



Irish Rule of Law
International

Strategy

2026-2030



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Section

1

Introduction



As democratic institutions face increasing pressure from the rise of authoritarianism and populism, the need for strong, independent justice systems, capable of protecting individual rights and holding power to account, has never been more urgent.

Welcome to Irish Rule of Law International's five-year strategic plan. This document sets out our priorities for the period ahead and reflects our shared ambition for the organisation. We hope it will serve not only as an introduction to our direction of travel, but also as a reference point that supports ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and partnership.

IRLI has come through a period of significant change and growth. This strategy reflects renewed purpose and strategic clarity – defining our priorities while maintaining flexibility to adapt thoughtfully as contexts, partnerships, and needs evolve.

During 2025, we undertook a period of careful reflection on Irish Rule of Law International: the work we do, how we do it, and the impact we seek to achieve. This was a deliberately inclusive and considered process. It drew on the insights of staff and trustees, as well as on the perspectives of a wide range of external stakeholders across multiple jurisdictions. Through structured strategy workshops and sustained consultation, we have used this collective learning to define a clear and purposeful path for the next five years.

The global outlook for those working in the rule of law and human rights spaces is complex and, at times, deeply challenging. As democratic institutions face increasing pressure from the rise of authoritarianism

and populism, the need for strong, independent justice systems, capable of protecting individual rights and holding power to account, has never been more urgent.

This strategy commits to strengthening justice systems that are equitable, responsive, and accountable to the people they serve. We will advance this goal through three strategic priorities. First, by supporting the conditions for justice-sector reform. Second, by promoting the vital role that the rule of law plays in protecting and advancing human rights. Finally, in an increasingly contested space, we commit to positioning IRLI as a leading, thoughtful, and principled rule of law organisation.

These priorities will guide our work and will inform the decisions we make about where we channel our efforts and resources. It recognises that our work is located within complex systems where change is rarely linear. This requires us to be adaptive, agile and prepared to change course.

Our thematic priorities, including prisoners' rights, financial and economic crime, and survivor-centred justice are underpinned by several cross-cutting approaches, including gender equality and a commitment to reaching the furthest behind first. Together, they provide a coherent framework through which we will plan, deliver, and assess our work.

This strategy also reaffirms our commitment to locally driven and locally led responses. We will test new and innovative approaches that prioritise working alongside and through local actors rather than expanding our own operational footprint in programme countries. Localisation is not an aspiration for IRLI; it is a core way of working.

IRLI is fortunate to be supported by an experienced, multidisciplinary, and deeply committed team, as well as by the generosity and engagement of legal and justice sector professionals across multiple jurisdictions. This collective strength gives

us confidence in our ability to contribute meaningfully to strong, independent rule of law systems which provide the foundations for democratic governance.

We are grateful for your continued engagement with Irish Rule of Law International. We hope that, in the years ahead, you will see this strategy reflected in the work we undertake and in the partnerships we cultivate, strengthen, and sustain.

Finally, our sincere thanks to our staff, trustees, partners, patrons, funders, and supporters, near and far.



Maria McCloskey
Executive Director



Bernard Brady KC
Chair of IRLI's Board of Trustees

Section

2

About Irish
Rule of Law
International



Irish Rule of Law International is a civil society organisation supported by both branches of the legal professions across the island of Ireland.

We work to strengthen justice systems that uphold human rights across multiple jurisdictions.

Our current programmes strengthen access to justice in Malawi, advance survivor-centred justice in Tanzania, and support anti-corruption and accountability in Zambia. We also deliver a small number of projects, both in our programme countries and elsewhere, in cooperation with pro bono, civil society, and human rights partners.

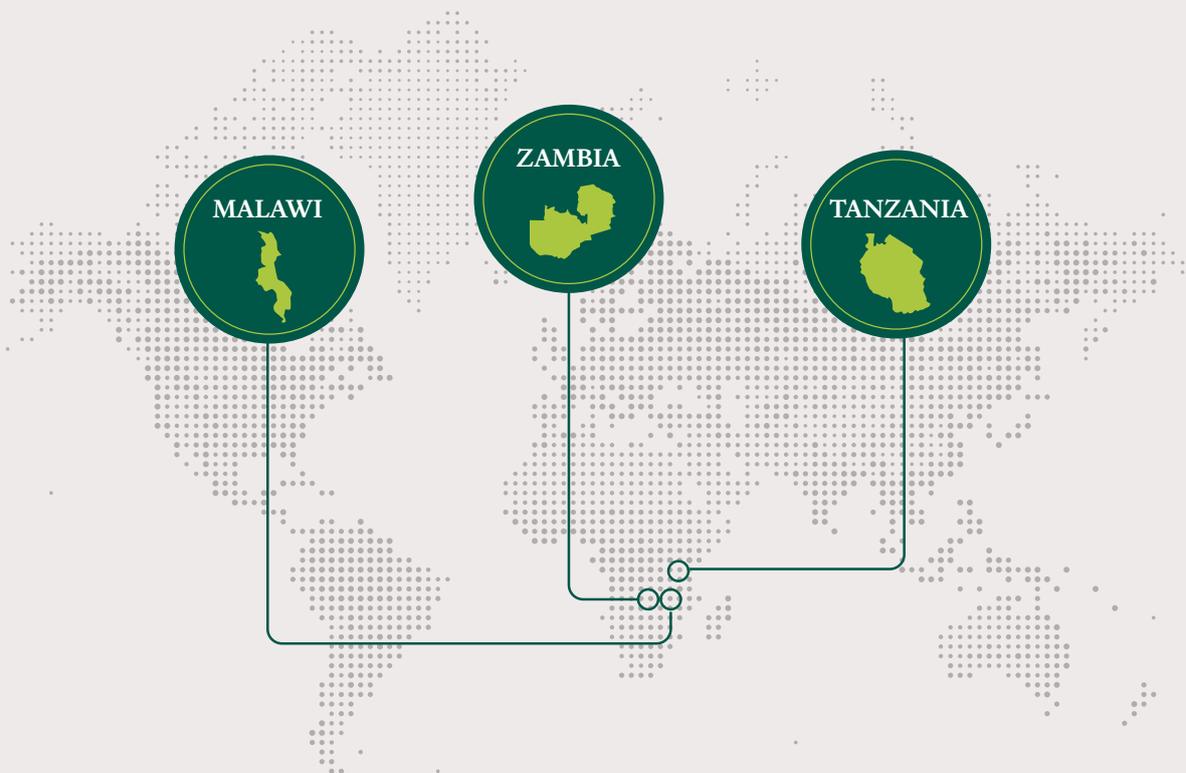
Established in 2007 by the Law Society of Ireland and the Bar Council of Ireland, the Law Society of Northern Ireland and the Bar of Northern Ireland joined as partners in 2015. We are further supported by The Department for Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Ireland, and the European Union.

We operate from offices in Dublin, Ireland, and Lilongwe, Malawi, with one staff member also currently based in Lusaka, Zambia. We adopt a multidisciplinary approach. Our work is locally driven, grounded in priorities identified by stakeholders, and delivered in partnership with communities through strong alliances with local organisations. Since our beginnings, we have collaborated with academics, judges, legal practitioners, policymakers, and civil society to deepen collective understanding of the relationship between the rule of law, democracy, sustainable development, and human rights.



Our current programmes strengthen access to justice in Malawi, advance survivor-centred justice in Tanzania, and support anti-corruption and accountability in Zambia.

Current Programmes at a glance



Malawi

Commenced:	2010
Funding partners:	Embassy of Ireland, Lilongwe / DFAT and the EU
Strategic partners:	Judiciary of Malawi, Malawi Police Service, Legal Aid Bureau, Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, Ministry of Gender Community Development and Social Welfare, Malawi Irish Consortium of Gender Based Violence, Theatre for a Change, Paralegal Advisory Services Institute.
Current programme focus:	Enhancing access to justice for all, including vulnerable, unrepresented adults and children who are in conflict with the law.
Key achievement:	Over 1,300 people, including children, released or diverted from deplorable prison conditions and police cells through IRLI interventions since 2022. 15% fewer children in custody between 2022 and 2024.



Tanzania

Commenced:	2018
Funding partners:	Embassy of Ireland, Dar es Salaam / DFAT
Strategic partners:	Tanzanian Judiciary, Institute of Judicial Administration, Tanzania Police/ Police Gender and Children Desks, An Garda Síochána, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the judiciaries of Ireland and Northern Ireland.
Current programme focus:	Strengthening institutional relationships towards the promotion of survivor-centred approaches in the handling of Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) cases.
Key achievement:	Expanded capacity on survivor-centred approaches, with training cascaded to over 2000 Police Gender and Children Desks officers and 191 prosecutors, magistrates, and social welfare officers.



Zambia

Commenced:	2022
Funding partners:	Embassy of Ireland, Lusaka / DFAT
Strategic partners:	Zambian Judiciary, National Prosecution Authority, Legal Aid Board, Zambia Correctional Services, Prisoners Future Foundation, Undikumbukire Project Zambia, Southern African Institute for Policy and Research, the Criminal Assets Bureau, (the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions (Ireland), Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland.
Current programme focus:	Supporting the justice sector to tackle economic and financial crimes, including corruption, and improve the handling of gender-based crimes and youth justice.
Key achievement:	Mobile courts pilot established addressing backlog and strengthening access to trial.

IRLI Vision, Mission and Values

IRLI Staff and Board Directors worked together throughout the strategic planning process to reflect on IRLI's role, purpose, and strategic direction. We reviewed and updated the Vision, Mission, and Organisational Values to better reflect the organisation we are today, our distinctive role, our guiding principles, and our aspirations for impact.

Vision

A world where everyone can access a fair justice system that protects their rights and values their dignity.

Mission statement

Irish Rule of Law International promotes justice systems that uphold human rights, ensure fairness, and guarantee equality before the law. Through shared learning and partnerships across jurisdictions, we strengthen the rule of law as a foundation for democracy, protection, and empowerment.

Our Values

Participation

We are rooted in partnership and collaboration, built on shared learning and mutual respect. We listen to and are guided by partner needs and priorities.

Integrity

We act with honesty, transparency and fairness, holding ourselves and our partners to the highest ethical standards.

Humility

We approach our work with openness and respect, aware that our role is to support, and learn from those closest to the issues.

Justice

Justice and equality guide everything we do, ensuring fairness for people is not just an aim but a standard.

Compassion

We are committed to strengthening justice systems where all people are treated with dignity, where they can place their trust and feel protected.

Looking back

During 2025, IRLI conducted an externally led organisational and programme review, and an extensive consultation process with partners and stakeholders in Malawi, Tanzania, Zambia, and across the island of Ireland. This provided an opportunity for IRLI to take stock of progress, reflect on ways of working, identify key learnings, and to agree on priorities for the five-year period ahead. Highlights are presented below.

1. Organisational Development

Our organisation has grown significantly in recent years, expanding its income base, programmes, and team. We now employ 16 full-time staff, with six based in Ireland and ten in Malawi, including the recruitment of a new Executive Director in late 2024. The creation of new roles has enabled further professionalisation and the introduction of critical skills. In Ireland, this has been driven by funding from the Law Society of Ireland practising certificate contributions and core support from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), while expansion in Malawi has been enabled by an increased Embassy of Ireland grant and European Union funding.

Organisational systems and policies have been strengthened, particularly in finance, human resources, governance, safeguarding, security, and data protection. Continued prioritisation remains necessary to ensure full and systematic implementation. Monitoring and evaluation capacity has

improved through recent recruitment; however, further investment is required to strengthen systems, staff capacity, and ensure a consistent, organisation-wide approach to results management, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting.

Key lessons from the organisational review highlight our strengths and priorities for the next strategic phase:

- Our growth has been organic and adaptive, allowing us to test different models, ways of working, and thematic areas while remaining responsive to local needs. As we adopt a more strategic and professionalised approach to future growth, it will be essential to preserve the flexibility that enables adaptation.
- Predictable, multi-annual, and flexible funding enables strong performance and remains key to organisational sustainability and effectiveness. Our work has aligned with the international development priorities of the Irish Government and the European Union, enabling expansion of our funding base and trusted collaboration.

- Our success is underpinned by a values-driven, multi-disciplinary, responsive team. Our team and programmes have grown, making this an opportune moment to develop a comprehensive, participatory strategy to guide future expansion, strengthen coherence across teams and geographies, and embed strategic priorities into planning, monitoring, and learning systems.
- Anchored in professional legal bodies and our all-Ireland presence, we are uniquely positioned to bridge the legal and development sectors. Exchange of expertise and professional collaboration remain central to our model. We believe that members of the legal professions across the island of Ireland play a meaningful role in helping enhance the rule of law and shaping progress beyond their own contexts.
- Our organisational model will continue to evolve to ensure efficiency, sustainability, and alignment with good practice, while maintaining our commitment to locally led development, adaptive working, and a lean, cost-efficient structure.
- We have significant potential to leverage legal expertise and relationships across the island of Ireland. Our reputation with the legal professions and professional bodies is a core asset that must be actively cultivated and systematised across the organisation, under the leadership of the Executive Director.
- As we continue to professionalise, sustained investment in internal culture, systems, and capacity is essential, alongside ongoing Board development to ensure strategic leadership, shared purpose, and the skills required to drive organisational growth.

2. Programme performance

IRLI's small size and focused mandate have enabled it to deliver targeted, highly relevant interventions, rooted in the practical realities of justice systems. Our programmes have delivered clear, measurable results in access to justice, institutional reform, and professional collaboration. These achievements were realised by our ability to leverage high-calibre justice sector expertise from across Ireland, supported by strong commitment from pro bono partners.



An independent case study of IRLI's work in Zambia concluded that it 'is a strong case of soft power in action, where diplomatic influence, strategic partnership, and locally anchored programming have featured to support systemic reform in a complex justice environment'^[1].



1. Tony Tyrrell (2025), Final Report: Case Study – Embassy of Ireland, Lusaka and Support for the Rule of Law in Zambia, report commissioned by the Embassy of Ireland, Lusaka (unpublished), 26 August 2025.



- i) **Expanded access to justice, particularly for unrepresented and vulnerable groups.** In Malawi, 640 people accessed camp courts (known as ‘mobile courts’ in Zambia) between 2022 and 2024, with 52 per cent released, a 15 per cent reduction in child detention, and substantially improved case processing times. Our work has established a clear niche in criminal justice reform across the justice chain, is recognised in national and international human rights reporting, and has been successfully replicated, including piloting the mobile courts model in Zambia with scope for expansion to higher courts.
- ii) **Exchange and peer-to-peer learning are a core strategic lever for institutional influence.** Judicial and professional exchanges between Ireland, programme countries, and across the region have enabled decision-makers to assess approaches used in comparable jurisdictions, adapt reforms to local constraints, and accelerate uptake of innovations in case management, gender-based violence handling, and technology-enabled justice.
- iii) **We have pursued systematic and sustainable capacity building, achieving scale through cascading and experiential approaches.** In Tanzania, over 1,250 justice sector practitioners were trained in 2024 and 2025, with national institutions increasingly owning and institutionalising training delivery and resourcing. Across programme countries, our work has contributed to systems-level reform, including new specialist courts, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and legislative change (to include the 2025 Malawi Prisons Act), while intentionally stepping back to enable local leadership.
- iv) **Deep, trusted institutional partnerships underpin programme effectiveness.** Long-term engagement and adaptive models position our teams as credible partners rather than external advisers, enabling sustained access, operational influence, and demand-driven collaboration across country programmes. In Malawi, for example, the move to long-term placements with partner institutions and the shift to a majority Malawian staff team has strengthened IRLI’s positioning.

v) **We have strengthened regional and cross-border collaboration,** reinforcing reform momentum. Exposure to both international and regional ‘best’ practices has helped legal professionals broaden perspectives, adopt innovative solutions, and connect with counterparts facing similar justice challenges. Programmes have strengthened national inter-agency coordination, overcoming traditional silos while also deepening collaboration between institutions in Ireland and Northern Ireland, generating benefits beyond original programme objectives.

vi) **Our pro bono portfolio** - comprising smaller projects and initiatives such as our South Africa Commercial Legal Skills Training and transitional justice programme in Somalia and Ethiopia - **has enabled innovation, diversification, and geographic expansion.** Long-standing skills initiatives now reach over 100 lawyers annually, while pro bono expertise supports new thematic areas, country programmes, and strategic partnerships. Greater integration of pro bono work into core programming offers scope to strengthen coherence and results.



Section

3

The changing context
and implications
for IRLI's work



This strategy was developed amid global turbulence and the destabilisation of the rules-based order that, previously, underpinned international cooperation and human rights.

We are operating in a context of a human rights and gender equality backlash, rising conflict and instability, shrinking civic space, undermining of multilateralism, and a sharply constrained aid environment, including in the countries where we work. For many Least Developed Countries, rising debt, climate-related shocks, and governance failures have deepened poverty and inequality. Funding for governance is projected to decline by 39 per cent over the next one to two years, with sub-Saharan Africa and Least Developed Countries facing the steepest cuts.

As democratic institutions face increasing pressure from the rise of authoritarianism and populism, the need for strong, independent justice systems, capable of protecting individual rights and holding power to account, has never been more urgent.

Our work is taking place against a global rule of law recession. The World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2025 shows that 68 per cent of countries experienced rule of law decline in 2025, up from 57 per cent the previous year. This is driven by executive overreach, erosion of checks and balances, and restrictions on expression, assembly, and participation in over 70 per cent of countries, with warnings that institutional gains can be dismantled rapidly.

At the same time, justice financing – comprising domestic resources and aid to the justice sector – is collapsing. According to the Overseas Development Institute (2025), justice spending

Funding for governance is projected to **decline by**

39%

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The **World Justice Project Rule of Law Index 2025** shows that

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According to the Overseas Development Institute (2025), **justice spending** stands at

€678

per person in Ireland, compared to

€6
in
Malawi,

€7
in
Tanzania,

and €9 in Zambia (2023).

stands at €678 per person in Ireland, compared to €6 in Malawi, €7 in Tanzania, and €9 in Zambia (2023). Aid to justice fell to 1.1 per cent of total aid in 2023, down from 3.1 per cent in 2012, and is projected to decline by a further 40 per cent by 2026.

Within this context, our primary funding partner, the Irish Government, has committed to maintaining its development cooperation budget and continues to champion the rule of law, multilateralism, civic space, and human rights. Our work aligns strongly with Ireland's foreign and development policies, with the United Nations Charter, and commitments to sustainable development, including Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions).

These dynamics sharpen our strategic priorities, and the imperative for IRLI to defend the space as rule of law champions. We must demonstrate the difference our work makes in a more competitive funding environment, invest in measurement of impact, research, and evaluation, maintain efficient operations and value for money, advance locally led development, and remain adaptive in complex and volatile contexts, focusing on areas where our niche, partnership-based model delivers the greatest effect.



Section

4

IRLI's operating
and partnership
model



IRLI’s operating and partnership model supports justice actors to lead and sustain reforms. While our programmes are demand-led and context-specific, our way of working is grounded in long-term relationships, peer-to-peer exchange, and co-design with national partners.

Our operating model typically progresses through three phases





IRLI's role

- Facilitate, connect, convene, broker.
- Allow local actors to lead.
- Foster learning, dialogue & inclusion.

IRLI ways of working

- Participatory, non-hierarchical, peer-to-peer.
- Focus on relationship building, mutual learning, and collaborative partnership.
- Practical, hands-on, focused on problem solving. Does not impose.
- Grounded in mutual respect. Delivered with humility.

Our operating model typically progresses through three phases – scoping, co-creation, and embedding – applied flexibly and often in parallel. We begin by building a deep understanding of the justice landscape and relationships through targeted exchanges and professional linkages. We then co-create interventions with our partners, such as expert exchanges, technical assistance, and capacity strengthening. In the embedding phase, we support partners to roll out reforms, strengthen systems, and anchor new practices within institutions, ensuring progress is sustained and nationally driven.

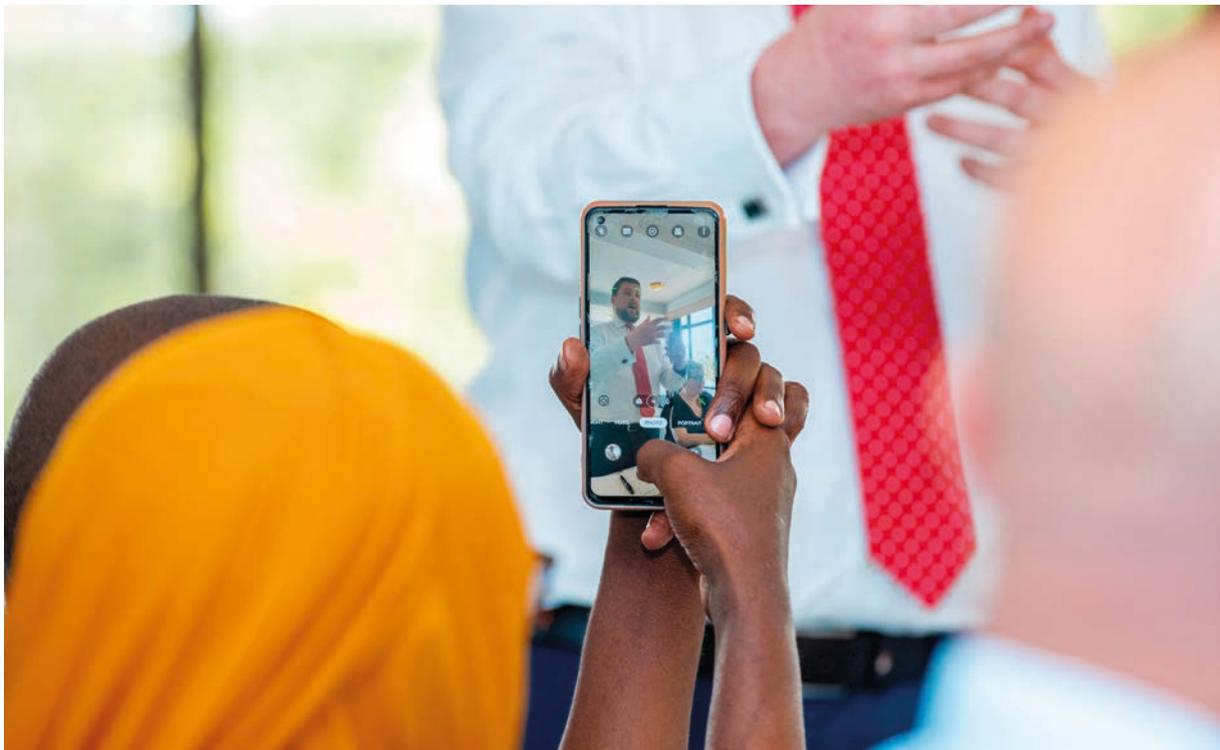
Across all phases, we prioritise local ownership and sustainability, and we work deliberately to avoid dependency. As national institutions gain confidence and leadership, we adapt and step back. Close collaboration with Irish Embassies and

cooperation partners enables us to remain politically attuned and to focus engagement where reform momentum is strongest.

Our niche lies in acting as a facilitator, connector, and convenor rather than a direct implementer. We enable justice actors to learn from one another across comparable systems. We encourage and foster inclusion at every stage. Our participatory, non-hierarchical, and problem-solving approach is grounded in trust, credibility, and long-standing professional relationships, generating access and influence.

Over this strategy period, we will strengthen coherence across programmes while recognising that no single model fits all contexts, that our programmes are locally grounded and have evolved differently.

Our model will continue to evolve as we learn and adapt.



Section

5

IRLI's
strategic focus
2026-2030





IRLI’s strategic framework for 2026-2030 is designed to reflect the evolution of our work, IRLI’s expertise, and the imperative of responding to a volatile global context. We listened to feedback from our partners and funders, as well as the experts who support our work.

We will focus on going deeper rather than wider, **consolidating proven approaches** by seeking to embed these in law, budgets, and government systems, and targeting gaps where IRLI’s comparative advantage is most evident.

IRLI’s focus will remain in **three key programme countries, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia**, where it has strong and established relations with senior decision-makers and ongoing programmes with justice sector partners.

While most of our work will be located within these three programmes, we will continue to engage in small projects and to consider specific requests or opportunities that arise within other countries, where strategically aligned. Over the course of this strategic period, we will assess the potential for IRLI to expand to one additional programme country. This will require careful scoping and risk assessment, including assessing internal capacity.

The strategy frames our work within a **systems-approach**, setting out ambitious, high-level results that provide a framework

for our programmes whilst allowing us the space to flex and adapt according to individual country contexts. We will ensure that programmes are underpinned by strong context analysis, mapping, and a focus on results. This approach recognises that our work is tightly connected to the political economies where we work. To be successful, we need a deep understanding of contexts and to continuously monitor and assess risk as well as windows of opportunity. We recognise that our work is located within complex systems where change is rarely linear. This requires us to be adaptive, agile and prepared to change course.

Our Theory of Change:

If we build trusted, peer-to-peer partnerships, grounded in a shared commitment to justice, and we respond to locally-driven demand using comparative experience from Ireland and beyond, and strengthen participation and coordination among justice actors, then institutions will lead reforms that deliver more equitable, accountable, and inclusive justice outcomes, so that justice systems become more responsive to people's rights and needs and respect for the rule of law is strengthened.

Our strategy is framed around **three high level objectives**, each with two outcomes that IRLI will be accountable for delivering. Several **strategies** will be employed to advance these results, including (i) Partnerships and Political Engagement; (ii) Knowledge, Data, and Capacity Building; (iii) Coordination, Convening, and Advocacy; and (iv) Communications and External Relations.

Five cross-cutting approaches will inform our work and guide us in prioritisation of programmes and resource allocation. These reflect our commitment to localisation, gender equality and reaching the ‘furthest behind, pro bono and partnership engagement, a systems approach, and learning and adaptation.

Our programmes will focus on several **interlinked thematic areas** where we can deliver the greatest impact. These currently include anti-corruption and financial crime (including criminal asset recovery), juvenile justice, prisoners’ rights, and sexual and gender-based violence, with a focus on survivor-centred justice. These thematic areas reflect IRLI’s current programme portfolio and will evolve as programmes and new partnerships develop.

Our **commitment to localisation** will be advanced by working through local actors, investing in national capacity rather than expanding our footprint, and ensuring partners remain at the centre of design and delivery. Through this strategic period, we will test innovative approaches and further interrogate our localisation approach, ensuring it continues to meet the needs of stakeholders. In Zambia, we have established a local interface in partnership with the *Southern African Institute for Policy and Research* and recruitment of a Zambian staff member. In Tanzania, we



will strengthen linkages with local actors and academic/research institutions that can advance reform dialogue, and ensure that interventions remain contextually grounded and responsive to survivor experiences. In Malawi, we will continue to collaborate in joint mechanisms and strengthen national coalitions. Across all programmes we will seek to strengthen linkages and high-level connections with Ireland, reduce direct implementation, and develop clearer sustainability and exit pathways (particularly in Malawi, where we have long-standing engagement). We will continue to review, evaluate and share innovative approaches.



In advancing our overarching goal of justice systems being more equitable, responsive, and accountable to the people they serve, we will prioritise the most marginalised and furthest behind in all our programmes. This requires a **strengthened and more explicit focus on gender equality** as well as addressing the structural barriers to gender equality wherever we work. We will invest in gender and intersectional analysis to inform programme development and take steps to strengthen internal capacity. We will chair the Malawi Irish Consortium on Gender Based Violence during 2025 - 2028. Our work to date on GBV/Child Sexual Abuse and trauma- and survivor-

centred approaches, as well our access to highly skilled pro bono expertise, provides a strong platform for a deepened approach to gender equality and inclusion. We will strengthen our monitoring and learning to integrate structured feedback loops from survivors, community groups, and frontline practitioners, allowing us to be more responsive to issues of inequality, lack of access, and discrimination in the justice system.

IRLI Strategic Framework (2026–2030)

Goal (the long-term impact we aim to achieve)

Justice systems are more equitable, responsive, and accountable to the people they serve.

High-Level Objectives (the change we want to see)

Justice institutions and justice-sector actors lead and sustain reforms that strengthen fairness, accountability, and equality.

Strengthened collaboration and understanding of the role of the rule of law in advancing and protecting human rights.

IRLI builds on its reputation as a credible, connected, and trusted Rule of Law partner in Ireland and abroad.

Outcomes (what we will be accountable for delivering)



1.i. Leadership and commitment to justice sector reforms are strengthened.



1.ii. Legal and justice sector frameworks and capacity are strengthened through evidence-based, rights-based, survivor-centred approaches.



2.i. Understanding of the rule of law and access to justice is deepened through communications and dialogue.



2.ii. Civil society and justice sector actors collaborate to promote legal literacy and citizens' ability to claim and uphold their rights.



3.i. IRLI is recognised and supported by key stakeholders, including the legal professions, government agencies, justice sector actors, and programme country partners, as a leading organisation on the rule of law.



3.ii. Governance, MEL, and organisational systems enable accountability, shared learning and continuous improvement.

Key Strategies (how we deliver results)

Partnerships and Political Engagement

Knowledge, Data, and Capacity Building

Coordination, Convening, and Advocacy

Communications and External Relations

Crosscutting Approaches

Localisation

Gender Equality & “Furthest Behind First”

Pro Bono & Partnership Engagement

Systems Approach

Learning & Adaptation

Section

6

Strategic
objectives



Objective 1:

Justice institutions and justice-sector actors lead and sustain reforms that strengthen fairness, accountability, and equality.

Outcome 1.i. Leadership and commitment to justice sector reforms are strengthened.

Outcome 1.ii Legal and justice sector frameworks and capacity are strengthened through evidence-based, rights-based, survivor-centred approaches.

Rationale

Justice systems that deliver for communities and individuals require sustainable reforms that prioritise fairness, accountability, and equality. Across the world, leadership and commitment are key drivers of institutional change but are often fragile or taken for granted. IRLI's people-centred, relationship-driven methodology and approach stimulates and supports decision-makers to initiate and drive reforms, ultimately influencing institutional processes.

Strengthened legal frameworks and institutional capacity are also fundamental to reform processes. IRLI's practical, demand-led approach supports partners to learn from other systems and tailor this to their own circumstances. IRLI can leverage expertise within the legal systems in both Ireland and our programme countries on evidence-based, rights-based, and survivor-centred approaches, applying this to the various thematic areas of our programmes (e.g. criminal justice, transitional justice, etc.).





Priority actions

Leadership and commitment will be supported through sharing of practices, lessons, and expertise across countries and support for peer-to-peer collaboration. We will **facilitate high level exchange and exposure visits – as well as follow-up actions** - between Ireland and programme countries, as well as between and amongst programme countries / their regions.

Progress in one jurisdiction is often inspired by another. We will take steps to **cultivate professional networks** across countries and regions to allow long term cooperation and reciprocal learning to take root and be sustained, independent of IRLI. For example, in 2025, IRLI facilitated its first peer-led exchange between the judiciaries of Ireland/Northern Ireland, Tanzania, and Zambia. Moving forward, we will establish a formal learning exchange mechanism between Tanzania’s well-established Institute of Judicial Administration (IJA) and Zambia’s newly formed Judicial Training Institute. This will enable structured exchanges on practices and models, regional adaptation, and for promising approaches to be adopted / scaled-up across jurisdictions.

We will support partner institutions to **strengthen legal and justice sector frameworks and to address capacity needs**. Sustainability will be prioritised, through co-design and co-delivery of interventions, strengthening training-of-trainers and cascade training systems, use of existing coordination mechanisms, and investment in accredited professional development and other curricula that integrate e-learning. We will further assess how modern digital tools, including AI, can responsibly and ethically support capacity-strengthening, outreach, and our access to justice commitment.

We will develop opportunities for approaches, resources, and training to be **shared across programme countries and jurisdictions** – such as the mobile court programme, honed in Malawi, and then shared with, adopted, and adapted by Zambia, and the replication of *Avoiding Re-traumatisation* training by Zambia, delivered by a team of Tanzanian and Irish/Northern Irish experts.



In Malawi we will:

Deepen collaboration with core justice sector partners including Malawi Police Service, DPP, Legal Aid Bureau, and Ministry of Gender, Social Welfare and Community Development

Shift focus towards government-led reform, institutionally-driven capacity building, and locally sustainable models of practice

Consolidate capacity gains, including integrating camp courts into the justice system

Prioritise reforms that strengthen coordination, improve case management – particularly for vulnerable groups – and support institutional leadership

Expand pro bono support in areas such as legal research, training materials, and comparative justice analysis

Implement a structured design process in advance of a new programme cycle, informed by external evaluation



In Tanzania we will:

Strengthen the partnership between the criminal justice systems in Ireland, Northern Ireland, and Tanzania, focusing on trauma-informed, victim-centred approaches to child sexual abuse and SGBV

Expand reach and embed approaches into Tanzanian systems through cascade training and e-learning

Support institutional linkages, particularly between the Institute of Judicial Administration and academic bodies

Assess opportunities to deepen the programme and expand the network of institutional partners where there is demand and momentum for reform



In Zambia we will:

Deepen partnerships with justice sector institutions, focusing on economic and financial crimes, gender-based crimes, and youth justice

Strengthen the economic and financial crimes framework through institutional support for a criminal assets agency, targeted practitioner training, and the development of judicial sentencing guidelines.

Support establishment of the Judicial Training Institute, facilitating exchange with Irish, Northern Irish, and Tanzanian counterparts

Scale up mobile courts as a tool to improve access to justice for marginalised populations

Expand trauma-informed, survivor-centred justice approaches in partnership with the National Prosecution Authority





In our **transitional justice work**, IRLI will seek to utilise Ireland’s experience of justice systems in times of conflict and the use of transitional justice models, post-conflict. We have engaged with the EU Advisory Mission in Ukraine to organise, facilitate, and host three delegations of Ukrainian judges to Dublin and Belfast, enabling professional connections and learning. Together with our partners, we will explore opportunities to sustain and broaden this cooperation. Potential areas of focus include expanding access to learning through digital

resources, facilitating further peer-to-peer exchanges, and identifying opportunities for future visits or joint initiatives, subject to context and partner priorities.

We will continue to support smaller projects and initiatives, such as our long-running South Africa Commercial Legal Skills Training, that enable us to engage a breadth of pro bono lawyers and to explore new programme areas and partnerships. We will strengthen integration of these initiatives into our country programmes and in delivery of our strategy outcomes.

Objective 2:

Strengthened collaboration and understanding of the role of the rule of law in advancing and protecting human rights.

Outcome 2.i.

Understanding of the rule of law and access to justice is deepened through communications and dialogue.

Outcome 2.ii

Civil society and justice sector actors collaborate to promote legal literacy and citizens' ability to claim and uphold their rights.

Rationale

The rule of law is facing unprecedented challenges across the globe. As the civic space shrinks and justice systems become increasingly politicised or inaccessible, vulnerable populations bear the disproportionate burden of these failures. The connections between robust rule of law frameworks and tangible human rights protections remain poorly understood, which limits political will and social legitimacy for justice sector reforms.

Against this context, IRLI is well positioned to defend and promote the rule of law as a key mechanism to advance and protect the systems that underpin human rights. First, by broadening public understanding of the importance of upholding rule of law principles. Second, by promoting collaboration between civil society and other justice actors so that citizens are equipped to navigate justice systems and access their rights. Together, these efforts help ensure that the rule of law becomes a lived reality, understood, valued, and defended by the communities it is meant to serve.



Priority actions

Outcome 2.i. Understanding of the rule of law and access to justice is deepened through communications and dialogue.

Over the five years of this strategy, IRLI will seek to position itself as a **reputable voice on rule of law and access to justice** issues. We will draw on our experience collaborating with academics, judges, legal practitioners, policymakers, and civil society, in Ireland and in the countries where we work, to deepen knowledge and understanding of the relationship between the rule of law, democracy, sustainable development, and human rights. We will leverage IRLI's unique position as a development organisation founded by and rooted in the legal professions across Ireland.

We will advance this work through **communications and external engagement**, facilitating and convening spaces for

dialogue and debate on global justice issues and reaching new audiences. We will use our Podcast, *The Justice Edit*, to explore how the rule of law, human rights, and geopolitics intersect, connecting complex international issues to everyday realities. We will invest in growing our social media presence and content, both to raise awareness and support for our work and as a tool to engage audiences in a dialogue on rule of law and justice issues. We will further develop our website as a learning hub.

In programme countries, we will support and work alongside our partners, using local media and platforms that demonstrate strong engagement from communities. We will explore complementary formats, including community-based discussions and youth justice dialogues, to broaden reach and ensure accessibility across diverse audiences.



In Ireland, IRLI will use its networks across the legal professions, universities, judiciary, and DFAT to **convene public discussions** on the rule of law, human rights, access to justice, and on global justice issues. We will host visiting delegations in ways that strengthen understanding and stimulate informed debate. In programme countries, IRLI will facilitate spaces for national actors to reflect on justice challenges, share learning, and generate solutions. We will work with partners to ensure that dialogue spaces meaningfully include women, young people, and survivors of rights violations, using formats that prioritise safety, dignity, and accessibility.

We will work to **embed communications** more strongly within our organisational practices, strengthening staff capacity to document the work we do and communicate the difference that it makes. We will invest in and strengthen rule of law and research expertise within our team, encouraging staff to undertake research and writing on relevant topics, and to contribute to public discussions and internal learning. Supporting professional development for staff strengthens IRLI's voice, deepens organisational expertise, and contributes to broader public understanding and discourse.

Outcome 2.ii. Civil society and justice sector actors collaborate to promote legal literacy and citizens' ability to claim and uphold their rights.

Over the course of this strategy, IRLI will test new approaches to **fostering collaboration** amongst civil society and justice actors. We will use our access and resources to encourage more inclusive, participatory spaces and processes.

In Malawi, we currently work to enhance public awareness of the rights of prisoners. As we move into a new programme cycle, from 2027, we will explore ways to move beyond awareness to support community-led accountability processes. We will continue to advocate for prisoners' rights, working collectively to maximise impact.

Together with partners, we will engage local, regional, and international human rights mechanisms through the submission of coordinated advocacy reports. Particular emphasis will be placed on initiatives that address the use of torture and forced confessions and sustained advocacy for the effective implementation of the Prisons Act. In Zambia, we will continue collaborating with CSOs in piloting the mobile court model, drawing on evidence from the pilot to inform public understanding and deepen community engagement on access to justice. In Tanzania, IRLI is exploring new partnerships with local actors that will allow us to expand our work on legal literacy and rights. We will also explore opportunities for cross-jurisdictional networks and exchanges between law societies to promote shared learning.



Objective 3:

IRLI builds on its reputation as a credible, connected, and trusted Rule of Law partner in Ireland and abroad.

Outcome 3.i.

IRLI is recognised and supported by key stakeholders, including the legal professions, government agencies, justice sector actors, and programme country partners, as a leading organisation on the rule of law.

Outcome 3.ii

Governance, MEL, and organisational systems enable accountability, shared learning, and continuous improvement.

Rationale

IRLI has grown and expanded in recent years, strengthening its organisational structure, programmes, and networks and bringing new skills and capacities to its team. Our stakeholders and partners have emphasised that IRLI's strength lies in its credibility, clarity of niche, and ability to deliver meaningful results. Given the nature of our work, credibility and integrity underpin our effectiveness – we simply cannot deliver unless we are recognised and trusted. This requires us to raise our visibility, to invest in strategic

communications, networking and relationship-building within the legal and international development sectors, and to ensure that IRLI staff and (volunteer) legal experts are highly skilled and competent. Given the challenging context for Overseas Development Assistance, fundraising, and compliance, we recognise the importance of communicating the impact of our work, and in ensuring that we have robust organisational systems and structures that ensure efficiency and accountability.



Priority actions

Outcome 3.i. IRLI is recognised and supported by key stakeholders, including the legal professions, government agencies, justice sector actors, and programme country partners, as a leading organisation on the rule of law.

Over the course of this strategic plan, we will work to strengthen IRLI's **visibility and public profile** among key audiences in Ireland and overseas. We will develop a comprehensive, phased **communications strategy** during year one. Our communications work will focus on articulating IRLI's programmes, thematic priorities, and institutional strengths over time, ensuring that communications actively advance the strategy. Each phase will be designed to build credibility incrementally, allowing IRLI's voice, positioning, and partnerships to mature in a deliberate and sustainable way. Our Podcast, *The Justice*

Edit, will remain a key vehicle to reach new audiences, to showcase our work, and to provide a platform on a broad range of rule of law and human rights topics. We will continue to grow our social media presence in Ireland and in the countries where we work.

IRLI's collaboration with all four **professional legal bodies** – The Law Societies and Bar Councils of Ireland and Northern Ireland – is a distinctive strength, anchored in the representation of these bodies on IRLI's Board. We will take steps to deepen these partnerships and draw on our respective convening abilities to engage members and strengthen their connection to our work. Pro bono engagement represents a valuable and mutually beneficial avenue for the legal professions and IRLI. We will continue to enhance the pro bono partnerships that have been established,

cultivate new ones, and use the pro bono offering throughout Ireland to support and enhance our programme activities. We will explore, with the legal professions across the island of Ireland, opportunities and benefits for their members to become involved in international legal reform work. We will reinforce IRLI's all-Ireland identity, expanding our engagement and profile in Northern Ireland and leveraging the co-patronage by the Office of the Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland.

We will **network, nurture relationships with legal professionals, including the judiciaries**, and engage in relevant fora, such as the relevant committees of the professional legal bodies and their regional associations, many of whom provide pro bono support and services to IRLI. We will continue to engage in small projects that enable us to develop Pro bono partnerships and to engage legal professionals in IRLI's work – such as the Zambia Child Diversion Programme, in partnership with Advocates for International Development (A4ID).



We will develop **academic linkages** – in Ireland and within programme countries – exploring the potential for collaboration on curriculum development and reform, legal education and research, and increased understanding of IRLI’s work amongst student bodies and staff. We will offer structured student placements to law students in Ireland and engage volunteers to work with us on events.

We will deepen our **strategic partnerships with DFAT** and the Irish Embassies in Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia. Recognising the strong alignment between IRLI’s work and Ireland’s foreign- and international development policy priorities, including its Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2026 and candidature for the Human Rights Council 2027-2029, we will seek to strengthen linkages so that DFAT can leverage IRLI’s expertise in relevant areas internationally. Given the critical importance of DFAT’s core support in enabling IRLI to deliver sustainable results, we will work closely with the Department to ensure that support for our core operations in Ireland is aligned with and complementary to commitments in our programme countries. We will seek to secure multi-annual core funding, allowing IRLI to plan strategically and maintain the operational capacity required to deliver on this strategy. We will collaborate with DFAT and partner Embassies on communications, using social media and other vehicles to raise visibility of Ireland’s role in developing and strengthening the rule of law.

Outcome 3.ii Governance, MEL, and organisational systems enable accountability, shared learning, and continuous improvement.

Following a period of expansion in recent years, we will prioritise **organisational development** during this strategic period. To strengthen efficiency, we will improve internal planning, communications, and information and knowledge management. We will develop improved and more comprehensive Human Resource systems, together with the necessary policies and budgets to ensure their proper implementation. We will create partnership and expert-engagement policies and strengthen policy compliance systems, including safeguarding and risk procedures, ensuring full compliance with legal requirements and sector standards. We will take steps to further strengthen financial systems and financial management capacity.

IRLI’s work is propelled by relationships, trust, and social capital. Change in this area can be subtle, non-linear, and challenging to capture. We will invest in the **strengthening of Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) systems** so that our contribution and impact can be monitored and measured over time. We will apply qualitative methodologies and establish systems to capture participant feedback and to assess the effectiveness of programme interventions on behaviours and practices. The feedback will be used to adjust and improve programme interventions, and to change course, as required. We will seek to establish a centralised MEL system, invest in strengthening capability across our team



and develop a more consistent approach to results management, MEL, and reporting across the organisation. The strategy implementation plan will set out core Key Performance Indicators, providing an accountability framework for delivery of this strategic plan.

We will build institutional resilience through continued refinement of our organisational structure and concerted action to build a cohesive, connected team and strong leadership. We will **strengthen programme coherence as well as cross-programme linkages**, bolstering information-sharing and cross-country collaboration between our Ireland- and programme country-based teams and partners. Structured, cross-country review and learning sessions will be used to reflect on progress, adapt, develop synergies, and increase efficiency.

We are committed to **accountability, transparency, and strong governance** in all that we do. We will strengthen annual reporting and continue to monitor and review organisational compliance against the Charities Institute Governance Code. We will review and update our Risk Management Policy, provide training to staff / board members, and take measures to improve routine risk monitoring and reporting.

We will continue to invest in strong and effective **Board governance and strategic leadership**, prioritising diversification of board membership and greater representation from programme countries. We will strengthen the oversight and compliance role of the Board, introduce processes for Board review / evaluation and revisit the role and set-up of Board sub-committees.

Section

7

Governance &
accountability





Irish Rule of Law International is a charity registered with the Charities Regulatory Authority, Ireland. We are a registered company limited by guarantee. The organisation is governed by a Board of Directors (eight members, at present) that is responsible for ensuring strong governance, accountability, legal compliance, and strategic oversight.

The Board of Directors includes a nominee of each of the current Presidents or Chairs of the Law Society of Ireland, the General Council of the Bar of Ireland, the Law Society of Northern Ireland, and the Bar of Northern Ireland. Board members contribute on a voluntary basis and bring specific skills and expertise to their roles. We are actively working to strengthen board diversity and balance. IRLI is led and managed by the Executive Director and the staff teams in Ireland and Malawi.

We are privileged to have two co-patrons, The Office of the Chief Justice of Ireland, currently Donal O'Donnell, and The Office of The Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland, currently Dame Siobhan Keegan. This is testament to IRLI's unique all-island identity.

IRLI is compliant with charity sector regulations and standards. Our Annual Report and Financial Statements are fully compliant with the Financial Reporting Framework, Irish law, and Financial Reporting Standard 102. We publish our reports online with the Charities Regulator

Authority and the Companies Registration Office as well as on our website.

We will continue to ensure organisational compliance with the Charities Governance Code, which we review annually and submit to the Charities Regulator.

We are an active member of Dóchas, a network of international development and humanitarian organisations in Ireland, and signatory of the Dóchas Guide to Ethical Communications. We abide by the Dóchas Safeguarding Code and maintain our own Safeguarding policy.

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**Irish Rule of Law
International**