



Factsheet: The Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (OPCAT)

May 2026

WHAT IS THE OPCAT?

The [Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (OPCAT) is a human rights treaty that aims to prevent torture and other ill treatment in places of deprivation of liberty. The OPCAT provides a practical and complementary element to the preventive framework set out under the [UN Convention against Torture](#) (UNCAT). Any state that has ratified the UNCAT can and should ratify the OPCAT.

This document was written using the Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT) and the Instituto Interamericano de Derechos Humanos' [Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture: Implementation Manual](#).

HOW OPCAT WORKS

The OPCAT sets up a proactive system of visits to prevent rights violations from happening. By ratifying the OCPAT, a State consents to regular, unannounced visits by international and national bodies to all places of deprivation of liberty.

The OPCAT establishes an international expert body within the UN, the Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (SPT). It also requires States Parties to establish or designate National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs). This complementary relationship ensures the effective implementation of international standards at the national level.

INTERNATIONAL PREVENTION

UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture

- Visits places of deprivation of liberty
- Advises States Parties & NPMs
- Supports prevention



NATIONAL PREVENTION

National Preventive Mechanisms

- Independent visits to places of deprivation of liberty
- Private interviews
- Recommendations to improve treatment and conditions

WHAT OPCAT REQUIRES STATES TO DO

The OPCAT establishes a practical set of obligations for States Parties which facilitate the preventive mandate of the SPT and NPMs:

1. to establish, designate or maintain an NPM
2. to open up all places of deprivation of liberty under its jurisdiction and control to external scrutiny by its NPM and the SPT
3. to facilitate contact between its NPM and the SPT
4. to provide information to its NPM and the SPT on domestic deprivation of liberty procedures and preventive measures
5. to consider the recommendations of its NPM and the SPT
6. to cooperate with its NPM and the SPT
7. to publish the annual report of its NPM.

HOW THE UK IMPLEMENTS ITS OPCAT MANDATE

- The UK ratified OPCAT in **2003** and its NPM was formally designated in **2009**.
- The UK NPM is made up of **21** organisations, coordinated by a small Secretariat Team, a Chair and a Steering Group.
- The UK NPM's multibody model allows for depth and breadth of monitoring, where the depth is achieved through frequent volunteer-led monitoring, and breadth through periodic, organised inspections by inspectorates.

Read more about the UK NPM and its obligations in the [UK NPM Factsheet](#).