

THE EVALUATION OF SOUTH AFRICA'S PAROLE SYSTEM

EVALUATIVE WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS REPORT

THE DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING, MONITORING AND
EVALUATION (DPME) AND THE DEPARTMENT OF
CORRECTIONAL SERVICES (DCS)

COMPILED BY: DPME EVALUATION UNIT
DATE: 20 NOVEMBER 2024



the dpme

Department:
Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iv
1.1 Introduction and Background.....	iv
1.2 key insights from the evaluation workshop	v
1.3 Workshop Recommendations	vii
1.4 Next Steps.....	viii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. OVERARCHING POLICY GOALS.....	2
3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY.....	4
4. EVALUATIVE WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS	6
4.1 Problem Statement	6
4.2 Current State of The Parole System	7
4.3 Operational framework of the Offender Rehabilitation Programme	8
4.4 Successes in the current parole system	8
4.5 Identified Challenges	9
4.6 Quantitative indicators of system performance	9
5. EXPERT PANEL PRESENTATIONS	12
5.1 Key insights	12
5.2 Challenges impacting the effectiveness of South Africa's parole system	14
5.3 Parole Best Practices	16
5.4 Characteristics of an ideal functioning Parole System	17
6. DISCUSSIONS.....	19
6.1 African-centred approach.....	19
6.2 Role of academics.....	20
6.3 Parole Board effectiveness.....	20
6.4 Medical parole.....	20
6.5 Foreign nationals on parole.....	21
6.6 Community corrections and overcrowding.....	21
6.7 Individualized approaches.....	21
6.8 Information gaps	21
6.9 Gang influence.....	22
6.10 Partnerships and Non-profit Organisations (NPOs)	22
7. CONCLUSION.....	22
7.1 CLOSING REMARKS.....	22

7.2 EMERGING THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS	25
7.3 NEXT STEPS OF THE EVALUATION	26
8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	27

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Summary of methodology	5
Figure 2: Characteristics of an ideal Parole System.....	17
Figure 3: Sentenced population	30
Figure 4: Social rehabilitation programmes	31
Figure 5: Parolee caseload and parolee without violation.....	32

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: National Prosecuting Authority court performance data.....	29
Table 2: Various ratios.....	29
Table 3: Correctional facilities detainees	30
Table 4: Overcrowding targets and actual performance	30
Table 5: Offenders that attended social rehabilitation programmes	31
Table 6: Parolees	32
Table 7: Probation	32

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

I.1 Introduction and Background

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), in collaboration with the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), is conducting an evaluation of South Africa's Parole System – to assess its design, efficiency and effectiveness in achieving its aims in line with Chapter VII of the Correctional Services Act (Act no. 111 of 1998, as amended¹).

The parole system is an integral part of the criminal justice system. It allows eligible offenders to serve the remainder of their sentence outside correctional facilities under the supervision of a DCS function called Community Corrections. The Correctional system aims to incarcerate, rehabilitate, and reintegrate offenders back into society. Rather than relying solely on punitive measures, it promotes social reintegration, reduces recidivism, and strengthens public safety. The parole system is designed to provide eligible offenders with a structured pathway for reintegration into society while maintaining public safety by, among other measures, reducing recidivism (i.e. the likelihood of reoffending).

The approach followed is of a Rapid Diagnostic Evaluation, planned for the period between November 2024 and March 2025. The methodology involves mixed methods, which include literature review and document analysis, evaluative workshops and case studies.

Overall, the evaluation seeks to examine the following Key Evaluative Questions:

- What constitutes an ideal parole system?
- How effectively does the current parole model align with the objectives of the Correctional Services Act?
- What are the systemic challenges in implementing the parole system?
- How well do pre-release and post-release programs support reintegration and reduce recidivism?
- What lessons can be drawn from international best practices to inform improvements?

¹ <https://tinyurl.com/3e7uj7jv>

To kick-off the evaluation process, the DPME and DCS jointly convened an evaluative workshop on 20 November 2024.

The Workshop facilitated an engagement of relevant role players in the sector, and provided a platform for researchers in the field to share insights based on available research – to help scrutinise the design, implementation and outcomes of the parole system.

About 211 stakeholders participated in the workshop, including policymakers, academics, NGO and community organisations.

The purpose of this report, therefore, is to capture the workshop proceedings with an intention to inform subsequent stages of the evaluation process. Workshop proceedings form part of preliminary findings that will later be consolidated into a final report that will contain insights from all stages of the evaluation process.

1.2 key insights from the evaluation workshop

In summary, the key insights generated from the abovementioned Evaluative Workshop are as follows:

What constitutes an ideal parole system?

An effective parole system reduces recidivism, enhances public safety, and supports community reintegration through restorative justice. Key elements include:

- Evidence-based decision-making: Utilization of risk assessments, structured frameworks (e.g., Decision-Making Matrix), and relapse probability reports.
- Comprehensive support: Access to stable housing, mental health services, employment, and social networks.
- Supervised reintegration: Continuous monitoring, behaviour incentives, and community-based services.
- Cultural alignment: African-centered approaches incorporating religious and regional best practices.
- Victim participation: Inclusion in parole deliberations to reinforce restorative justice principles.

Current state: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons

Successes:

- Community involvement: Greater transparency through public participation in parole boards.
- Restorative justice initiatives: Programs fostering offender accountability and victim reconciliation.
- Innovative tools: Use of the Parole Revocation Tool and Decision-Making Matrix to guide decisions.
- Medical parole monitoring: Improved oversight ensures compliance with health-related parole conditions.

Challenges:

- Resource constraints: Insufficient staffing, training, and infrastructure, especially in rural areas.
- Decision inconsistencies: Variability in parole outcomes, particularly for life sentences and medical parole.
- Overcrowding: Limits rehabilitation opportunities and strains system efficiency.
- Data limitations: Inadequate offender profiling and recidivism tracking hinder policy improvements.

Lessons:

- Standardized criteria and specialized training for parole boards enhance fairness.
- Tailored interventions address rural-urban disparities and gang-related risks.

Effectiveness of pre-release and post-release programs

- Pre-release programs: Overcrowding and limited resources delay vocational training and mental health support.
- Post-release programs: Housing, employment, and mental health service gaps weaken reintegration outcomes.
- Systemic barriers: Poor coordination between DCS, NGOs, and private sector reduces program effectiveness.

Enhancing parole effectiveness through evidence-based practices

- Adopt global best practices: Flexible sentencing (Norway/Sweden), electronic monitoring, and structured post-release programs (Germany/Canada).
- Data-driven policies: Strengthen recidivism tracking, offender profiling, and long-term program evaluations.

- Stronger partnerships: Collaboration with NGOs and businesses to improve job placement and housing initiatives.
- Specialized training: Equip parole boards with criminologists and psychologists to enhance risk assessments and decision consistency.

Additional considerations

- Gang affiliations: High recidivism rates among gang-linked offenders require targeted rehabilitation strategies.
- Foreign nationals: Inefficient deportation processes overburden correctional facilities; enhanced Home Affairs coordination is needed.
- Medical parole: Public distrust persists; stricter eligibility criteria and post-release health monitoring are necessary.
- Academic partnerships: Universities can bridge policy gaps through research, training, and program development.
- Public awareness: Campaigns and success stories can help counter stigma and build confidence in the parole system.

1.3 Workshop Recommendations

1.3.1 Policy and decision-making reforms:

- Shift from process-oriented to results-driven decision-making frameworks for parole boards. "Process-oriented decision making" emphasizes the steps taken to reach the result, focusing on following a structured method and ensuring quality throughout the process, even if the final outcome is not guaranteed. Meanwhile, "Result-driven decision making" focuses solely on achieving the desired outcome, prioritizing the final result and measuring success based on that outcome.
- Incorporate criminologists and psychologists to enhance behavioural evaluation and evidence-based recommendations.
- Standardise criteria for medical parole and life sentence decisions to ensure fairness and transparency.

1.3.2 Resource allocation:

- Augment funding for rehabilitation programs
- Put more emphasis on alternative sentencing measures to address overcrowding.

- Invest in rural infrastructure and technology, including electronic monitoring systems, to enhance oversight and accountability.

1.3.3 Rehabilitation and Reintegration:

- Strengthen individualised rehabilitation programs that are tailored to offenders' specific needs, including vocational training and mental health support.
- Develop targeted interventions for gang-affiliated offenders to disrupt criminal networks and foster reintegration.
- Collaborate with NGOs, community organizations, and the private sector to expand post-release support systems.

1.3.4 Public engagement and education:

- Launch public awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote an understanding of parole's rehabilitative objectives within society
- Showcase reintegration success stories to build societal trust and confidence in the parole system.

1.3.5 Culturally relevant practices:

- Adopt culturally sensitive rehabilitation approaches aligned with South Africa's diverse societal contexts.
- Leverage practices from neighbouring countries to enhance policy relevance and adaptability.

1.3.6 Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation:

- Establish comprehensive systems to track recidivism trends and evaluate rehabilitation program outcomes.
- Conduct regular evaluations to align interventions with restorative justice principles and public safety goals.

1.4 Next Steps

The evaluative workshop was meant to kick-off the project. The following activities are planned for the remaining period up to March 2025:

- **Collection of Case Studies Data** from selected DCS regions, namely; Kgosi Mampuru, GP; Qalakabusha, KZN; Baberton, MP; and St Albans, in the EC.

- Second **Evaluative Workshop** in which case study findings will be presented and the theory of change for the parole system examined;
- Production of a Report of Rapid Diagnostic Evaluation of the Parole System which will also contain refined set of findings and conclusions;
- **Dissemination of findings and recommendations to relevant authorities**, including the National Commissioner of Correctional Services, the Director General of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME), the relevant clusters, i.e. Justice, Crime prevention and Security (JCPS) and the Social Protection and Community Human Development (SPCHD), the Minister of Correctional Service and the Minister in the Presidency responsible for DPME; and briefing of Cabinet and relevant Parliamentary committees; and
- Finally, DCS will **develop an Improvement Plan** to outline how evaluation recommendations will be implemented and monitored.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) co-hosted an evaluative workshop on 20 November 2024. The workshop marked the commencement of a Rapid Evaluation of South Africa's parole system, planned to be completed by the end of March 2025. The objective of this evaluation is to assess the system's design, efficiency, and effectiveness in achieving its intended aims, in terms of Chapter VI and VII of the Correctional Services Act. Furthermore, the evaluation aims to identify gaps and recommend necessary reforms to enhance the impact of the parole system.

A total of 211 participants attended the workshop via the Microsoft Teams online platform, representing various sectors across the country. Attendees included government officials, academics, researchers and representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The Director-General of DPME was present, while the National Commissioner of DCS was represented in absentia by the Chief Deputy Commissioner (CDC): Strategic Management, both of whom delivered the opening address. In addition, relevant research groups from Higher Education Institutions, namely the Universities of South Africa (UNISA), the Western Cape (UWC), the Free State (UFS), Cape Town (UCT), and Fort Hare (UFH), participated and presented valuable insights drawing from their existing research.

The workshop was co-facilitated by the Deputy Director-General (DDG) of DPME responsible for Evaluations and the Chief Deputy Commissioner (CDC): Incarceration and Corrections from DCS. They ensured an engaging and well-structured discussion among all participants. At the outset, the facilitators highlighted three key strands essential to understanding the purpose of the workshop:

- Need for Evaluations – highlighting that evaluations must help address both new and existing challenges, identify areas of excellence, and areas of poor performance in order to make necessary improvements.
- Policy Relevance – highlighting that policies and programs must remain relevant and effective to meet their objectives and address public concerns.
- Research-Policy Nexus – emphasising the importance of drawing from existing research programmes to inform policy discourse, but not only in the areas of corrections and parole but also on broader socio-economic factors influencing crime and behaviour of offenders,

This report aims to document the workshop proceedings, which serve as preliminary findings to inform the subsequent stages of the evaluation process. The insights gathered from this workshop, will later be consolidated into a final report incorporating findings from all stages of the evaluation, including literature review, case studies and the interrogation of the Theory of Change.

2. OVERARCHING POLICY GOALS

The South African parole system is governed by the Correctional Services Act of 1998. Under Chapter VI and VII, the Act allows eligible offenders to serve the remainder of their sentence outside correctional facilities under the supervision of a DCS function called Community Corrections. The Correctional system aims to incarcerate, rehabilitate and reintegrate offenders back into society. Instead of relying solely on punitive measures, it promotes social reintegration, reducing recidivism and strengthening public safety. Community Corrections provides a cost-effective alternative to incarceration by supervising parolees, probationers, and awaiting-trial persons (ATPs). It ensures compliance with parole or probation conditions and supports offenders in leading crime-free lives. A critical aspect of this framework is the education and orientation of offenders on their release conditions. They receive manuals and guidance to reinforce compliance with legal requirements, aiding their successful reintegration into society. By engaging the community in the reintegration process, the parole system fosters social responsibility among offenders and enhances public safety. This approach is meant to benefit both the offenders and the communities they return to, ensuring a more sustainable criminal justice system.

The policy goals for the parole system are articulated in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and the 2019-2024 Medium Term Strategic Framework (2019-2024 MTSF) and the Strategic Plan of the DCS.

The NDP envisions a South Africa where communities are safe, and citizens enjoy crime-free lives. Realizing this vision requires a cohesive justice system in which the police, judiciary, and correctional services collaborate effectively to ensure efficient crime detection, prosecution, incarceration and rehabilitation. The NDP aspirations are programmes into five yearly plans of Government and then the Strategic Plans and Annual Plans of relevant institutions.

The 2019–2024 MTSF addresses the parole system challenges under Priority 6: Safer Communities,

highlighting its critical intersections with both the criminal justice system value chain and broader societal dynamics. It emphasizes the direct link between safety and security, socio-economic development and equality. It asserts that a secure environment is essential for fostering economic growth, transformation, and addressing the triple challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment. Public trust is often undermined by perceptions of injustice, including cases where criminals evade the law, arrests fail to result in successful prosecutions, or prisoners escape from custody. Priority 6 (Safer Communities) of the 2019–2024 MTSF targeted the following outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Improvement in Corruption Perception Index Rating
- Outcome 2: Reduced Organised Crime
- Outcome 3: Increased feeling of safety in Communities
- Outcome 4: Secured Cyber Space
- Outcome 5: Effectively defended, protected, safeguarded and secured communities
- Outcome 6: Increase in number of victims participating in Restorative Justice Programme
- Outcome 7: Levels of marginalisation, stigmatisation and discrimination and violence against women, girls and persons with disabilities.

To ensure the successful delivery of these outcomes, the JCPS Cluster adopted the 7-Point Plan, which outlines key actions to create an integrated and modernised criminal justice system. This plan ensures that all relevant departments within the justice value chain operate in cooperation to enhance efficiency, ultimately strengthening public confidence and trust in these institutions. The 7-Point Plan includes the following elements:

1. Alignment – through a single vision and mission for the Criminal Justice System (CJS), with aligned objectives, plans, priorities and performance measurement targets.
2. Enhanced coordination of management structures – Strengthening communication and accountability across all levels of the justice system, with end-to-end coordination through national and provincial JCPS structures.
3. Targeted interventions to improve court performance – Implementing short- and medium-term measures to address case backlogs, improve judicial efficiency and enhance overall court performance.
4. Prioritised of component parts needing critical intervention – forensic capacity, investigative capabilities, prosecution services, legal aid and the management of remand detainees.
5. Integrated CJS information system – Establishing a seamless, national system for better information sharing and operational efficiency.

6. Modernisation of the Criminal Justice System – Implementing technology-driven solutions to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.
7. Community partnerships – Strengthening collaboration with Community Policing Forums (CPFs) and Community Safety Forums (CSFs) to enhance public participation in crime prevention.

All the above contribute towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG): Goal 16: Peace, justice and strong institutions.

3. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the evaluation of the Parole System is to assess the design, effectiveness, and efficiency of the parole system as outlined the Correctional Services Act of 1998. It aims to diagnose the implementation gaps in the current parole system in order to recommend actionable reforms.

The approach followed is of a Rapid Diagnostic Evaluation. This means that a limited time period is allocated for this evaluation (November 2024 and March 2025). The evaluation seeks to diagnose whether the current parole system meets its goals and to understand how well it functions compared to the intended objectives.

Key Evaluative Questions include the following:

- What are the characteristics of an ideal parole system?
- What are the overall challenges affecting the current parole system?
- What insights are emerging from local and international literature on parole systems that could be used to identify best practices and principles of a well-functioning parole system?
- Whether the DCS parole system (including pre-release and post-release programs) implemented as designed?
- What are the challenges in applying the risk-predicting variables used to determine the likelihood of a parolee reoffending?
- Whether the current DCS parole model is appropriate and effective in achieving the objectives of the correctional system in South Africa, as defined by the Act?

To assess the parole system, the evaluation adopted the following mixed methods:

- o **Literature Review and document analysis:** The importance of conducting a comprehensive literature review to identify best practices and principles for the current parole system. Key documents include the NDP; the MTSF 2019-2024; the draft Medium Term Development Plan 2024-2029; the DCS Strategic Plan 2020-2025; the 2024 Development Indicators Report; the 2023 South Africa SDG Country Report; and the 2024 South Africa Voluntary National Review on the SDGs.
- o **Evaluative Workshops:** To engage key actors, including government agencies, NGOs, and research institutions in order to run an inclusive process, of diagnosing key challenges and exploring strategies for improvement.
- o **Case Study Analysis:** The use of case study analysis to document successful and unsuccessful reintegration experiences, providing evidence-based solutions for system improvements.

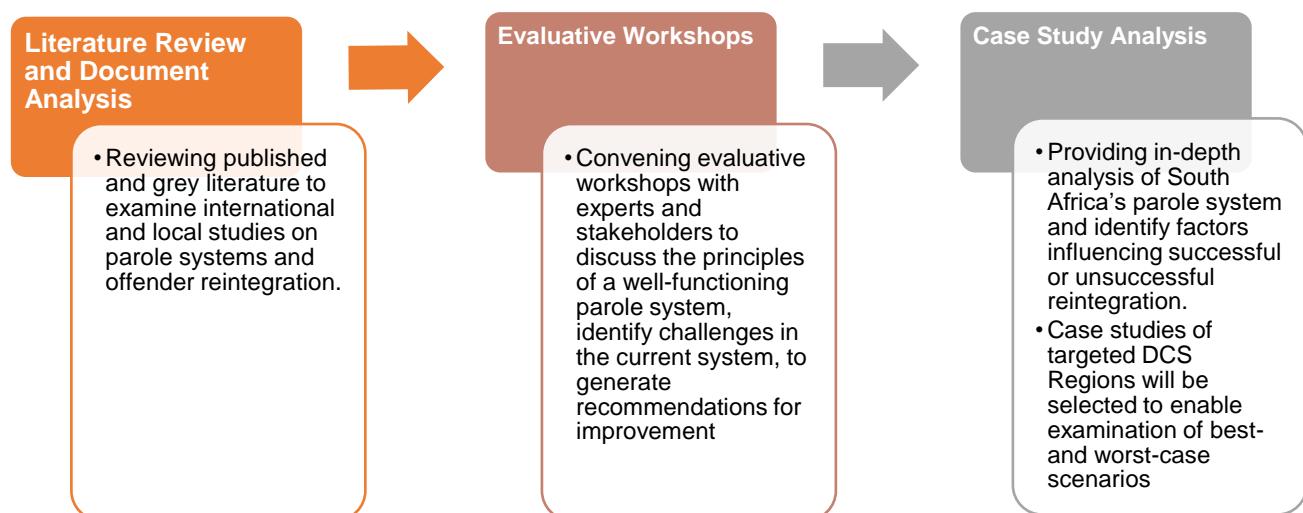


Figure 1: Summary of methodology

Key issues for consideration in the evaluation process included time sensitivity, emphasizing the urgency of the project and the need for decisive action to avoid delays that could weaken the impact of proposed interventions. A holistic approach was highlighted, recognizing the multifaceted nature of parole and the need to align internal DCS dynamics with broader societal contexts. The importance of innovation and collaboration was stressed, advocating for cross-sectoral cooperation to address systemic challenges. The evaluation also covered internal processes, including the Offender

Rehabilitation Path (ORP), and the rehabilitation process, which prepares offenders for reintegration. Finally, that this evaluation is conducted as the government is phasing out the 2019-2024 MTSF (of the 6th Administration) while still finalising a new five-year plan, now named the Medium-Term Development Plan (2024-2029 MTDP).

4. EVALUATIVE WORKSHOP PROCEEDINGS

4.1 Problem Statement

The problem statement motivating the evaluation is drawn from the remarks by the National Commissioner of the DCS and the Director General of DPME, which they shared during a preparatory Steering Committee meeting on 25th October 2024 and when delivering opening remarks at the workshop:

According to DG: DPME, “South Africa’s parole system is fraught with significant challenges, drawing substantial public scrutiny and media attention. Chief among these is the perception that the correctional system fails to fulfil its dual objectives of rehabilitating offenders and ensuring their successful reintegration into society. Public trust has been eroded by concerns that the parole process undermines judicial sentences and contributes to high reoffending rates. These challenges are compounded by a lack of transparency, inconsistent outcomes, and a perceived disconnect between the stated goals of the parole system and its practical implementation. To address these issues, there is a pressing need to restore public trust and enhance public safety, ensuring the parole system operates effectively to reduce recidivism and support societal reintegration”.

Operational inefficiencies and resource constraints within the DCS exacerbate these challenges. The system struggles to deliver effective rehabilitation programmes and post-parole support, due to limited coordination among critical stakeholders, including social workers, psychologists, community members, and other government agencies. This fragmentation diminishes the overall effectiveness of the system, highlighting the necessity to strengthen alignment between rehabilitation and reintegration processes, and implementation of a more cohesive approach through collaborative governance that aligns with broader societal and public safety objectives. Furthermore, efforts to properly evaluate and reform the parole system have been hindered by budget reallocations and shifting priorities within government frameworks. Although initially prioritised under the National

Evaluation Plan (2020–2025)/ 6th Administration, the evaluation process has been scaled down to accommodate resource constraints, relying on existing research and limited case studies. This has impeded the ability to diagnose systemic issues fully and implement meaningful reforms. A more comprehensive approach to conduct systematic evaluations and addressing resource and capacity constraints is required to detect inefficiencies and develop sustainable solutions.

Both the DG: DPME and the National Commissioner: DCS assert that the parole system also operates within a broader socio-economic context characterised by high crime rates, unemployment, and social instability. These challenges create an environment that makes reintegration for parolees more difficult, contributing to high rates of recidivism. Mitigating systemic and societal challenges, alongside improving internal operations, is critical to creating an environment conducive to successful reintegration. Moreover, limited engagement of key stakeholders, including the Justice, Crime Prevention, and Security (JCPS) cluster departments, non-governmental organisations, and the public, risks misalignment between parole policies and broader governmental strategies. Integrating public engagement and awareness in the reform process is essential to ensure inclusivity and effectiveness while fostering societal support for the system's objectives.

Addressing these challenges demands a holistic and evidence-based approach to reforming the parole system. Without a commitment to address these policy goals- enhancing public safety, strengthening rehabilitation and reintegration, mitigating systemic and societal challenges, integrating public engagement and awareness and promoting collaboration, the system will continue to face criticism (challenges), thus undermining its ability to fulfil its policy objectives and intended societal impact.

4.2 Current State of The Parole System

To reflect the performance of the parole system, this section draws from the DCS presentation delivered at the workshop and document analysis of the 2024 Development Indicators Report, the 2023 South Africa SDG Country Report, and the 2024 South Africa Voluntary National Review on the SDGs.

Firstly, this section will address the operational framework of the Offender Rehabilitation Path presented by the DCS at the workshop. This will be followed by analysis of selected quantitative indicators that apply to the Correctional System and its operational environment.

4.3 Operational framework of the Offender Rehabilitation Programme

This section focuses on the operational framework of the Offender Rehabilitation Path (ORP), and the effectiveness of decision-making mechanisms. The ORP is a structured Rehabilitation Path designed to support offenders in their reintegration journey. It includes comprehensive assessments, classification of offenders, and the development of individualized sentence plans tailored to address specific rehabilitative needs. The multi-tiered decision-making process for parole involves the Case Management Committee, the Correctional Supervision and Parole Board (CSPB), and ministerial oversight for life sentences. This structured process aims to balance offender rehabilitation with public safety considerations. In addition, the ORP provides therapeutic and non-therapeutic programs.

4.4 Successes in the current parole system

Despite listed challenges in the parole system, there are several significant achievements, such as:

- The active involvement of community members in parole boards, which enhances transparency and inclusivity.
- The successful implementation of restorative justice programmes, which foster accountability and reconciliation between offenders and victims.
- Development of procedures to facilitate and promote the involvement of victims in Correctional Supervision and Parole Boards (CSPB) meetings when an offender is considered for possible placement on parole.
- A review of the Parole System: addressing placement and release of foreign nationals; measures to improve decision making on placement as well as cancellation of placement.
- The implementation and development of the following tools as quick wins to address identified shortcomings in the parole consideration process were highlighted:
 - A Relapse and Risk Probability Report used as a guide for decision makers to determine possible areas regarding relapse and risks posed to the community should an offender be released on parole.
 - A Decision-Making Matrix: Utilised by the CMCs and Parole Boards to guide the process of arriving at a decision and will at the same time create the record of motivation for the decision. The utilization of the matrix ensures that all decision makers take the same factors into consideration to increase consistency of decisions.
 - A Parole Revocation Tool: Will be used by the Supervision Committee and Parole

- Board in ensuring that parole is not revoked without considering all relevant factors, including alternative interventions.
- Restorative Justice Programme awareness programme was also introduced as a compulsory programme to all offenders incarcerated for more than 24 months.

4.5 Identified Challenges

Key systemic challenges that hinder the effectiveness of the parole system, including:

- High vacancy rates and insufficient staffing levels. Reported lack of dedicated Case Assessment Officials structures and fully-fledged Case Management Committee structures. Absence of Criminologists to conduct the Risk Assessment and submit reports to the Correctional and Supervision Parole Board/ National Council for Correctional Services and the portfolio Minister hampers efficiency.
- Overcrowding in correctional facilities, which strains resources and delays the implementation of rehabilitation programmes.
- Limited capacity to address the growing needs of offenders for targeted support. Post establishment of professional structures such as social workers and psychologists does not complement offender population, which causes delays in consideration of offenders for possible placement on parole.
- Lack of integrated systems. Difficulty with victim tracing for participation in Victim-Offender Dialogue, Victim-Offender Mediation and parole process due to absence of an integrated systems within JCPS cluster.

4.6 Quantitative indicators of system performance

The parole system's effectiveness is linked to broader criminal justice system trends. A selected set of quantitative indicators is used in the following paragraphs to reflect on the state of performance, namely conviction rates; prisoner population and overcrowding rates; access and uptake of available rehabilitation programmes; offend in parole and probation processes.

Conviction rates

South Africa's conviction rate has shown a slight recovery, increasing from 92.1% in 2021/22 to 93.5% in 2023/24, though still below peak levels of previous years. The number of convictions for verdict cases improved by 8.9%, rising from 130,064 in 2020/21 to 170,750 in 2023/24. However, Alternative Dispute Resolution Mechanisms (ADRM) cases have declined since 2014/15, reaching 124,106 in 2023/24, indicating reduced reliance on non-trial resolutions.

New cases entering the court system have stabilized following a significant drop during the pandemic years, with 609,226 cases in 2023/24, marking a 2.3% year-on-year increase. Finalized cases with a verdict rose by 8.2%, reflecting improved court throughput. However, the backlog of unresolved cases continues to grow, reaching 210,438 in 2023/24, up from 193,838 in 2021/22. Despite a consistent conviction rate above 90%, the increasing caseload challenges the system's efficiency and its deterrence capacity for crime.

Prisoner population and overcrowding in correctional facilities

The analysis of overcrowding trends in South Africa's correctional facilities from 2012/13 to 2023/24 reveals the complexities involved.

Overcrowding has multiple and cumulative causes, largely external to the correctional system itself. It therefore cannot be addressed only at the level of Correctional Services but requires a holistic and coordinated response from a broad range of authorities, including at the policy level and in society at large. The DCS is at the front end of the criminal justice system through the detention of remand detainees and tail end through the detention of sentenced offenders and state patients. The latter are detained in DCS while waiting for beds in designated mental health establishments. The DCS does not have control over the criminal justice system processes that lead to a decision in the form of a court order to detain a person in its facilities, the DCS cannot refuse to admit any person referred by the court regardless of its occupancy level. Refusal is equivalent to breaching section 165(5) of the Constitution of South Africa which provides that an order or decision issued by a court binds all persons to whom and organs of state to which it applies.

Overcrowding levels were contained below the set targets from the 2018/19 to 2020/21 financial years as a result of the 2019 Special Remission and 2020 COVID-19 Special Parole Dispensation while in the two subsequent financial years, i.e. 2021/22 and 2022/23, the overcrowding level surpassed set overcrowding targets. The rapid escalation in overcrowding levels during 2022/2023, prompted the Department to review its overcrowding target for the 2023/24 financial year from 32% to 50%. The inmate population increased by 13 833 from 143 223 to 157 056 inmates during the 2022/23 financial year, i.e. an increase of 9.7%.

The inmate population of 156 600 as at 31 March 2024 was accommodated within the approved bedspace capacity of 105 474 resulting in an excess of 51 126 inmates resulting in an overcrowding level of 48%.

As at 31 December 2024, there were 102 784 sentenced offenders, 63 876 remand detainees and 264 state patients incarcerated in correctional facilities.

The total number of inmates as at 31 December 2024 was 166 924 against the approved bedspace of 107 346 which calculated into an overcrowding level of 56%.

On 31 December 2024, the number of available bedspaces resulted in an excess of 59 578 inmates.

The inmate population trend from 2023/24 to 2024/25 reflects an overall increase of 10 324 inmates from 156 600 to 166 924 reflecting an approximate increase of 7%.

The creation of additional bedspaces is a long-term project which cannot provide immediate relief to the increasing rate of overcrowding, hence, the DCS is unable to gain and/or maintain synergy as it cannot create bed spaces equivalent to the rate of admission of inmates.

The DCS continues to implement direct and indirect measures contained in the Overcrowding Reduction Strategy to manage the situation.

Overcrowding levels in correctional facilities have also fluctuated, reflecting both the DCS capacity and external pressures influencing the number of inmates. From 2012/13 to 2018/19, overcrowding remained largely below target levels, demonstrating effective inmate population management. Special measures such as the Special Remission in 2019 and the COVID-19 Parole Dispensation in 2020 further reduced overcrowding rates. However, the 2021/22–2023/24 period saw a sharp rise in overcrowding, exceeding set targets. In 2022/23, overcrowding was 46% against a target of 32%, indicating an increasing strain on correctional facilities.

The decline in available bed space from 120,567 in 2019/20 to 105,474 by 2023/24 has exacerbated overcrowding. Although the 2023/24 overcrowding target was adjusted to 50%, the actual rate stood at 48%, still highlighting a critical challenge. Sustainable solutions such as infrastructure expansion, non-custodial sentencing alternatives, and sentencing policy reforms are necessary to address overcrowding and improve correctional facility operations.

Rehabilitation of offenders

The primary aim in this area is to rehabilitate offenders and transform them into law-abiding citizens through correctional and development programs. Three categories of such interventions are identified: Correctional Programmes - These provide needs-based interventions that target behaviors associated with offenses committed; Development Programmes - These include educational, vocational, and agricultural training; and Psychological, Social Work, and Spiritual Care Services -

These focus on improving the emotional, mental, and spiritual well-being of offenders. Between 2022/23 and 2023/24, the number of sentenced offenders declined by 4.1% from 101,186 to 97,026. Conversely, the unsentenced inmate population increased by 3,704 year-on-year. The number of offenders benefiting from correctional and development programs slightly increased by 119 during the same period. However, access to psychological services, long skills, short skills and TVET developmental programs, and spiritual care declined significantly, with reductions of 2,953, 1,902, and 4,924 beneficiaries, respectively. Social worker programs saw an increase of 1,397 beneficiaries, demonstrating a shift in rehabilitative service utilization.

Parole and probation

The parole system enables offenders to turn their lives around by allowing them to live in the community under correctional supervision rather than remaining incarcerated. The number of people on parole increased between 2013 and 2019 due to the expansion of the system.

Statistical trends from 2013/14 to 2023/24 indicate significant changes in offender supervision under Community Corrections. Between 2013/14 and 2018/19, the number of parolees increased from 49,282 to 55,030. However, a decline followed, with parolee numbers dropping to 46,686 in 2023/24. This reflects the implementation of the Volume 5 Procedure Manual, which strengthened compliance monitoring and parole enforcement.

The number of probationers also decreased from 16,744 in 2013/14 to 15,502 in 2018/19, largely due to operational challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite these fluctuations, Community Corrections remains a vital element of the South African criminal justice system.

5. EXPERT PANEL PRESENTATIONS

The panel discussions provided key insights, identified systemic challenges and practical recommendations, best practices, rehabilitation approaches, and possible actionable reforms.

5.1 Key insights

Several key insights in the parole discussion include amongst others the following:

- **Crime trends:** Identified significant trends in crime statistics, noting:
 - A decline in prosecutions and convictions, indicating potential inefficiencies or systemic challenges within the criminal justice process.
 - Downward trend in crime (murder) during Covid-19 time.

- A sharp increase in murders since 2020, raising alarms about public safety and the effectiveness of existing interventions.
 - Crime trends through-put: Arrests high-decision dockets.
 - Crime trends-sentenced population- projected sentenced population e.g. 30 years-1-4%
- **Information gaps:** The urgent need for comprehensive, accurate, and disaggregated data on key metrics, including:
 - Admissions and releases of offenders.
 - Detailed inmate profiles to identify risk factors and tailor interventions.
 - Trends in recidivism to inform policy adjustments and resource allocation.
- **Community corrections:** Emphasis on the transformative potential of community corrections in mitigating reoffending, advocating for:
 - Support services: Addressing housing, mental health, and substance abuse needs for parolees.
 - Employment opportunities: Facilitating access to sustainable livelihoods as a cornerstone of successful reintegration.
 - Basic needs fulfilment: Ensuring parolees' immediate needs are met to prevent a return to criminal activity.
- **Expectations management:** The importance of cautioning against overestimating the impact of the criminal justice system alone in reducing crime, highlighting instead, a broader societal approach should be advocated, addressing root causes such as inequality, unemployment, and social instability in communities.
- **Inconsistencies in parole board decision-making:** pointing out inconsistencies in parole board decisions, which undermine public trust. Training and capacitation of board members are essential to ensure fairness and uniform application of parole policies.
- **Post-Release Programs:** The importance of robust post-release programs was emphasized, including:
 - Allocating budgets for ongoing support.
 - Conducting annual longitudinal studies to evaluate program effectiveness.
 - Collaborating with NGOs and community stakeholders to develop tailored reintegration initiatives.
- **Employment support for Parolees:** Advocating for revision of policies, such as expungement of criminal records, to facilitate employment opportunities for parolees. Partnerships with businesses and community organizations can be instrumental in

integrating parolees into the workforce.

- **Pre - and Post-Release Programmes** reliant on structured programmes to support successful reintegration and reduce recidivism not effective due to systemic issues, including:
 - Limited resources allocated to rehabilitation efforts.
 - Overcrowding in correctional facilities, which hampers effective program delivery.
 - Inadequate evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact of current practices.
 - Public perception and stigma against parolees, which hinders their reintegration into communities.
- **Challenges in rural areas:** Findings from a shared recent study on rural South Africa, illustrates unique challenges related to:
 - Lack of access to support services.
 - Weak community infrastructure to facilitate reintegration.
 - Higher risk of recidivism due to economic and social barriers.
- **Life sentencing:** Emphasizing the increasing prevalence of life sentences, presenting stark statistics:
 - Life sentences increased from 520 in 1994 to 17,000 in 2021.
 - In 2020, of the 4,494 life-sentenced inmates eligible for parole, only 36 were granted parole. This is a key area requiring reform, with significant implications for resource allocation and offender rehabilitation potential.

5.2 Challenges impacting the effectiveness of South Africa's parole system

Amongst many, some of the key challenges hindering the effectiveness of the parole system include:

Community corrections and reintegration: Community corrections emerged as a key element for reducing recidivism. Insights highlighted the need for comprehensive support services, including housing, mental health care, and employment opportunities for parolees. The importance of addressing systemic information gaps—such as detailed offender profiles and recidivism trends—was emphasized as a prerequisite for tailoring effective interventions. A broader societal approach to addressing inequality, unemployment, and social instability was recommended alongside criminal justice efforts.

Evidence-based approaches: Evidence-based methods were identified as critical to improving rehabilitation outcomes and enhancing parole decision-making processes. Suggestions included leveraging electronic monitoring systems for better oversight, engaging victims in restorative processes early, and ensuring consistency in parole board decisions. Robust post-release support systems, including counselling and job placement programs, were deemed essential for long-term reintegration success. Also critical was alignment of practices with policy frameworks such as the White Paper on Corrections.

Addressing rural and systemic barriers: Unique challenges in rural areas were noted, such as inadequate community infrastructure and limited access to support services. Systemic issues like overcrowding in correctional facilities further hampered rehabilitation efforts. Proposals included increasing funding for both urban and rural rehabilitation initiatives and tailoring interventions to the distinct needs of rural communities.

Life sentencing and medical parole: Concerns were raised about the increasing prevalence of life sentences and the inconsistent application of medical parole. Participants stressed the need for clearer, standardized criteria for decision-making processes and mechanisms to monitor parolees post-release. Transparent practices were seen as essential for rebuilding public trust and ensuring accountability.

High vacancy rates: High vacancy rates in critical parole board positions and correctional centres highlighted as a major impediment. These shortages undermine the parole board's capacity to thoroughly evaluate and recommend parole decisions.

- **Insufficient Staff, Resources and training:** Although training is taking place, more specialised training of personnel was emphasized, including criminologists and professionals, which limits the delivery of essential rehabilitation programmes and reduces the system's overall efficacy. A general shortage of staff to deal with overcrowded facilities.
- **Need for Specialized Training:** The urgent need for targeted training programs for parole board members. This would enhance their understanding of offender behaviour and enable evidence-based decision-making.

Ineffectiveness of the parole boards: Inability of parole board members to effectively evaluate and recommend release of inmates on parole. Board members have shown difficulty in evaluating inmates' readiness for reintegration into society.

5.3 Parole Best Practices

Many international best practices in parole systems emphasize a focus on rehabilitation and restorative justice, enabling more effective reintegration of offenders into society. Countries such as Norway and Sweden prioritize flexible sentencing options, comprehensive support programs, and community involvement, which contribute to lower recidivism rates and successful reintegration. Additionally, nations like Germany and Canada utilize advanced risk assessment tools and provide extensive resources for housing, education, and mental health support for parolees.

In contrast, South Africa's parole system, governed by the Correctional Services Act, focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration, employing structured risk assessments for parole eligibility. While there are initiatives aimed at offering support services for parolees, such as drug rehabilitation and job training, challenges, however, do persist due to community resistance to allow reintegration and due to limited resources (such as funds, capacity, and pre and post-release rehabilitation programs) by the government. By learning from international practices, South Africa could enhance its parole system by improving support services, fostering community engagement, and utilizing more effective assessment tools, ultimately leading to better outcomes for offenders re-entering society.

The discussions highlighted several best practices for addressing systemic challenges and enhancing the effectiveness of the parole system. These included implementing structured pre- and post-release programs, which have demonstrated success in fostering reintegration and reducing recidivism. Investments in targeted rehabilitation initiatives, such as vocational training, counselling, and mental health support, were identified as critical for addressing inmates' individual needs. The use of electronic monitoring systems was recognized as a valuable tool for tracking parolees and mitigating risks, while fostering partnerships with NGOs, community stakeholders, and private organizations was emphasized to expand support networks. Additionally, adopting a culturally relevant approach that aligns rehabilitation strategies with South Africa's diverse societal contexts emerged as a key practice, ensuring interventions resonate with offenders and their communities. These practices collectively underscore the importance of aligning policy and operational efforts with evidence-based, tailored, and collaborative solutions.

5.4 Characteristics of an ideal functioning Parole System

An Ideal Parole Systems should aim to:

- Reduce recidivism
- Enhance public safety
- Foster community reintegration
- Promote restorative justice and support offender rehabilitation (Visher et al, 2023; Taxman et al; 2023; Duke and Carke; 2023)

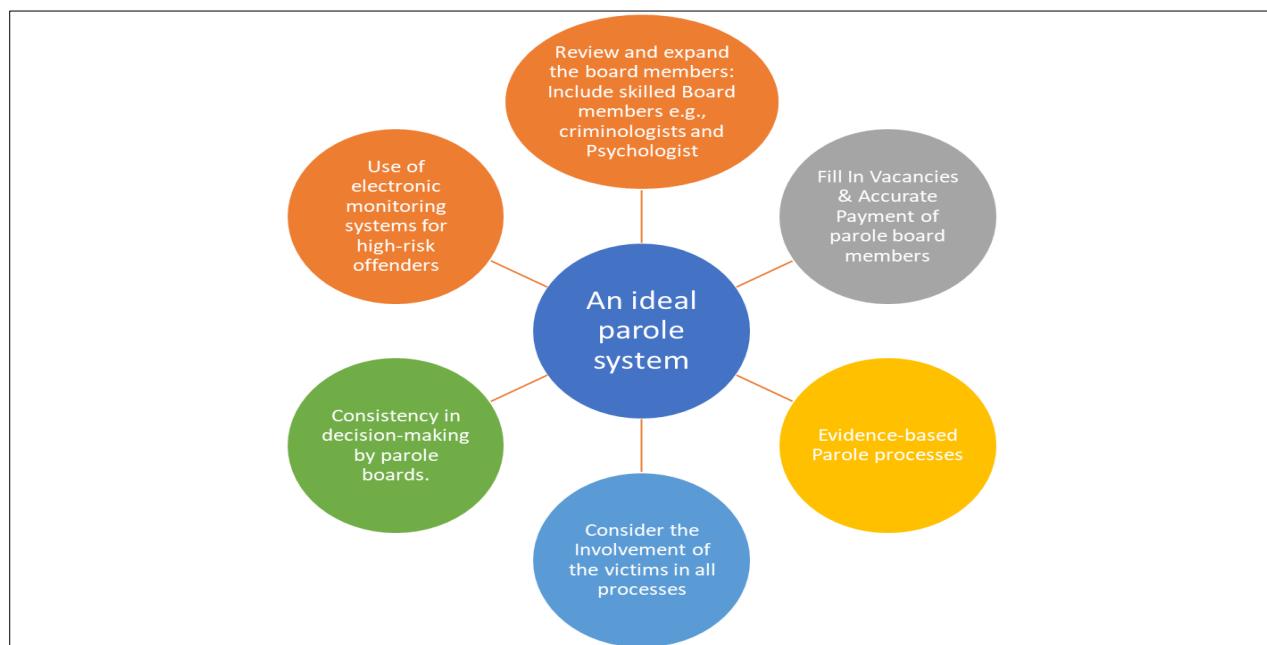


Figure 2: Characteristics of an ideal Parole System

Source: Prof E. Sibanyoni (20 November 2024)

Additionally, the Ideal Parole Systems should comprise the following characteristics:

- The parolees must be assured of honourable employment and favourable surroundings at the time of their release.
- Favourable surroundings mean to have supportive family and social networks, access to mental health, substance abuse treatment, stable housing and favourable economic conditions
- Evidence-based programmes (EBPs) to reduce recidivism: these are programs that use research to reduce recidivism. These programs are effective when they address criminal thinking, target criminogenic needs, and promote active participation. The EBPs – Use of actuarial risk assessments is a method used to predict the likelihood of an individual

committing a future crime or engaging in harmful behaviour. It involves using statistical model and data analysis to identify risk factors associated with recidivism.

- On-going supervision and support.
- Incentives for positive behaviour.
- Community based services.
- Evaluation and continuous improvement.
- DCS and parole boards must collaborate to identify risk-reduction requirements for parole.
- Parole boards must implement guidelines that account for factors that demonstrate an inmate's readiness for release, including the risk of reoffending and criminogenic needs.

The discussions collectively emphasized:

- **Enhanced decision-making processes:** Transitioning to transparent, standardized, and results-driven approaches.
- **Resource allocation:** Prioritizing investments in rehabilitation programmes, community corrections infrastructure, and technology for oversight e.g. Electronic tracking systems.
- **Collaboration:** Fostering stronger partnerships across sectors to support holistic reintegration strategies. Henceforth, collaboration between government, NGOs, and communities is key.
- **Cultural relevance:** Adapting rehabilitation and parole practices to reflect diverse cultural and societal contexts. Addressing socio-economic and institutional barriers is critical to achieving safer communities.
- **Positive reinforcement and incentivisation:** The parolees are trained to facilitate rehabilitation programmes as witnesses that the programmes are effective.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Implementing data-driven mechanisms to target high-risk areas. Assessing recidivism trends and evaluate program outcomes continuously. This involve using data from crime statistics, demographics, environmental factors, and historical incident reports to identify trends and pinpoint geographic locations with a higher probability of incidents occurring,
- **Victim-centric approach:** Implementing victim-centred approach that prioritises the needs and the rights of the victims and survivors of crimes by allowing them to be part of the reintegration processes.
- **Establishing public confidence in the Parole System:**
 - Keeping courts out of the correctional centers' decision making processes. Limiting judicial overreach in parole decisions by recognizing the DCS's specialized knowledge

- of offender rehabilitation and risk assessment.
- Provide Criminal Justice System (CJS) support for the DCS Parole Board: South African Police Services and the Department of Justice.
- Establish strong community partnerships with NGO's, civil society.
- Research on parolees and re-offending/ recidivism. (Understanding the experiences prior to and during imprisonment).
- The quality and effectiveness of support post-release
- What are the basic needs to negotiate the risks?
- Accommodation, employment, substance abuse and addiction, criminogenic networks and support.
- **Legislation 2008:** Proposing amendment to the Correctional Service Act.
- **Uprooting corruption:** Integrity, transparency and accountability.
- **Community involvement in Parole Boards:** Elements of parolees involved in reoffending, raising concerns about the effectiveness of community involvement in parole decision-making and post-release supervision.
- **Halfway Houses:** Questioning the sufficiency of halfway houses, essential for parolees with no safe or supportive place to return to post-release.

6. DISCUSSIONS

The discussion session provided a platform for stakeholders to voice critical insights, identify systemic gaps, and propose actionable recommendations for strengthening the parole system. Key themes included cultural relevance, academic involvement, parole board efficacy, community safety, and strategies for addressing gang influence and public perceptions.

6.1 African-centred approach

It was emphasized that the potential of implementing an African-centred framework to address recidivism effectively:

- Neighbouring countries: Insights from neighbouring African countries were highlighted as invaluable in identifying culturally relevant practices and avoiding pitfalls.
- Cultural elements: Incorporating South Africa's diverse cultural and linguistic heritage can foster a sense of belonging among parolees and enhance their motivation for reintegration.
- Religious Aspects: Aligning rehabilitation strategies with religious and spiritual values was

proposed to promote self-management and reduce dependency on the correctional system.

6.2 Role of academics

The highlight of the untapped potential of academic collaboration in addressing policy and operational hurdles:

- Implementation hurdles: Existing gaps in policy execution within the Department of Correctional Services require innovative solutions.
- Academic assistance: Academics can play a pivotal role by providing training for correctional officials, participating in rehabilitation program design, and offering evidence-based recommendations for parole decisions.

6.3 Parole Board effectiveness

Insights raised regarding the parole board effectiveness include:

- Decision-Making Matrix: A shift from process-oriented to results-based decision-making was advocated to improve system effectiveness.
- Inconsistencies in Decision-Making: Inconsistencies in parole board decisions undermine public trust. Pointing to training and capacitation of board members as essential to ensure fairness and uniform application of parole policies.
- Criminologists' inclusion: Integrating criminologists into parole boards would bring behavioural insights and evidence-based approaches to the evaluation process.
- Behaviour modification: Offender rehabilitation pathways should emphasize long-term behavioural change, guided by specialists i.e., Sociologists and Criminologists.
- Evidence based design making: Rehabilitation programmes to be rendered by offenders themselves and not officials. Offenders to use their organic knowledge.

6.4 Medical parole

The inconsistent application of medical parole and high-profile controversies have undermined public trust and calling for stricter criteria and transparent processes to restore credibility.

- Pre and Post Measures: Strengthening processes before and after granting medical parole is critical to avoid misuse and public distrust.
- Monitoring Period: A monitoring system to evaluate parolees' health status post-release was suggested to ensure parole terms are adhered to.
- Revoking Parole: Introducing mechanisms to revoke medical parole if conditions no longer

suffice was recommended.

6.5 Foreign nationals on parole

Systemic inefficiencies in managing foreign nationals on parole:

- Deportation issues: offenders released not deported and idle. Ineffective deportation processes often result in reoffending and are straining on correctional resources as they become the responsibility of correctional service centres.
- Home Affairs collaboration: Strengthening partnerships with Home Affairs to enforce deportation policies and mitigate reoffending highly emphasized.

6.6 Community corrections and overcrowding

The importance of community-based structures in managing parolees was highlighted:

- Dedicated Structures and staff: The establishment of well-funded, specialized units to support community corrections was strongly advocated for.
- Recidivism Tool: Developing a dedicated tool(electronic) to monitor recidivism rate in order to facilitate data-driven strategies/approaches for identifying underlying and addressing root causes of repeat offences.
- Community Safety: Parole decisions to prioritize public safety over reducing overcrowding.

6.7 Individualized approaches

An emphasis on the value of tailored rehabilitation strategies:

- Rehabilitation programmes must be tailored to address specific needs and skills of offenders to enhance rehabilitation outcomes.
- A more targeted approach-Implementing peace-building model within prisons was proposed to prevent violence and foster cooperation.

6.8 Information gaps

Little is known about recidivism trend, calling for urgent need for comprehensive, accurate, and disaggregated data on key metrics, including:

- Admissions and releases of offenders.
- Detailed inmate profiles to identify risk factors and tailor interventions.
- Trends in recidivism to inform policy adjustments and resource allocation.

To better understand trends, it is crucial to analyse data on admissions, releases, and inmate profiles, including details such as age, gender, sentence type, and locality. This data must be disaggregated

rather than presented at a national or provincial level.

6.9 Gang influence

Detailed impact of gang affiliations on recidivism:

- Gang impact: Gang culture significantly affects offenders' reintegration efforts, with members often returning to criminal networks post-release. Hence, calling for effective release and rehabilitation programmes design.
- Treatment programmes: Specialized rehabilitation programmes for gang-affiliated offenders are crucial and should be rigorously evaluated.
- Comprehensive profiling: Conducting an in-depth-profiling of offenders' developmental and criminal histories was suggested to tailor interventions effectively. This will detect behaviour since release.

6.10 Partnerships and Non-profit Organisations (NPOs)

A participant advocated for greater collaboration between the DCS and non-profit organizations for:

- NPOs and community groups can bridge gaps between correctional services and society, and as a result this will support parolees' reintegration and address stigma related challenges.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 CLOSING REMARKS

The co-facilitators emphasised that this initial evaluative workshop served as the kick-off for the broader evaluation process, which will continue through March 2025. They highlighted the urgency of translating workshop outcomes into actionable reforms and shaping the next phases of evaluation. The workshop was effective in facilitating a multi-stakeholder examination of South Africa's parole system, identifying critical gaps and generating recommendations for reform. The overarching theme is a transformative approach that balances offender rehabilitation with public safety while addressing systemic inefficiencies and fostering societal trust.

The workshop also underscored the importance of innovative practices in resolving some of the recurrent challenges, the importance insights from academic research in informing policy reforms and cross-sector partnerships in working towards an all-of society approach. Stakeholders agreed that reforms must prioritise community safety, offender reintegration, and transparency, and aligning the

parole system with restorative justice principles. The engagement established a solid foundation for systemic improvements and clear direction for DCS and its partners.

Seven key themes emerged from the desktop document analysis and workshop discussions:

- Reforms to policy and parole board decision-making processes
- Resource allocation
- Rehabilitation and reintegration programmes
- Public engagement and education
- Integration of culturally relevant practices
- Enhanced monitoring, research and evaluation
- Collaboration and partnerships

The facilitators stressed the importance of leveraging academic research in policymaking, training correctional officials, and enhancing rehabilitation programmes. They underscored the need for improvements in medical parole processes and public awareness due to ongoing controversies.

For specific areas require greater attention, namely the parole system for foreign nationals, offenders serving life sentences, those involved in gangs, decisions on medical parole. Strengthening collaboration between DCS, Home Affairs, the NPA, and other stakeholders will ensure effective deportation measures, prevent their return into the country and mitigate reoffending risks. The role of criminologists should be expanded to support evidence-based parole decisions. Stronger partnerships between DCS, businesses, and community organisations can bridge gaps between correctional services and reintegration efforts. In addition, it will be crucial to address gang involvement through comprehensive profiling and targeted treatment programmes.

Modernising the parole system through digital recordkeeping and improved data collection will enhance tracking, performance evaluation, and research support. Continuous dialogue and cross-sector partnerships are necessary to establish a transparent and effective system.

The engagement identified some successes, challenges and opportunities. Specific successes have been identified in relation to Community Corrections interventions, which is said to demonstrate strong potential in mitigating reoffending, prison overcrowding management and public safety enhancement. Key factors in this regard include support services for housing, mental health, and substance abuse; education and skills development to enhance employability; and meeting parolees' basic needs to prevent recidivism.

Key challenges include inadequate resources, inconsistencies in parole board decision-making, and issues concerning foreign nationals and gang-affiliated offenders.

Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms, including infrastructure expansion, non-custodial sentencing alternatives, enhanced vocational training, and improved rehabilitation services.

By strengthening the parole system's efficiency and rehabilitative impact, South Africa can enhance public safety, reduce recidivism, and promote sustainable reintegration of offenders into society.

New opportunities are there to explore evidence-based, culturally relevant approaches and fostering collaboration among stakeholders in driving meaningful reforms tailored to South Africa's context. There is potential to increase access to Community Corrections interventions if more resources could be made available.

7.2 EMERGING THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Table 1: Emerging themes for consideration

Theme	Key Recommendations
1) Policy and decision-making reforms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shift from process-oriented to results-based decision-making for parole boards. Integrate relevant experts, such as psychologists and criminologists, into parole evaluations. Revise medical parole criteria and procedures to ensure fairness and prevent misuse, monitoring and revocation mechanisms Standardise criteria for granting parole to offenders serving life sentences – and improve transparency.
2) Resource allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase funding for rehabilitation programmes. Expand community corrections infrastructure, such as halfway houses and rural support services Enhance technology for electronic monitoring systems to improve tracking of parolees and oversight.
3) Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen individualised rehabilitation programmes tailored to offenders' specific skills and needs. Strengthen profiling of gang-affiliated offenders to develop tailored and specialised treatment programmes. Foster partnerships between DCS and NGOs and community organizations to enhance post-release support.
4) Public engagement and education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement awareness campaigns to reduce stigma and promote understanding of parole's rehabilitative goals among citizens. Highlight reintegration success stories to build public trust and confidence in the parole system.
5) Culturally relevant practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adopt an African-centred approach incorporating cultural and religious elements, to foster belonging and self-management for parolees. Learn from neighbouring countries to adapt relevant practices to South Africa's context i.e. Kenya's best practices that address overcrowding and involvement of community.

6) Enhanced Monitoring and Evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a system to track recidivism and evaluate the long-term effectiveness of rehabilitation programmes. Conduct regular evidence-based evaluations to align interventions with restorative justice principles. Utilise the existing electronic Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) system to enhance parolee tracking and oversight. The system comprises of custom electronic bracelets worn by offenders.
7) Collaboration and partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthen collaboration between DCS, Home Affairs, NPA, and other stakeholders to enforce deportation policies reduce reoffending. Encourage private sector involvement to providing employment opportunities for parolees. Foster academic partnerships for research, training, and policy implementation.

7.3 NEXT STEPS OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation process will continue with several activities leading up to March 2025. The following steps are planned for the remaining period:

- Collection of Case Study Data:** Data will be collected from DCS regions that were selected by the Steering Committee, namely Kgosi Mampuru, GP; Qalakabusha, KZN; Baberton, MP; St Albans, EC. The case study Data Collection Instruments will focus on parole system efficiency, access to rehabilitation programs and reclassification processes, reintegration outcomes. There will also be questions about factors contribute to delays in parole decision-making, effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in addressing inmates' needs, and support systems to improve reintegration outcomes. Analysis of this will help document the critical challenges and successes. These findings will inform discussions at the second evaluative workshop, shaping actionable and evidence-based reforms. DCS to coordinate the compilation the case studies.
- Second Evaluative Workshop:** Scheduled for February 2025, this workshop will present case study findings and examine the theory of change for the parole system.
- Rapid Diagnostic Evaluation Report:** A report will be produced to present overall findings and conclusions about the parole system.
- Dissemination of findings: Findings and recommendations will be shared with key**

stakeholders, including the following:

- The National Commissioner of Correctional Services
- The Director General of the DPME
- The Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) cluster
- The Social Protection and Community Human Development (SPCHD) cluster
- The Minister of Correctional Services and the Minister in the Presidency responsible for DPME.
- Cabinet, relevant Parliamentary committees, researchers, and the public.
- **Improvement Plan:** DCS will develop an Improvement Plan to outline how evaluation recommendations will be implemented and DPME will monitor the implementation of the improvement plan over a period of two years where DCS will provide 6 monthly progress reports to DPME.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The DPME in partnership with the DCS, would like to acknowledge attendees who participated in the workshop and contributed to this work and special acknowledgment to the following institutions that shared their broaden expertise and related research on parole issues that brought value to the workshop:

1. University of South Africa (UNISA), Department of Corrections Management – Prof Ephraim Sibanyoni, Chair of Department.
2. University of Western Cape (UWC), Dullah Omar Institute for Constitutional Law, Governance and Human Rights – Prof Lukas Muntingh, Director of Institute.
3. University of Cape Town (UCT), Department of Public Law – Prof Irvin Kinnes, Head of Department
4. University of Free State (UFS), Department of Criminology – Prof Francois Steyn, Head of Department.
 - a. Ms Alexandra Giddy, Academic facilitator
 - b. Dr Bashizi Murhula, Senior Lecturer
5. University of Fort Hare (UFH), Department of Criminology – Mr T Tshivhase, Head of Department.
 - a. Ms N Daniel, Lecturer

ANNEXURE A: PRESENTS DATA ON THE FOLLOWING INDICATORS DRAWN FROM THE DEVELOPMENT INDICATORS:

Conviction rate

Table 1: National Prosecuting Authority court performance data

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Y-o-Y change
1. New cases in court	931 799	908 364	864 276	884 088	888 053	792 895	714 604	776 232	560 168	595 387	609 226	2,3%
2.2 Finalised cases	505 342	503 463	477 802	505 376	494 815	425 778	368 319	220 272	263 830	284 315	306 492	7,8%
2.2.1 Verdict cases	329 153	319 149	310 850	341 360	335 161	276 309	231 725	137 956	153 320	168 723	182 542	8,2%
2.2.1.1 Convictions	301 798	294 608	289 245	321 190	317 475	260 456	217 467	130 064	141 233	156 777	170 750	8,9%
2.2.2 ADRM	176 189	184 314	166 952	164 016	159 654	149 469	136 594	82 316	110 674	115 592	124 106	7,4%
3. Cases remaining in the system	182 979	171 708	185 202	171 312	167 901	181 912	194 225	196 022	193 838	203 480	210 438	-3,4

Table 2: Various ratios

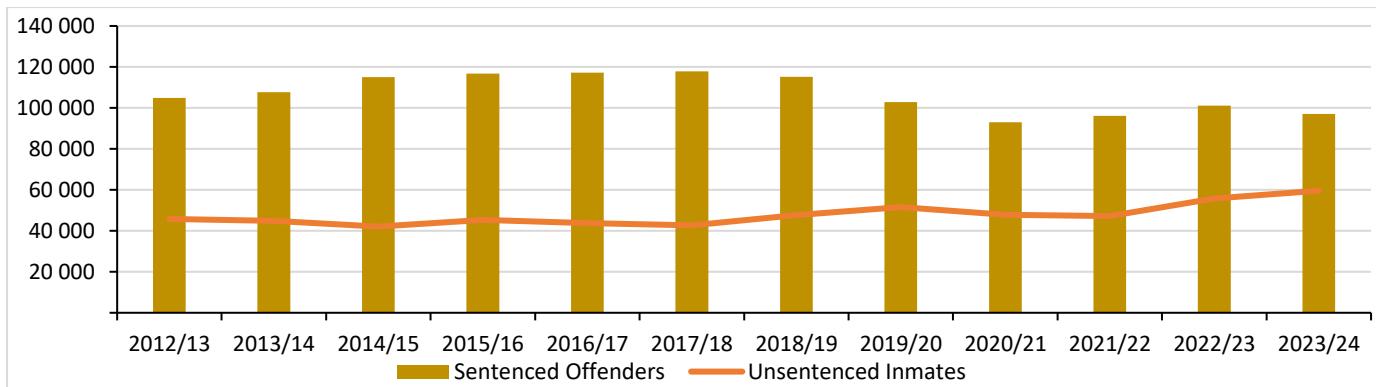
	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Y-o-Y Change
Conviction rate	91,7%	92,3%	93,0%	94,1%	94,7%	94,3%	93,8%	94,28%	92,12%	92,3%	93,5%	-2,29%
District courts	93,6%	94,2%	94,7%	95,6%	96,1%	95,7%	95,3%	95,90%	93,90%	94,5%	95,1%	-2,09%
Regional courts	76,0%	76,6%	78,4%	79,8%	81,0%	81,7%	82,5%	82,20%	80,60%	82,5%	81,8%	-1,95%
High courts	88,8%	91,0%	89,9%	91,0%	91,7%	90,0%	90,9%	93,80%	90,90%	89,2%	91,0%	-3,09%

Total number of inmates

Table 3: Correctional facilities detainees

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Sentenced Offenders	104 878	107 696	115 064	116 727	117 255	117 878	115 147	102 841	93 066	96 079	101 186	97 026
Unsentenced Offenders	45 730	44 858	42 077	45 2573	43 799	42 705	47 728	51 608	47 882	47 144	55 870	59 574
Female inmates	3 380	3 495	3 915	4 105	4 080	4 150	4 316	3 982	3 453	3 724	4 649	4 641
Male inmates	150 608	149 058	153 226	155 226	156 200	156 433	158 559	150 467	137 495	139 499	152 407	151 959

Figure 3: Sentenced population



Source: Development Indicators

Table 4: Overcrowding targets and actual performance

Financial Year	Approved Bed space	Total Inmate Population	Excess	Overcrowding Targets	Actual Performance
2012/13	119 216	151 517	33 953	32%	28%
2013/14	119 134	157 969	35 370	30%	30%
2014/15	119 134	159 563	38 007	29%	32%
2015/16	119 134	161 984	40 197	31%	34%
2016/17	119 134	161 054	41 146	32%	35%
2017/18	119 134	164 129	45 271	38%	38%
2018/19	118 572	162 875	44 303	39%	37%
2019/20	120 567	154 449	33 882	40%	28%
2020/21	110 836	140 948	30 112	38%	27%
2021/22	108 804	143 223	34 419	28%	32%
2022/23	107 582	157 056	49 474	32%	46%
2023/24	105 474	156 600	51 126	50%	48%

Source: Annual Reports from 2012/13 to 2023/24

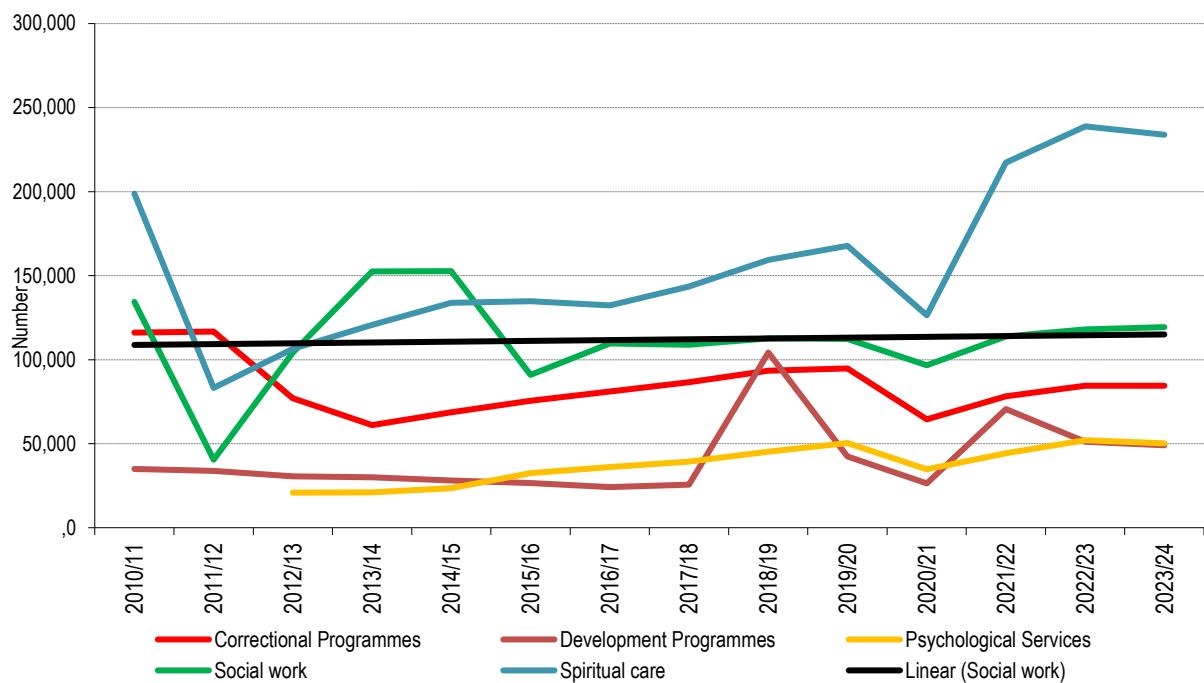
Rehabilitation of offenders

Table 5: Offenders that attended social rehabilitation programmes

	2011/12	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Correctional programmes	116 716	77 087	61 049	68 624	75 595	80 960	86 518	93 419	94 694	64 399	78 158	84 443	84 562
Development programmes	33 807	30 657	29 965	28 033	26 499	24 171	25 573	104 227	42 367	26 335	70 642	55 158	48 304
Psychological services	-	20 865	21 120	23 565	32 523	36 014	39 407	45 331	50 354	34 851	44 327	52 058	50 156
Social work	40 469	104 073	152 406	152 707	91 013	109 690	108 960	112 611	112 267	96 760	113 833	117 999	119 396
Spiritual care	83 198	106 478	120 668	133 826	134 760	132 364	143 480	159 259	167 680	126 361	217 177	238 808	233 884

Source: Development Indicators

Figure 4: Social rehabilitation programmes



Source: Development Indicators

PAROLE AND PROBATION

Table 6: Parolees

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Parolee caseload	46 259	48 703	50 855	51 937	51 785	54 225	55 030	52 745	52 275	52 054	50 695	46 686
Parolee without violations	39 269	38 768	49 928	51 307	51 161	53 615	54 487	53 256	51 901	51 586	50 134	46 246
Percent of parolees without violations (%)	85	80	98	99	99	99	99	99	99	97	99	99

Source: Development indicators

Table 7: Probation

	2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
Probationer caseload	15 943	16 950	17 033	17 061	16 178	16 311	15 251	12 471	7 597	7 803	8 101	6 325
Probationer without violations	14 029	13 560	16 913	16 416	16 016	15 914	15 334	12 605	7 530	7 714	7 990	6 252
Percentage of probationers without violations (%)	88	80	99	96	99	99	99	99	99	99	99	99

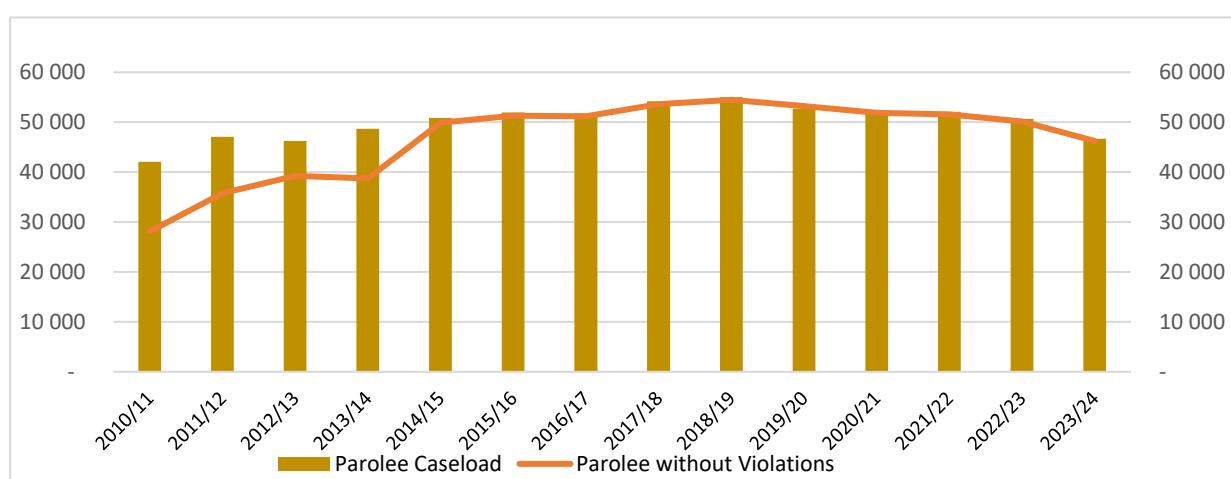


Figure 5: Parolee caseload and parolee without violation

Source: Development indicators