

WHAT IS A NATIONAL PREVENTIVE MECHANISM?

A National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) is one or more designated bodies that monitor the treatment and conditions of people deprived of their liberty in order to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment from taking place.

The NPM mandate comes from the [Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (OPCAT), a human rights treaty created to ensure stronger protections for people deprived of their liberty. Central to OPCAT is the idea that regular, independent visits to places of deprivation of liberty can safeguard against abuses, and prevent torture and ill treatment in places that fall outside the public gaze.

The UK ratified OPCAT in 2003 and designated the UK NPM in 2009. As of 2026, there are 79 NPMs in existence globally.

Specific Requirements of an NPM

To comply with OPCAT, NPMs must have certain powers. These include the power to:

- inspect all places of deprivation of liberty
- access all information relating to people deprived of their liberty
- interview people deprived of their liberty in private
- choose where to visit and who to speak to
- make recommendations based on human rights norms to relevant authorities
- make proposals and observations on existing or draft legislation.

WHAT DOES THE UK NPM DO?

The UK NPM is made up of [21 organisations](#) (see table) whose functions include monitoring and inspecting places of deprivation of liberty. Across the UK, different settings are visited or inspected by different NPM bodies. The UK NPM is coordinated by a small Secretariat Team, a Chair, and a Steering Group of representatives from NPM bodies in the four nations. The UK NPM also has Scotland and Northern Ireland Subgroups which enable regional collaboration on devolved issues.

The multi-body composition of the UK NPM allows for breadth and depth of monitoring. Breadth is achieved through frequent, routine volunteer monitoring visits that capture the day-to-day realities of life and provide continuous observation. Depth comes from periodic, organised inspections that involve detailed scrutiny of processes and systems, carried out by inspectorates.

Many inspection practices include partnerships between NPM organisations. For example:

- HMIP and CQC inspect health and social care services within prisons
- HMIP and Ofsted inspect education provision in prisons and secure training centres
- HMIPS and Healthcare Improvement Scotland inspect healthcare in prisons

As of 2026, the UK NPM is undergoing a membership review and hopes to invite the UK's National Human Rights Institutions to fulfil the role of advisory bodies. This would include both the Scottish and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission, and the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Further, national Children's Commissioners will be invited as associates, to consult

on children-specific work, including the Children and Young People’s Commissioner for Scotland, the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People and the Children’s Commissioner for Wales.

WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES BEING PART OF THE UK NPM MAKE?

The powers of UK NPM organisations to inspect, monitor and visit places of deprivation of liberty are formally recognised as part of the UK’s efforts to prevent torture and ill treatment. UK NPM organisations have the responsibility to ensure that their working practices are consistent with standards for preventive monitoring established by OPCAT.

In addition to individual bodies’ preventive monitoring, the UK NPM as a coordinated body focuses attention on systemic issues, promoting research, analysis and responses, and producing an Annual Report of its findings and activities. The UK NPM is scrutinised by official UN human rights bodies and non-governmental organisations to ensure that it is fulfilling its OPCAT mandate.

UK NPM CONSTITUENT BODIES (by principal inspected or monitored setting)

Setting	Jurisdiction			
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland
Prisons	HM Inspectorate of Prisons		HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland (includes Independent Prison Monitors)	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
	Independent Monitoring Boards			Independent Monitoring Boards Northern Ireland
Immigration Detention	HM Inspectorate of Prisons			
	Independent Monitoring Boards			
Police Custody	HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services		HM Inspectorate of Constabulary for Scotland	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
	Independent Custody Visiting Association		Independent Custody Visitors Scotland	Northern Ireland Policing Board Independent Custody Visiting Scheme
Court Custody	HM Inspectorate of Prisons		HM Inspectorate of Prisons for Scotland	Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
	Lay Observers			
Secure Children’s Accommodation	Ofsted	Care Inspectorate Wales	Care Inspectorate (Scotland)	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
				Criminal Justice Inspection Northern Ireland
Children (all settings)	Children’s Commissioner for England			
Detention under Mental Health Law	Care Quality Commission	Health Inspectorate Wales	Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
Deprivation of Liberty and other safeguards in Health and Social Care	Care Quality Commission	Health Inspectorate Wales	Mental Welfare Commission for Scotland	Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority
		Care Inspectorate Wales	Care Inspectorate (Scotland)	
Military Detention	HM Inspectorate of Prisons			
	Independent Monitoring Boards			
Terrorism-related Detention	Independent Reviewer of Terrorism Legislation			
NHRI			Scottish Human Rights Commission	