

Addressing the **Garda Recruitment and Retention Crisis**



OCTOBER
2025





Introduction

In communities across the state, right now, there are not enough Gardaí to keep our streets safe and to prevent crime. This is a result of the ongoing crisis of retention and recruitment within An Garda Síochána.

The situation has worsened throughout the period since Fine Gael came into government in 2011 and since 2016 when Fine Gael secured the support of Fianna Fáil to remain in power.

High profile recruitment campaigns for An Garda Síochána have made very little difference to the overall number of Gardaí. While large numbers of people apply to join An Garda Síochána, this is not translating into increases in the overall number of gardaí.

For example, while the recruitment campaign lauded by the Minister for Justice at the beginning of 2025 attempted to give the impression that the situation was improving, the figures available for the year to date are dismal.

In the first eight months of 2025 there was a net increase of just 178 Gardaí in the state. There were 14,191 serving members of An Garda Síochána on the 31st of December 2024. On 31st July, the latest figures revealed to Sinn Féin in a parliamentary question, there were 14,369.

The low numbers of Gardaí has implications across the board. The impact has been particularly noticeable in terms of Garda visibility and in the drop in the number of community Gardaí and roads policing gardaí. Indeed, the impact of low Garda numbers and the failure to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis has been highlighted by the Policing and Community Safety Authority in its assessment of policing performance.

Without meaningful action the situation will continue to worsen. Irish communities will remain under-policed. Members of An Garda Síochána will be left in an unsustainable situation whereby they are unable to provide the service they want to and which communities deserve.

Matt Carthy TD
SINN FÉIN SPOKESPERSON
ON JUSTICE

Réamhrá

Níl dóthain Gardaí i bpobail ó cheann ceann na tíre faoi láthair chun na sráideanna a choinneáil slán agus coiriúlacht a stopadh. Is toradh é seo ar an ngéarchéim maidir le foireann a choinneáil agus a earcú laistigh den Gharda Síochána

Is i ndonacht a chuaigh an scéal ó tháinig Fine Gael chun rialtais in 2011 agus ó 2016, tráth a bhfuair Fine Gael tacaíocht Fhianna Fáil i dtreo is go bhféadfaidís fanacht i gcumhacht.

Is beag an tionchar a bhí ag feachtais mhóra earcaíochta don Gharda Síochána ar líon iomlán na nGardaí. Cé go gcuireann líon mór daoine isteach ar an nGarda Síochána, ní hionann sin agus méadú ar líon na ngardaí féin.

Bíodh is go raibh iarrachtaí ann, tríd an bhfeachtas earcaíochta a mhol an tAire Dlí agus Cirt i dtús 2025, dul i gcion ar daoine go raibh cúrsaí ag dul i bhfeabhas, mar shampla, tá na figiúirí don bhliain go hainnis.

Bhí méadú glan de 178 Garda sa stát sa chéad ocht mí de 2025. 14,191 ball reatha den Gharda Síochána a bhí ann ar an 31 Nollaig 2024. Ar an 31 Lúnasa, sna figiúirí is déanaí a tugadh do Shinn Féin i bhfreagra ar cheist phairlimiteach, bhí 14,369 Garda.

Tá impleachtaí ag líon íseal na nGardaí ar go leor. Tá tionchar ar leith aige ar fheiceálacht na ngardaí agus ar an titim i líon na ngardaí pobail agus i líon na ngardaí a bhíonn ag plé le póilíníú bóithre. Tá aird tarraingthe ag an Údarás um Phóilíneacht agus Sábháilteacht Phobail sa measúnú a rinne siad ar fheidhmiú póilíneachta, go deimhin, ar an tionchar atá ag líon íseal na ngardaí agus ag an gcliseadh dul i ngleic leis an ngéarchéim maidir le foireann a choinneáil agus a earcú.

Is chun donais a rachaidh an scéal gan gníomh suntasach. Beidh pobail na hÉireann gan dóthain póilíneachta. Beidh baill den Gharda Síochána fágtha sa chás nach mbeidh siad in ann an tseirbhís atá ag dul don phobal a chur ar fáil.

Matt Carthy TD
URLABHRAÍ DLÍ
AGUS CIRT SHINN FÉIN



Current and recent trends in Garda numbers

The latest figures provided show that there were 14,369 members of An Garda Síochána at the end of August serving a population of approximately 5.12 million people.

15 years ago, in 2010 there were 14,377 members of an Garda Síochána serving a population of 4.52 million.

So, while there has been a significant increase in the population; Garda numbers under Fine Gael and Fianna Fáil are lower than they were a decade and a half ago.

There is now a broad consensus that there are too few Gardaí. The government has set a target of 15,000 Gardaí. In fact, previous governments had projected that the 15,000 figure would be exceeded by 2021. They failed to reach that target just as the current government is on track to fail.

The Garda Representative Association (GRA) has advocated that the target number should be 17,000. The Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors (AGSI) have stated a need for 18,000 Gardaí.

The impact of the low numbers of Gardaí can be seen in terms of specific areas of policing. There has been a significant drop in the numbers within roads policing and community policing, both of which play a crucial role in crime prevention and community safety.

There were only 700 Community Gardaí in the state at the end of 2024, compared to 1,113 at the end of 2011.

There have also been clear issues in terms of Garda visibility in urban and rural areas. While there have been a visible, and welcome, effort to increase visibility in Dublin City centre this is not sustainable without increasing overall Garda numbers, due to the pressures it places on other districts.

The Policing and Community Safety Authority (PCSA) report into An Garda Síochána's policing performance in 2024 highlights the serious impact that the low Garda numbers crisis is having on policing services. The report highlights the fact that a lack of adequate Garda numbers is undermining the work of the Gardaí and that this can be seen in a continued reliance on overtime. This is because there are not enough Gardaí and Garda staff available for work. It also underlines the fact that low Garda numbers are creating significant problems in relation to the new operating model as well as the impact it is having on community policing.

In June 2025 both the GRA and the AGSI appeared before the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Justice, Home Affairs and Migration. The GRA and the AGSI highlighted the very serious issues in terms of the failures to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis in An Garda Síochána. The representatives emphasised how their members are over stretched and overworked because of the failure to ensure there are enough Gardaí.

There is a continuing over reliance on overtime in An Garda Síochána because there are not enough Gardaí and Garda staff available for work.

Despite the fact that the PCSA report for 2024 highlighted that overtime continues to be used to deliver routine policing services, with the three highest being crime investigation (22%); court attendance and security (14%); and crime prevention and public order (16%) Budget 2026 contained an increase allocation for overtime but nothing to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis.



Recruitment figures

The Programme for Government sets out the government's objective of recruiting at least 5,000 Gardaí during the term of this government. However, there is no evidence to suggest that this is feasible under the current trajectory. The large numbers of applications received following the high-profile recruitment campaigns are simply not translating into attestation numbers that would see the figure of 5,000 reached over a term of government.

While the maximum number for each intake at Templemore is 225, this figure has not been reached on any occasion in the last number of years. While the capacity to train more Gardaí is a clear part of the problem, issues in relation to the Garda training allowance and Garda pay also have to be addressed in order to increase the number of Gardaí who are being trained.

At the beginning of 2025 the then Garda Commissioner Drew Harris said it would simply not be possible to meet the government goal of 1,000 new members this year and that the likely maximum would be 800.

750 recruits attested from Templemore in 2023 while just 631 recruits attested in 2024. It is now estimated that only between 600- 650 Gardaí will attest in 2025.

The Policing and Community Safety Authority Annual Assessment of Policing for 2024 expressed concern about the lack of a recruitment and retention strategy for An Garda Síochána. It stated categorically: *"In the current environment given a full employment market, the capacity of the Garda College and the impending eligibility of many Gardaí to retire, reaching a target of 15,000 Garda strength will not be achieved in the short term."*

The following table shows the numbers per intake since January 2023 and the numbers who attested from the intakes. As can be seen in all intakes, with the exception of those who attested in January 2023, a number of trainees drop off between intake and attestation.

ORIGINAL NUMBER OF INTAKE	NUMBER ATTESTED (Attestation date)
24	25 (January 2023)
92	86 (July 2023)
135	126 (October 2023)
154	151 (December 2023)
174	165 (March 2024)
174	157 (June 2024)
109	108 (September 2024)
186	169 (December 2024)
157	149 (March 2025)
125	120 (June 2025)
162	154 (August 2025)



Is the Garda training allowance adequate?

The Garda training allowance is currently €354 per week. This is 67% of the weekly minimum wage. This allowance has been criticised by the Garda Representative Association, who have questioned how anyone can survive on that amount. The GRA has argued that trainee Gardaí should be taking home at least the equivalent of 80% of the rate of first year qualified Gardaí.

The adequacy of this allowance needs to be considered both in the context of the rising costs of living and the need to attract high quality candidates to join An Garda Síochána.

The maximum age for joining An Garda Síochána was increased from 35 to 50 years of age increasing the likelihood that those joining will have family and other financial responsibilities. For someone who may have a mortgage, a rental contract and/or childcare responsibilities the training allowance as it stands is totally inadequate. The Garda Training Allowance, because it involves a very large drop in income for most people seeking to join, is a disincentive to those who may otherwise consider joining the Gardaí.

Sinn Féin believes there must be a significant increase in the Garda training allowance as part of a recruitment and retention crisis.

Sinn Féin is proposing that the training allowance be raised to €579.15 per week from 2026 which is the weekly equivalent of a minimum wage of €14.85 per hour.

SINN FÉIN PROPOSAL

- ▶ **Increase the Garda training allowance to €579.15 per week from 2026. Cost based on training 1,000 recruits a year approximately €9 million.**

Training capacity

Not enough Gardaí are being trained annually. In addition to the inadequacy of the training allowance there are issues in relation to the capacity of the Garda training college in Templemore to meet the government's target. Without expanding the capacity of the Garda college there is little chance of meeting the Government's stated targets.

The Garda College in Templemore is used for both trainee Gardaí and established Gardaí. The college provides residential training programmes covering leadership, management & professional development and crime, specialist and operational skill such as driving courses, firearm courses and specialist interview course.

The Minister for Justice has stated that the capacity of Templemore is not a constraint on recruitment but has also stated that the Recruitment and Training Capacity Group is to consider expanding the capacity of Templemore to support the achievement of increased recruitment.

According to the Minister for Justice the planning cycle of the admission of new Garda trainees to the Garda College allows for the commencement of a new intake of between 200 to 225 trainees every 12 weeks allowing for four new intakes per year. The Minister also outlined that in each 3-year cycle it is possible to schedule a 5th intake of trainees to commence training in the 3rd year.

While a second garda college may be required in the medium to longer term, in the shorter term increasing the annual output of trained gardaí will be best achieved by increasing the capacity of Templemore.



To increase the numbers of Gardaí attesting per year to a minimum of 1,100 Sinn Féin is proposing:

- ▶ **Increasing the capacity per intake by 50 to 275 per intake.**
- ▶ **Moving residential training programmes for management and professional development to the University of Limerick Campus during the summer period when there is availability of student accommodation and classrooms.**
- ▶ **Initiate a feasibility study to examine the costs and potential locations for a second Garda college.**

Targeted recruitment in working class communities

Historically those from working class backgrounds have been underrepresented in An Garda Síochána. At the same time we also know that socio economic background impacts on how communities interact with An Garda Síochána.

The CSO Equality and Discrimination 2024 report on interactions with An Garda Síochána shows that one's socio-economic background, such as address, accent, level of education, employment status, type of housing, etc. was the most common ground for perceived discrimination by An Garda Síochána (30%). The Garda Public Attitudes Survey for 2023 showed that those from what could be termed more working class socio economic backgrounds (C2DE) were somewhat more likely to have low levels of trust in the Gardaí.

Working class communities across the state need better policing. A part of that is ensuring that An Garda Síochána are representative of those who come from that community. As Garda recruitment continues to take place in a competitive work market, there needs to be a focused effort to recruit from within underrepresented working-class communities some of which have significantly higher levels of unemployment. Unfortunately, An Garda Síochána does not collate information on the number of recruits who come from disadvantaged backgrounds as measured by the Pobal index meaning we cannot get an accurate picture of the make-up of An Garda Síochána.

SINN FÉIN IS PROPOSING:

- ▶ **A Garda Recruitment Drive Roadshow to visit DEIS secondary schools and engage with senior cycle students as part of each recruitment competition.**
- ▶ **Collate data on the deprivation /affluence background of Garda recruits.**
- ▶ **Increase the numbers of Community Gardaí assigned to disadvantaged communities.**



Encouraging Gardaí who have resigned to return

Over recent years there has been a significant number of resignations of Gardaí who have not reached retirement age. 653 Gardaí resigned since 2020, 395 of whom were under the age of 35. In the same period 317 Gardaí had resigned within 5 years of joining An Garda Síochána.

While there will always be Gardaí who would like a change of career some may be interested in returning. This should be encouraged. However the numbers rejoining according to information provided by the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration is minuscule. Since 2015 only 19 Gardaí rejoined having previously resigned. The highest number was in 2024 when 6 returned.

There have been efforts over recent years by other police services, namely those from Western and Southern Australia, to recruit members of An Garda Síochána. It is difficult to ascertain exactly how many members of An Garda Síochána have left to serve in those police services. However, what is clear is that even if the number is not particularly significant there should be incentives in place to encourage them to return as is the case for other essential workers in the public sector.

Sinn Féin is proposing the introduction of 'Return to Policing' incentives, similar to those that exist to encourage nurses and midwives to return to practice:

- ▶ This would include a return to policing course for those who have been absent for 5 years or more. If taking an approach similar to nursing that would involve 3 weeks theoretical and skills instruction and 6 weeks practice placement – to a max of 9 weeks.
- ▶ Return to policing grant - €1500 initially and €1500 after completing a year. Set a target of 50 rejoiners a year. Cost €150,000
- ▶ Recognition of relevant overseas policing experience for the purpose of the Garda pay scale.

Garda pay

The current full employment market poses challenges when seeking to address the recruitment and retention crisis in An Garda Síochána. People have many other options in terms of employment. Ensuring the role attracts and retains high quality capable people means that the issue of Garda pay must be examined.

Garda representative organisations have highlighted issues of pay as an important factor in terms of tackling the recruitment and retention crisis.

To improve garda pay as part of efforts to tackle the recruitment and retention crisis Sinn Féin is proposing:

- ▶ Removing point 2 on the Garda pay scale so that Gardaí would go from point one to point 3 on the pay scale. Cost: approximately €1.8 million
- ▶ Removing point 5 on the Garda pay scale so that Gardaí would go from point 4 to point 6 on the pay scale. approximately €0.8 million



Retirement and retention of those with long service

Once a Garda has completed 30 years' service, they can retire on full pension at age 50 if they joined before 1 April 2004 or 55 years of age if they joined on or after that date.

In September 2024 the mandatory retirement age was increased from 60 years to 62 years. Extension can be given to allow Gardaí to work beyond the mandatory retirement age and the Minister for Justice has indicated that since 2020 his department has processed 180 requests for retirement extensions. There were 15 retirement extensions approved for the year to September 2025. 4 were 1 year extensions to age 63 and 11 were 2 year extensions to 64. There were no extensions to 65.

The mandatory retirement age of 62 is still far below other frontline professions in the public sector. While working in the Gardaí is highly demanding and many may want to retire following 30 years of service, others may wish to work until 65. Rather than have a situation where individuals must put in requests to work to 65 the mandatory age should be increased to this.

The most recent figures provided by the Minister for Justice indicate that 2,650 Gardaí will be eligible to retire over the period from January 2025 to December 2030.

While the Minister argues that not all these Gardaí who are eligible will retire, there is currently little incentive for those who have 30 years of service to remain in position.

The Garda Síochána Recruitment Training Capacity Group Report which reported to the Minister for Justice, Home Affairs and Migration in September 2025 noted that "The data does show that the number of compulsory retirements will start to climb from 2030 onwards and this will have to be factored into longer term workforce planning.

The table below sets out the number of Gardaí who have served more than 20 years of service and illustrates that there is a serious challenge coming down the line in terms of future retirements.

LENGTH OF SERVICE IN YEARS	NUMBER OF MEMBERS
20 - 24	2437
25 - 29	2217
30 or more	1008

To incentivise Gardaí with long service to remain Sinn Féin is proposing:

- ▶ Introducing a long service payment of €2,500 per year for all Gardaí who have served 30 years or more. Cost approximately €2.52million based on current numbers with over 30 years service.
- ▶ Increase the mandatory Garda retirement age to 65.



Conclusion

The Garda recruitment and retention crisis can be addressed. But it will only be done if some of the practical barriers to recruitment and retention are tackled. These barriers include the lack of training spaces, the low level of the Garda training allowance and the lack of incentives to retain Gardaí particularly those who have served 30 years or more. There is also little done to encourage gardaí, including a significant number of younger Gardaí who resign, to return.

If this is a 'job worth doing' as the straplines on the Garda recruitment campaigns state, then from the training allowance to Garda pay to recognition of long service there needs to be increases that recognise the value of the work being done and the challenges of recruiting and retaining Gardaí.

Garda recruitment campaigns are seeing thousands of applications, but this is not translating into any significant increase in the number of Gardaí because the underlying issues are not being addressed.

We cannot continue to rely on overtime to deliver routine policing services. We cannot continue with poor Garda visibility, a severe lack of community Gardaí and too few roads policing Gardaí. Steps need to be taken now to tackle the retention and recruitment crisis that has been ongoing for years.

Implementing the proposals set out here will be an important step in addressing the retention and recruitment crisis so that we have sufficient Gardaí to meet the policing needs of our communities and of an increased population.





Sinn Féin