwide (including people in prison in England and Wales). There is a family support worker in place within the Maynooth office, which allows the families of people in prison abroad to engage in opportunities for support and connection through family get-togethers and regular meetings.

Maynooth is also the hub of ICPO’s policy and research work, which in recent years has focused on repatriation, resettlement, return on licence and other issues, including spent convictions. Our work in policy, advocacy and awareness-raising complements the support we provide to individuals as we aim to focus public and governmental attention on issues affecting Irish people in prison abroad and push for policy developments that will positively impact those we support.

Our vision, mission, and values

Vision

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

Mission

To empower Irish people, and their families, facing the challenges of imprisonment and detention abroad, by providing information, advocacy, support, and pastoral care. We help restore hope, resilience, and the potential to rebuild lives.

Values

- **Inclusivity:** We work with all Irish people and their families, at all stages of the criminal justice process, irrespective of faith, personal status or conviction.
- **Respect:** We treat everyone with dignity and compassion.
- **Confidentiality:** We ensure the privacy of everyone we work with.
- **Person-centred:** We journey with people, tailoring services to their needs, for as long as required.

> ‘In my darkest times ICPO was there for me.’

Our organisation’s structure

Our team consists of five full-time, and one part-time, members of staff in Maynooth, including our Coordinator. In our London office, we have four full-time members of staff and one part-time staff member. Our staff team is supported by four permanent volunteers, based in Maynooth. Our organisation is overseen by a voluntary Council and is governed by the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference. Staff in the UK office report to the CEO of the Irish Chaplaincy, who in turn reports to the Board of the Irish Chaplaincy, UK. The team in Ireland reports to ICPO’s Coordinator, who reports to our Council, the Chief Operating Officer and the Irish Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

Staff in each location collaborate and work together, as one team, with the London office working closely alongside the Traveller Equality Project, which also sits within the Irish Chaplaincy, UK.

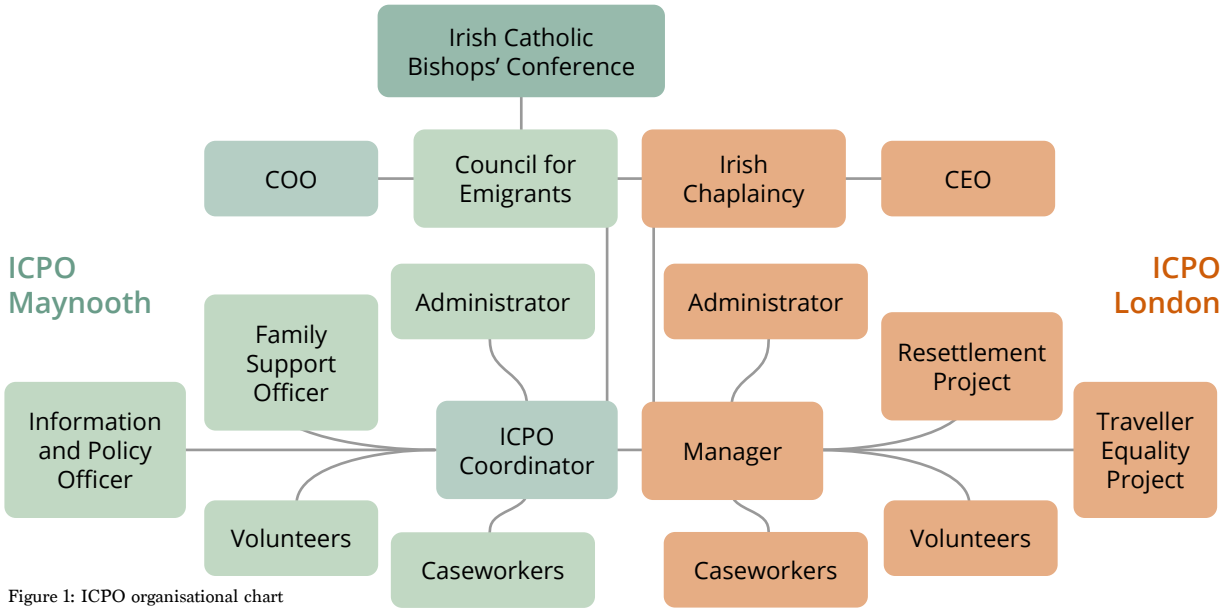

Figure 1: ICPO organisational chart

Our Council

ICPO is overseen by the IECE (our Council), which comprises six members tasked with leading our organisation and ensuring ICPO continues to be sustainable and is meeting the needs of those we serve. Our Council members are:

- Most Rev. Bishop Paul Dempsey (Chair)
- Ms Joanna Joyce
- Sr Liz Murphy
- Ms Joan Freeman
- Mr Gary Doggett
- Rev. Nigel Charles

Our funders and partners

Funding for ICPO is provided in part by the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference and, as such, the organisation feels a deep responsibility towards parishioners whose donations support our work. In addition to the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA), with whom we work closely, is a primary source of funding for the ICPO. The Society of St Vincent de Paul, and other organisations, also contribute vital funding to our projects. These financial resources are crucial in maintaining and expanding ICPO services.

ICPO works closely alongside a range of organisations, including Crosscare's Irish Diaspora Support Project in Ireland, HM Prison Service departments and Probation Service in the UK, and the Irish Apostolate USA in America. For a full list of our partners, refer to Appendix: Our Partners.

ICPO services and supports

ICPO has developed and expanded its services, always with a view to ensuring our work is tailored to the specific needs of those imprisoned abroad, and their families. Frontline work conducted by our caseworkers supports people in prison, people preparing for release and people who have been released, and their families. We focus much of our attention on communicating with people in prison and ensuring they have contact with their families, and people outside.

Our services span eight main areas:

1. *Casework and advocacy*

   Our casework and advocacy cover an array of issues, including repatriation, deportation, health and legal matters, discrimination, ill-treatment and access to post-release supports. We help people in prison and their families with these issues and work closely with government departments, statutory agencies,

solicitors, probation officers, prison officials, local authorities and welfare agencies to meet their specific needs and make representations on their behalf to prison authorities and other relevant parties.

> 'I know I have my caseworker at ICPO to assist with support while in desperate conditions here in jail.'

2. *Information and resources*

   We provide wide-ranging information and resource supports, from those on our website to materials provided to people in prison. In-cell resources include books, magazines, activity packs and language materials (such as dictionaries and phrase books). We also send a regular ICPO newsletter and cards, and coordinate and sponsor entries to the Prisoners Overseas Award in the 'Writing in Prisons' section of the Listowel Writers' Week.

3. *Prisoner support*

   ICPO staff undertake a considerable number of prison visits each year in the UK, USA, Europe, Australia and more recently in parts of Asia, the Middle East and South America. Prison visits provide practical support to people in prison and provide the opportunity for us to raise matters of concern (e.g. prisoner welfare) where these emerge. Where possible, we also try to organise visitors for Irish people detained abroad.

4. *Pen friend scheme*

   We facilitate a pen friend scheme that connects volunteers in Ireland with Irish people in prison overseas through regular letter writing. The scheme provides vital support and companionship for people in prison, helping to restore a connection with the outside world and to reduce isolation and loneliness.

> 'All your help and support has been outstanding. Having a pen friend has been a fantastic help – it's great to receive a letter and to be able to write to somebody.'

> 'I have a pen friend through ICPO, which is a fantastic link to home.'

5. *Resettlement and release*

   We provide advice and support to the people who use our service in advance of their release from prison and assist them in accessing the supports they will require. ICPO can make referrals to various services to help in accessing benefits, education, training and, in some instances, supported housing.

6. *Family support*

   An essential part of our work is providing information, support and advice to the families of Irish people who are imprisoned overseas. Restrictions on communication, language and cultural differences and an unfamiliar legal system are serious problems that families encounter. The ICPO assists families with these issues and provides links to other useful contacts. We facilitate regular family coffee mornings and a biannual family information day, assist in the facilitation of communication with family members in prison and visits, as well as providing useful resources.

> 'I had a great day at Family Day. It was late into the night before I got home and I was tired but it didn't matter because I enjoyed the day so much. I just wanted to say thanks to all the staff.'

7. *Hardship fund*

   We administer a hardship fund, which provides financial support to vulnerable

> **'It was great to listen to other people in the same situation and being able to talk to them because they understand where you are coming from.'**

Irish people in prison overseas. One of its most important functions is to enable people in prison to stay in contact with their loved ones. This fund is also used to assist clients who are unable to access necessities, such as food, water, clothes and medical treatment.

8. *Policy and research*

   ICPO engages in policy and advocacy work on issues affecting Irish people in prison overseas and their families, lobbying on a range of issues including repatriation, spent convictions, and return on licence. We also advance the needs of Irish people in prison overseas by participating in networks in Europe and the USA that are dedicated to promoting the rights and welfare of prisoners detained abroad.

Our achievements over the past four years

In the process of developing this strategic plan we reflected on our achievements and the challenges we have worked to overcome through the life of the last strategic plan, which form a strong foundation for the ambitious plan we have developed for the coming years.

Overall, we continued our unwavering support for Irish people in prison abroad and their families, throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and in the face of increased restrictions and barriers to communicating with and meeting those in prison.

The ICPO teams in London and Maynooth made more than eight thousand contacts to, from and on behalf of clients in 2021 (including telephone calls, letters, emails and visits).

In 2022, 1,100 Irish people detained in prisons across thirty-two countries were supported by the ICPO. The organisation experienced, and responded to, an expansion in its caseload in 2022 as international travel and in-prison visits, which had been reduced due to the pandemic, resumed.

We also:

- Introduced a biennial client survey, the results of which demonstrate the significant value people derive from ICPO's work, which has guided us in refining the support services we offer.
- Introduced a resettlement assessment form to facilitate caseworkers in better identifying the resettlement needs of people returning to Ireland.
- Provided additional small grants to enable the people who use our service who are in prison to maintain contact with their loved ones during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Provided staff training on mental health first aid and trauma-informed care to better equip our staff to support people facing challenges with their mental health.
- Developed a family resource booklet to support families with loved ones in prison abroad, as well as facilitating regular get-togethers for family members.
- Saw the passing and commencement of legislation on transfer of sentenced persons (also known as repatriation) under the Criminal Justice (Mutual Recognition of Custodial Sentences) Act 2023. This act transposes EU legislation on transfers and amends existing legislation to facilitate transfers to and from non-EU countries, including the UK. This was an important development that the ICPO has been actively lobbying for and one which has the potential to positively impact the lives of Irish people in prison abroad, and their families.

- Expanded our provision of information and education resources to people in prison who we support. For instance, we collaborated with the National Adult Literacy Agency to enable access to their resources for Irish people in prison overseas, and our wellbeing guide for people in prison, *Beo Beathach*, was distributed to all clients in 2021 and was received with enthusiasm.

In the words of those we support

> Irish prisoners worldwide are very fortunate to have an organisation that provides them with such a comprehensive service ranging from the most practical to the pastoral.

> When my niece died, I received 20 pounds, which helped me speak to my family on the phone, which really helped me at my lowest point.

> I can't express how grateful I am for all the support you and the ICPO have given me during the most difficult time of my life. The hardship grant has helped so much with getting essentials during the harsh winter here.

> Thank you so much for the birthday card. It is appreciated greatly. It is the first birthday card I've had in a while and I will be keeping it.

Recognising the challenges ahead

It is important to recognise the environment in which the ICPO will be operating over the next four years, and the external factors challenging our organisation and staff, which include:

- A cost-of-living crisis impacting individuals released from prison and the support they receive from state-funded agencies.
- A housing crisis.
- Increased demands on ICPO services stemming from cutbacks in UK prison services, rising rates of imprisonment and deteriorating prison conditions.
- Growing difficulties (and associated expenses) in accessing prisons and communicating with people in prison.
- Increasing demand for resettlement supports for those leaving prison, especially in the UK.

2. HOW THE STRATEGIC PLAN WAS DEVELOPED

Overview

This section explains how ICPO developed its strategic plan and the stakeholder groups involved in this process. Quality Matters, an independent research charity, supported ICPO in developing the strategy.

Consultations

Consultation with the Council and staff led to the development of an online survey, which was used to consult and gather feedback from a wide range of stakeholders. Our interest was to understand various views and perspectives on how ICPO might improve its work over the next four-year period. At this stage, Council members, staff and volunteers were asked about the key challenges for the organisation, its achievements over the past four years, and how we might develop our organisation.

In developing the plan, we undertook four workshops with staff and another with ICPO's Council. We received fourteen responses to our online survey of staff, Council, and volunteers. Concurrently, we consulted with people who use our service and representatives from stakeholder organisations. We received thirty-eight responses from people in prison to an email survey and six to a family survey. We undertook interviews with three families and five stakeholder organisations.

We acknowledge and thank everyone for their feedback and ideas, which were documented in a brief consultation report to inform the next stage of the strategic planning process, where we co-created the strategic goals.

> **'I don't think you understand how much we genuinely look forward and anticipate your contact, and how important it is to us all. It means an awful lot, our interactions with yourselves, as you do treat us like humans no matter what. We often share our letters with each other and talk about the good you do more than you probably realise.'**

Co-creating our strategic goals

Our ten strategic goals were co-developed over several workshops attended by ICPO staff, volunteers and Council members. Each session sought to define strategic goals in terms of their benefit or rationale while understanding the necessary actions or steps to achieve them. We were also mindful of the impact of working towards these goals upon the organisation, and whether we have the resources, capacity and skills required to achieve them over the next four years.

Once our goals were finalised, they were presented for approval to our Council, as well as to the Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference.

3. ICPO'S STRATEGIC GOALS

Our ten strategic goals are divided across three areas of ICPO's work: support for Irish people in prison abroad and their families; policy, advocacy, and awareness-raising; and operations, impact and oversight. For each goal described, we provide an explanation of why it is necessary and how we aim to achieve it.

Area 1: Support for Irish people in prison abroad and their families

Goal 1: Our goal is to enhance opportunities for Irish people in prison abroad to access information, education and wellbeing resources, while ensuring our approach in this area is inclusive and ensures accessibility.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

We will continue supporting Irish people in prison, advocating on their behalf, representing their interests, providing pastoral care and, where possible, regularly communicating with them and making prison visits. We understand the ongoing need to address wellbeing challenges associated with imprisonment, including mental health problems and the lasting damage caused by protracted isolation.

Our experience tells us that a key element of wellbeing within prison is access to information, education and wellbeing resources. These resources provide a sense of purpose, a meaningful use of time, contribute to improved mental health, and offer opportunities to acquire skills and knowledge.

However, access to education and resources within prisons varies greatly, and most often access is limited. ICPO remains committed to providing in-cell packs and supporting the educational endeavours of the people who use our service, wherever feasible, and providing information and resources to our clients to support them throughout their sentences.

We take a broad view of education, and understand that people have different needs, interests, capabilities, and priorities, and that these change over time. Our service provision in this area is therefore expansive, encompassing the provision of resources and activities to support exploration of:

- Vocations/employability
- Wellbeing and mental health
- Creativity, arts and craft
- Language/literacy
- Academia/formal education
- Spirituality

In facilitating access to resources and opportunities it is also important that we respond to the needs of individuals with disabilities and literacy difficulties. We are dedicated to reviewing our resources to ensure accessibility, focusing on delivering services in the most accessible way, and equipping staff to confidently respond to the needs of all our clients.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Continue to build on and further expand provision of information and education resources based on what our clients need.** For instance, the provision of information on education courses, grants, the criminal justice system, rights, and on policy areas such as repatriation and return on licence.
2. **Identify future educational partners for collaboration with and the continuation of our work with existing educational providers.** We will identify partners who can assist in delivering education modules/courses to people in prison and continue to build existing relationships in this area, exploring how their courses or educational material can reach people in prison.
3. **Provide Irish language and multilingual resources.** We will use Irish language resources to support people in prison in developing their Irish language. We will also develop multi-lingual resources, to address language barriers experienced by individuals in foreign prisons.
4. **Expand the pen friend scheme.** To increase personal connections, we will expand the existing pen friend scheme and explore the viability of online communication.
5. **Document the impact of providing access to education.** Because it is important that the impacts of educational resources and information provision is captured, we will document and share stories from the people who use our services on the impacts of supports they have received in this area.
6. **Perform an accessibility audit.** We will conduct an accessibility audit and update our website, forms and resources, including our in-cell provided materials, based on findings.[1]
7. **Provide training for staff.** Staff will undertake training to enhance their capacity to support and advocate for the people with disabilities who use our service in prison.
8. **Use information provided by our clients to understand their needs.** We will review current data that has been collected from the people with disabilities who use our service, in order to evaluate their needs. We will adapt our data collection forms (the client survey, for example) to ensure we are collecting relevant information.

With these actions, we aim to make a positive impact on the lives of Irish people in prison, promoting wellbeing, and creating more inclusive and accessible supports.

1. To assist with the audit, we will engage with the National Disability Authority or another external agency.

Goal 2: Building on our successful work with women in prison, our goal is to continue to address their needs, uphold their dignity, and support their wellbeing. We also aim to expand our focus to other people in prison with complex needs.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

In ICPO's previous strategic plan, women were prioritised. We formed a work group that focused on understanding how ICPO could tailor its supports to women. Through this group, ICPO's work adapted to address the highly complex needs of women in prison, which has positively impacted the lives of those we support, and their families. We will continue in this endeavour and

will aim to increase the financial support made available to women in prisons, which is a key factor in enabling them to cope better with life inside and to meeting their essential needs.

Based on our success in developing this approach to supporting women in prison, during the term of this strategic plan we want to examine how other cohorts of prisoners, who also experience complex and additional needs, could be further, or differently, supported by the ICPO. These groups include members of the Traveller Community, people with disabilities, older people and people who will not be released in their lifetime.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Establish working groups** to identify and improve supports for people in prison with complex and additional needs.
2. **Perform the following tasks in relation to our work with women, and other identified people in prison:**
   - » Assess the need for a planned resettlement service and, based on this assessment, make the case for increased resources.
   - » Identify specialist interest groups for collaborations and potential funding.
   - » Establish a specialised category within the hardship grants, focusing on addressing the distinct needs of the cohorts identified.

By taking these actions, we continue our focus on women in prison, upholding their dignity and enhancing their wellbeing. Drawing upon our achievements in this area, we will work towards identifying and responding to the complex needs of other groups of people in prison.

Goal 3: Our goal is to review the resettlement supports provided by ICPO and assess the need for the introduction of a planned resettlement service, as well as improving efficiencies in our current practice.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

People in prison face many challenges upon release, including accessing housing, income supports, employment opportunities, and essential services. Additionally, many of the people who use our service, who have spent years living and being imprisoned abroad, will struggle to adapt to life in Ireland post-release.

Recognising these challenges, ICPO plays a pivotal role in supporting people in prison before and after their release, which makes a tangible difference to how well individuals can reintegrate. During the Covid-19 pandemic, ICPO's role in resettlement intensified. However, ICPO lacks the resources to provide the comprehensive resettlement assistance that is currently being demanded.

While we remain committed to providing resettlement supports and are well-positioned to play a central role in this work, we require adequate resources and recognition to effectively deliver the service.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Assess the need for a planned resettlement service** and, based on this assessment, make the case for increased resources. This means quantifying and detailing all resettlement tasks being performed.
2. **Centralise and update ICPO resettlement resources and create a**

dedicated UK guide to resettlement, ensuring access to these across the organisation.

3. **Continue to collaborate with relevant agencies**, including Irish statutory agencies, to explore opportunities for increasing efficiency in resettlement-related tasks for those resettling in Ireland.
4. **Formalise our practice of obtaining identification documentation**, including seeking additional funding for Irish passport applications.

These actions will improve ICPO's capacity to deliver effective and consistent resettlement support services to individuals preparing to leave prison and resettling into community life.

Goal 4: Our goal is to better understand the needs of the families we support, enabling us to enhance ICPO's services, engagement and outreach.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

The support currently provided to families by ICPO is highly valued, encompassing information provision, assistance navigating unfamiliar legal systems, family group support sessions, and the facilitation of prison visits and communication.

Recognising the significant impact of this work, our aim is to ensure that we are delivering the most effective supports to families and directing resources appropriately. To achieve this, we will introduce a family survey to improve our understanding of the needs of families. Additionally, we want to ensure that there is consistency in terms of how families are supported by the ICPO, regardless of the location of the family.

We will continue and aim to increase the current group supports offered to family members, and explore the value of the peer aspect of the family work conducted by ICPO, where families find comfort in connecting with others on similar journeys.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Introduce a biennial family survey,** to be distributed to all of the family members we support.
2. **Consider further peer-to-peer engagement**, including:
   - Regional meetings for family support groups.
   - Linking families based on commonality of prison location, or where families reside.
   - Training family members as peer supporters.
   - Review models of prisoner peer-to-peer support and consider the merits of these for our clients.
3. **Review family outreach worldwide,** to determine the need for:
   - The development of specific regional resources.
   - Further formalisation and consistency in our approach to supporting families.[2]

The actions outlined above aim to enhance ICPO's understanding of the needs of families and improve our services.

2. For example, looking at how we use authorisation forms for families, whether all families receive the ICPO newsletter, which events families worldwide should be invited to, and whether regional events could be introduced.

Area 2: Policy, advocacy and awareness-raising

Goal 5: Our goal is to enhance the visibility and awareness of ICPO among individuals facing prison sentences abroad, their families, and other stakeholders.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

As an organisation, we want to improve awareness and communications to effectively convey our mission and achievements to stakeholders. As the only organisation in Ireland dedicated to supporting Irish people in prison abroad, it is vital that we are recognised within the Church, the non-profit sector, and by government.

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and related restrictions we had to forgo publicly celebrating our 35th anniversary as an organisation, which was a missed opportunity to showcase our successes, share our story, and develop further resources. Creating opportunities such as this to effectively communicate our work is crucial.

A particular challenge we face related to communications is a lack of public awareness, potentially causing delays for individuals who could benefit from our interventions. By enhancing our communication, we want to ensure that people in prison and their families can access our services at the earliest stages of engaging with foreign criminal justice systems.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Develop a communications and awareness strategy, which will:**
   - Articulate and convey the compelling narrative that is ICPO's mission and impact, ensuring it reaches a broader audience.
   - Include improved branding to be used uniformly across all channels and offices.
   - Continue our collaboration with the Catholic Communications Office.
2. **Identify and engage stakeholders,** seeking opportunities to connect and network.
   - We will establish an e-zine to share information and updates.
3. **Improve the ICPO website and increase our social media activity**.
   - We will upload videos, ensure the website includes up-to-date information, and review search engine optimisation.
   - We will explore the outsourcing of our social media management, or provide training to an existing staff member and allocate this task to them.
4. **Celebrate our 40th year**, using the anniversary as an opportunity to reflect on our journey and accomplishments. We will chronicle ICPO's history and use the resource developed to raise awareness of our work.
5. **Continue our work with the DFA,** building our relationships with consulates and formalising our framework of collaboration.

Implementing these strategic actions will mean improved visibility and awareness of the ICPO among individuals facing prison sentences abroad, their families, and other stakeholders. This increased awareness will facilitate earlier access to ICPO's services. Additionally, improved understanding and recognition of ICPO among stakeholders will enhance the organisation's impact, reach and resources.

Goal 6: Advancing our policy agenda and effectively advocating for the interests of Irish people in prison abroad.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

From a policy perspective, our primary focus over the past three years has been repatriation, resettlement and return on licence. We have focused on several other areas also, including spent convictions. Over the course of this strategic plan, we aim to advance these policy areas, ensure our clients are kept up to date on progress and prepare for when policy is amended. We also want to ensure that any emerging policy issues are captured, with focused attention on policy issues impacting Irish people in prison in the UK.

In addition to addressing outstanding policy issues, our goal is to continue our efforts to effectively advocate for the enhancement of conditions for Irish people in prison abroad. With the upcoming 20th anniversary of the DFA's Flood Report,[3] and an absence of targeted government strategy on Irish prisoners abroad, we want to capitalise on this moment to remind government of the ongoing and evolving needs and vulnerabilities of the individuals supported by the ICPO.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Develop a plan around the anniversary of the Flood Report to re-engage government on prisoner rights and welfare.** This would involve:
   - Reviewing progress on the Flood Report recommendations.
   - Engaging with DFA and seeking to collaborate with them in relation to reviewing and updating the Flood Report.
2. **Progress our policy agenda** on the three issues of resettlement in Ireland on licence, transfer/repatriation and spent convictions; keeping clients informed of progress and preparing resources in anticipation of legislative change.
3. **Build a case for a full-time policy and communications officer**.
4. **Establish a policy and research sub-committee of the Council**, whose role is to identify emerging issues impacting people in prison and their families, with representation from the Council and the UK and Ireland offices.
5. **Continue our work exploring the development of a service for foreign national prisoners** following the findings of the research conducted in partnership with Maynooth University, titled *Foreign National Prisoners and Irish Prisons: Evaluating the Need for a Dedicated Service*.

By focusing on these priority areas and leveraging the 20th anniversary of the Flood Report in 2027, we aim to bring attention to and improve the conditions of Irish people in prison abroad.

3. In 2007, the DFA published the Flood Report, providing recommendations regarding Irish citizens in foreign prisons. Authored by former TD Chris Flood, the report focused on prisoner welfare abroad.

Area 3: Operations, impact and oversight

Goal 7: Our goal is to monitor and manage staff workloads, while enhancing volunteer engagement within the ICPO.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

Increasing demands on staff, coupled with the growing complexity of casework, pose challenges in workload management. Despite these pressures, resources have not seen a proportional increase, resulting in a reactive approach to casework, which threatens staff wellbeing and retention.

It is important that we are constantly reviewing workloads, both in terms of what staff currently have to manage and also by ensuring that we are offering our services to those who are the intended target group.

For staff to be able to manage workloads, perform their roles effectively, and experience job satisfaction, it is also important for them to engage with consistent, high-quality supervision and professional development.

With volunteers playing a crucial role in the ICPO by supporting the staff team, it is important that they are supported and their involvement is expanded.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Refine the triage process and review parameters for accepting new clients.**
   - » As part of this, we will develop tiered levels of support based on agreed criteria, need, and priority.
2. **Support team members who are at capacity**, with team meetings to regularly review where support is required.
3. **Create a business case for key staff positions in the UK.**
4. **Perform a benchmarking exercise to accurately understand staff workloads and roles**, which can be utilised for future funding applications or the development of a business case for further staffing roles or the promotion of existing staff.
5. **Document the work of staff and volunteers in an operations manual**, covering our workflow, processes, and procedures to deliver standardisation across ICPO and facilitate knowledge sharing.
6. **Expand professional development and support for staff**, considering opportunities to enhance skills, the recognition of skills and experience, with alignment across London and Maynooth offices.
7. **Continue to recruit volunteers to support our work,** whilst ensuring ICPO volunteers are provided support and supervision with their roles.

These actions are aimed at enhancing the efficiency of ICPO's operations, providing consistent and effective support for staff, and contributing to the organisation's ability to meet demand.

Goal 8: Our aim is to create a method for measuring our work that is practical, relevant and clearly captures the outcomes of our interventions.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

Measuring the impact of bespoke services is challenging. Although we conduct client surveys, accurately quantifying the effects of our work remains difficult. We receive informal positive feedback from stakeholders, people in prison we support and family members, which demonstrates the clear value of our work. However, we need to be able to communicate this more accurately to our funders and supporters.

As such, it is important that we start measuring the outcomes of our work, with a method that:

- Captures the diversity, flexibility and bespoke nature of our approach.
- Benefits the people who use our service and the ICPO.
- Helps us to communicate the impact of our work, strengthening the case for future funding, guiding our advocacy work and improving our services.
- Preserves our pastoral ethos, recognising the unquantifiable aspects of our work.
- Acknowledges that not all individuals we support can be approached in the same way and that direct contact with many is limited.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Develop a method for measuring the impact of our work.** This would be based on the principles described above and will be designed to assess clients at agreed points, including when they first enter prison, during their sentence and when preparing for release. We will explore engaging with an external agency to work with us to develop this framework.

   As part of developing this action, we will:

   - Review our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database system so we have clarity on how many cases we are running at any one time and the level of supports and interventions people are receiving.
   - Trial the method with an agreed client group.

Implementation of methods to measure impact will enhance our ability to evaluate, improve, and communicate the outcomes of our services, ultimately benefiting the people who we support and ICPO's sustainability.

Goal 9: Our goal is to improve governance and the effectiveness of our Council by building their capacity and oversight, ensuring they are positioned to lead ICPO toward its strategic objectives.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

Building on our previous success in achieving governance-related objectives, ICPO is committed to best practice in governance, which is vital for maintaining trust and credibility with our partners, funders, staff, volunteers, and the people who use our service. Effective governance ensures that ICPO operates efficiently, ethically, and in compliance with regulatory and statutory requirements, which in turn safeguards our organisation's reputation.

The enhancement of the effectiveness and capacity of the Council will enable them to better guide progress towards the outlined strategic objectives and ensure continued

alignment between our actions and activities and our mission and values.

ICPO's performance is underpinned by the skills, knowledge, and dedication of its Council; therefore, the continued expansion of Council membership and provision of appropriate induction, training, and ongoing supports will ensure members are able to perform their roles effectively

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Develop a Council handbook** that provides members with a comprehensive guide to organisational governance, aligning with the Terms of Reference and outlining the specific roles and functions of the Council and its members.
   - » Develop an induction process for new members to be contained within the handbook.
2. **Review organisational policies and procedures**, and ensure a mechanism is in place to monitor ongoing compliance.
3. **Provide access to training and development** to strengthen the Council's effectiveness.
   - » Develop a training plan to address the specific needs of Council members.
4. **Consider diversity, representation, and skill gaps on our Council**, and implement recruitment efforts to address identified needs.
5. **Incorporate a report and discussion on the progress of our strategic objectives at Council meetings**, on a quarterly basis.

These actions collectively aim to increase the effectiveness of the Council, improve governance practices, and ensure that ICPO remains accountable and aligned with its mission and values.

Goal 10: Our goal is to reaffirm our commitment to incorporating the voices, feedback, and experiences of the individuals we support throughout ICPO practices and processes.

Why we want to achieve this goal:

Building upon our successful engagement of people in prison and their families, in which their perspectives directly shape our approach to providing support, is a fundamental priority. We believe that involving individuals with lived experience in various capacities throughout the organisation is central to our person-centred approach and embodies good governance.

A commitment to integrating the voices, feedback and experiences of the people who use our service into our processes will enhance our services and ensure our responsiveness to their evolving needs.

To achieve this goal, ICPO will:

1. **Review how we facilitate input from the people who use our service** and consider new ways to involve people in prison and their families within the organisation.
2. **Continue to engage individuals with lived experience**, seeking their participation as members of the Council, volunteers, on staff, as committee or working group members, or as representatives on forums with which the ICPO engages.
3. **Review how we support those we engage with lived experience**, to ensure they have the capacity and training they need.

The anticipated outcome of these actions is to reinforce ICPO's person-centred approach, resulting in improved responsiveness to the evolving needs of Irish people in prison abroad and their families.

4. APPENDIX: OUR PARTNERS

Ireland

- DFA (including the Irish Abroad Unit, Consular Assistance Unit plus embassies and consulates worldwide)
- Crosscare Irish Diaspora Support Project
- Safe Home
- Cork Alliance
- Action for Children and Families of Prisoners

Northern Ireland

- NIACRO

UK

- HM Prison Service departments
- Probation Service
- The Home Office
- ICAP (Irish Counselling & Psychotherapy Services)
- The Passage (Homeless Services)
- CCRC (Criminal Cases Review Commission)
- PACT (Prison Advice & Care Trust)
- The Traveller Movement

USA

- Irish Apostolate USA
- Coalition of Irish Immigration Centers

Australia

- Irish Support Agency (ISA) Sydney
- Irish Australian Support and Resource Bureau (IASRB) Melbourne
- Claddagh Association Perth
- Irish Australian Support Association of QLD (IASAQ) Brisbane

icpo

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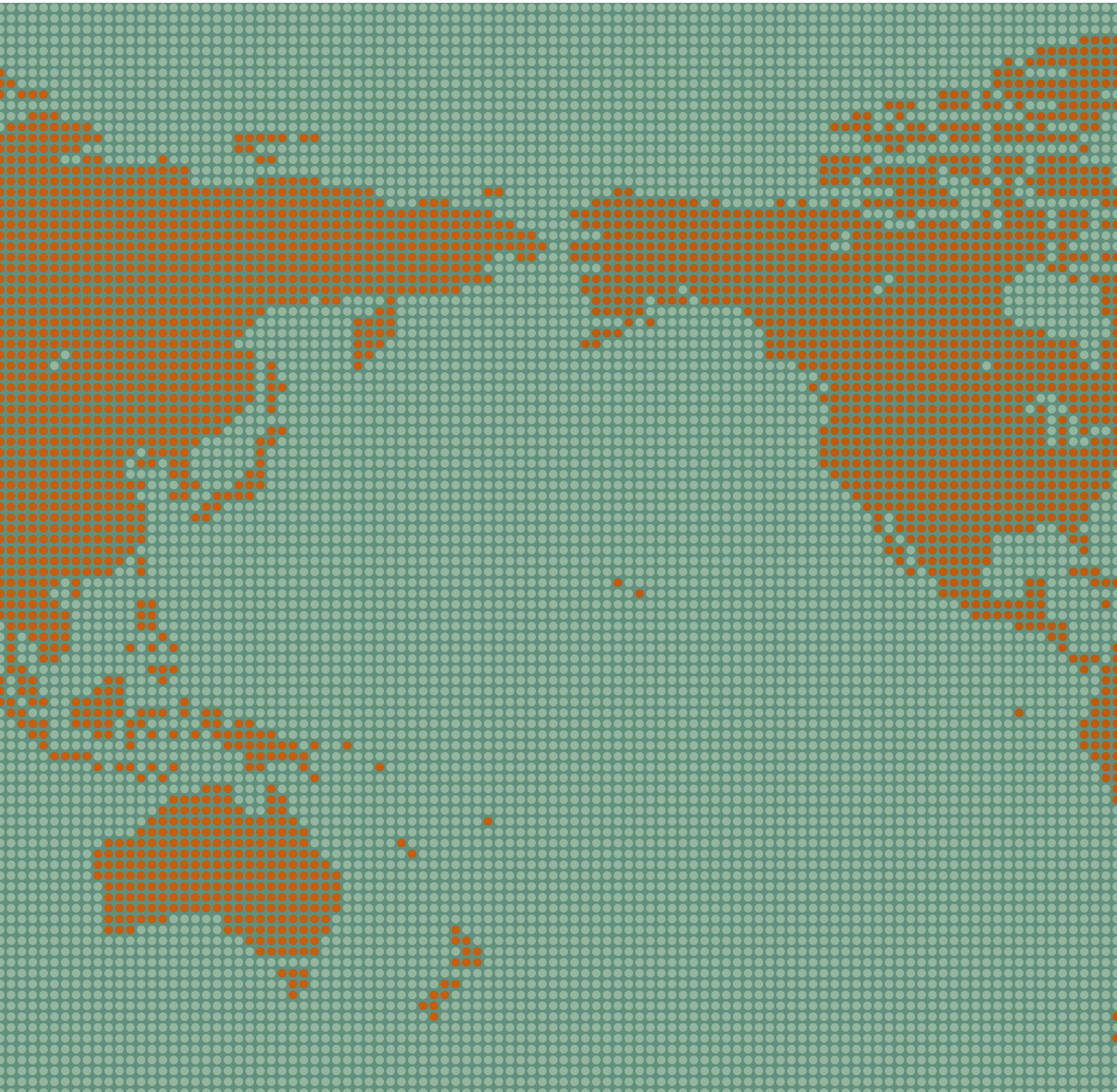
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