A QUIET LETTER ABOUT THE NUMBERS WE ALL PAY

The World Upside Down

Ireland · 2026

Dear stranger,

1. The price of a person

Ireland's prison administration reports what it spends, on average, for one day of detention.

One day in an Irish prison costs €271.00.

One day in a primary school costs €24.68.

The difference is 11.0 times.

That is the whole comparison.

Sources:

- Council of Europe, SPACE I 2025, 2024 data: Table 33, Ireland row, column 33A — the average amount spent per day for the detention of one inmate, €271.00. The same row counts 1,818,643 days spent in penal institutions in 2024. It also reports a total prison-administration budget of €529,244,000; the per-day figure is the table's own reported average, not that budget divided by the days.
- https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2026/06/260626_rapport-space-i-2025.pdf
- Eurostat, 2022: €9,008.8 of public expenditure per primary-school pupil (educ_uoe_fine09, ISCED 1, euro, full-time equivalent). 2022 is the latest year published; the 2023 observation is listed but empty.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/educ_uoe_fine09/default/table?lang=en
- Calculation: 9008.8 / 365 = €24.68 a day for a child; 271.00 / 24.68 = 10.98, shown as 11.0.

2. The price of a job

A lawyer earns €298.08 a day.

An accountant earns €240.38 a day.

A teacher earns €180.57 a day.

A cleaner earns €113.20 a day.

All four are gross, before tax.

These four figures do not come from one table. The two professional figures are the midpoints of a recruitment guide's Dublin salary bands for this year: a solicitor with up to three years' experience, and a newly qualified accountant. The teacher's figure is the first point of the official post-primary scale. The cleaner's figure is the statutory minimum wage at eight hours. The three annual figures are divided by two hundred and sixty working days; the hourly figure is multiplied by eight.

The range itself is the story.

Sources:

- Morgan McKinley, 2026: Ireland Salary Guide, Legal: Private Practice, Solicitor, Dublin, 0–3 years €65,000–€90,000; midpoint €77,500. Core Finance, Newly Qualified Accountant, Dublin €60,000–€65,000; midpoint €62,500. Annual rate, gross.
- https://www.morganmckinley.com/ie/salary-guide/legal-risk-compliance/permanent-salaries
- https://www.morganmckinley.com/ie/salary-guide/accounting-finance/permanent-salaries
- Department of Education and Youth, 2026: Circular 0005/2026, revised incremental salary scale for post-primary teachers appointed on or after 1 January 2011, point 1 €46,948 from 1 February 2026. This is the entry point of the scale; the top point is €85,411.
- https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/08e7b37d/Circular_0005-2026.pdf
- Citizens Information Board, 2026: national minimum wage €14.15 an hour from 1 January 2026. Used as the cleaner's floor, not a cleaner's survey median.
- https://www.citizensinformation.ie/en/employment/employment-rights-and-conditions/pay-and-employment/minimum-wage/
- Calculation: 77500 / 260 = 298.08; 62500 / 260 = 240.38; 46948 / 260 = 180.57; 14.15 * 8 = 113.20.

3. The loop

The government takes in €144,802,900,000.00.

The government spends €134,135,900,000.00.

The difference is €10,666,900,000.00.

This time the difference is a surplus. The state took in more than it spent.

The loop is not broken. It is simply pointed somewhere.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2025: general government (S13) total revenue €144,802.9 million and total expenditure €134,135.9 million (gov_10a_main, euro). Central government, local government and social-security funds together. Updated 2026-10-21; no provisional status flag on the 2025 observations.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_main/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2025: net lending of €10,666.9 million, 1.8% of GDP (gov_10a_main, B9); general government gross debt 34.8% of GDP (gov_10dd_edpt1, sector S13, Maastricht definition).
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10dd_edpt1/default/table?lang=en
- Calculation: 144,802.9 ? 134,135.9 = 10,667.0 million euro; the published net lending is 10,666.9 million because each total is independently rounded.

4. Where the loop points

The single largest item is old-age pensions: €16,827,000,000.00.

A lot of money goes to catching people after they fall.

Much less goes to making sure they do not fall in the first place.

This is not a conspiracy. It is a habit.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF1002 (old age), general government, €16,827.0 million — 13.4% of total expenditure and the largest single sub-function. The whole social-protection function (GF10) is €45,799.2 million, 36.3% of the total. For comparison: health (GF07) €29,243.4 million, education (GF09) €15,073.4 million, hospital services (GF0703) €15,209.8 million, transport (GF0405) €6,399.9 million, pre-primary and primary education (GF0901) €6,271.4 million, defence (GF02) €840.7 million, police services (GF0301) €2,254.2 million, prisons (GF0304) €590.9 million, 0.5% of the total.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en

5. Five lines worth naming

Pre-primary and primary education: about €17,181,917.81 per day (€6,271,400,000.00 per year).

Transport: about €17,533,972.60 per day (€6,399,900,000.00 per year).

Hospital services: about €41,670,684.93 per day (€15,209,800,000.00 per year).

Defence: about €2,303,287.67 per day (€840,700,000.00 per year).

Police services: about €6,175,890.41 per day (€2,254,200,000.00 per year).

Some are large. Some are small. Each of them is a decision, written down.

Sources:

- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0901 (pre-primary and primary education), €6,271.4 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0405 (transport), €6,399.9 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0703 (hospital services), €15,209.8 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF02 (defence), €840.7 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Eurostat, 2024: COFOG function GF0301 (police services), €2,254.2 million.
- https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/gov_10a_exp/default/table?lang=en
- Daily figures divide each annual amount by 365.

6. The habit

We are all part of this habit.

We pay taxes. We vote. We work. We accept the numbers.

Not because we consciously chose them, but because we were born into them.

No one ever showed us the whole picture at once. This letter is that picture.

7. The other number

One cent per day. That is €3.65 per person per year.

The idea is simple: instead of paying €271.00 every day for the end of someone's story, what happens if many people each give one cent a day for the beginning of the story?

You give one cent every day. Over a full year that is €3.65.

No promises. No guarantees. No returns.

Just a place, a question, a group of people, a very small amount of money, and the freedom to stop at any time.

Sources:

- Calculation: one cent per day, multiplied by the days in a year, is €3.65.
- Council of Europe, SPACE I 2025, 2024 data: the €271.00 average cost of one detention day quoted above.
- https://wp.unil.ch/space/files/2026/06/260626_rapport-space-i-2025.pdf

8. What this letter is not

It is not a business plan. It is not a political programme. It is not a religion. It is not a solution.

It is a mirror.

9. What you can do

Nothing. Or something. That is the whole choice.

You can look at the public numbers. You can join the experiment and give one cent a day, €3.65 a year. Or you can close this letter and forget it.

No one is obliged. That is the point.

10. The world upside down

It costs more to keep someone in a cell than to teach a child.

It costs more to treat people after they fall than to prevent the fall.

It costs more to argue than to listen.

It costs more to count the money than to spend it well.

This letter does not turn the world the right way up. It only shows you that it is currently upside down.

11. One last number

One cent. Per day. Per person. €3.65 per year.

That is all that is asked. Not because it is enough, but because it is honest, and because it is completely yours to choose.

Sources:

- Calculation: one cent per day, multiplied by the days in a year, is €3.65.

12. The layer underneath

The differences are psychotic. Extreme is not too strong a word.

One day in an Irish prison costs more than ten days in an Irish classroom. A solicitor's day is worth more than two and a half cleaner's days, and a teacher's day is worth less than an accountant's. These are not small gaps. They are public, they are measured, and they were chosen.

Money is not the problem. The money exists. The state takes in more than one hundred and forty billion euro a year, spends more than one hundred and thirty billion, and still runs a surplus; its debt is about a third of everything the country produces. The loop turns. The problem is where the money goes.

The price is not the problem either. The price of a prisoner, a teacher, a child or a cleaner is not a natural law. These prices were decided. They can be decided differently.

What lies underneath is consent, choices, expectations, input.

We consent to these numbers, not because we voted for them, but because we never refused them. We make choices, or we let others make them for us. We carry expectations about what work is worth, who deserves what, what a child needs, and what a prisoner costs. And we either give input into the system, or we stay silent.

The numbers are not the problem. Our consent is the material. Our choices are the shape. Our expectations are the weight. Our input is the only thing that can change it.

With quiet hope, A stranger