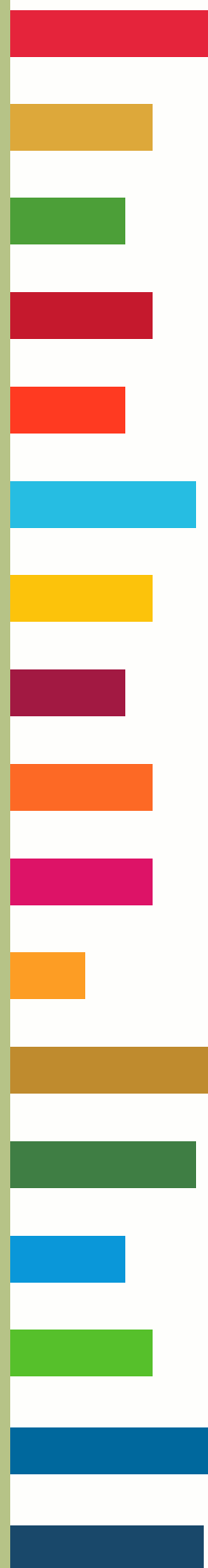


SDG'S AND DETENTION HOUSES

TRANSITIONING
FROM **NICHE STRATEGY**
TO **ECOSYSTEM STRATEGY**



Co-funded by
the European Union



INTRODUCTION

JUSTICE AS A **PILLAR** OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development represented a global commitment to build societies that are more inclusive, equitable and resilient. Through its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the international community recognised that social progress, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability and strong institutions are deeply interconnected. Sustainable development therefore requires approaches that acknowledge the relationships between people, communities, public institutions and the environments in which they operate.

Despite this ambition, one essential public system has remained largely absent from sustainable development discussions: justice. Every year, millions of people experience detention, and the way detention is organised has consequences that extend far beyond the walls of detention facilities. It affects access to education and employment, physical and mental health, housing stability, family relationships, community cohesion, public expenditure and the use of infrastructure. Justice systems therefore do not operate separately from society; they actively shape the social, economic and environmental conditions that underpin sustainable development.

The commitment to leave no one behind necessarily includes people deprived of their liberty. The justice sector should not be considered an isolated sector operating outside broader societal development, but as an integral part of sustainable societies. The question is therefore no longer whether justice is relevant to the SDGs, but how justice systems can actively contribute to achieving them.

FROM NICHE **STRATEGY** TO **ECOSYSTEM STRATEGY**

Since its establishment in 2019, RESCALED has supported the transition from large prison institutions towards small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses. This work has traditionally been framed within the field of criminal justice reform, focusing on human rights, detention conditions, restoration and social (re)integration. These perspectives remain fundamental and continue to guide international standards and national reform efforts.

However, experience from the implementation of detention houses and already existing inspirational practices has demonstrated that their relevance extends beyond the criminal justice sector.¹ Their small scale, differentiated approach and community-integration create opportunities to strengthen connections with education, healthcare, employment, housing, families, local communities and public services. Detention houses should therefore not only be understood as an innovation within criminal justice, but as part of a wider societal ecosystem.

This evolution represents a shift from a niche strategy towards an ecosystem strategy. In recent years, detention houses have primarily been positioned as an alternative approach within detention systems. The ecosystem strategy recognises that their potential lies not only in transforming detention itself, but also in strengthening the relationships between justice institutions and the wider systems that support social inclusion and sustainable communities. This understanding is captured in RESCALED's Ecosystem Perspective, introduced in more detail in the Methodology section.





GROWING **INTERNATIONAL** RECOGNITION

This broader understanding reflects a growing recognition at European and international level that justice reform requires approaches capable of supporting restoration, reintegration and sustainable justice systems.

Over the past decade, small-scale detention has increasingly gained attention as a form of deprivation of liberty that can contribute to improved detention conditions, greater opportunities for personal development and more effective reintegration into society. This development is reflected in several policy instruments, including the European Parliament's 2017 Resolution on prison systems and conditions², the European Commission Recommendation on procedural rights and material detention conditions (2022)³, the Council Conclusions on detention conditions and the use of small-scale detention facilities (2024)⁴, and the United Nations Resolution on the social reintegration of detained persons (2024)⁵.

Together, these developments encourage Member States to explore and evaluate different approaches to detention, strengthen evidence-based practice and promote exchange of knowledge and experiences. This is already reflected in several policies at national levels.

Small-scale detention is therefore increasingly recognised not as an isolated national innovation, but as part of a broader transformation towards justice systems that are more humane, effective and sustainable.

THE FRAME PROJECT

FRAME (**F**rameworks for **R**ealising, **A**ssessing and **M**onitoring Small-scale Detention in **E**urope) is a two-year European project that aims to strengthen how small-scale detention is assessed, implemented and monitored across Europe. As small-scale detention increasingly replaces large prison institutions, FRAME develops practical tools and a comprehensive monitoring framework to ensure that detention houses are measurable, comparable across countries, and embedded within human rights, evidence-informed policy and positive societal impact.

The project brings together four organisations with complementary expertise in justice and detention: RESCALED (Belgium – European), Associazione Antigone (Italy), Irish Penal Reform Trust (Ireland) and Penal Reform International (the Netherlands – International).

By integrating the Sustainable Development Goals into detention monitoring, FRAME creates opportunities to strengthen cooperation between small-scale detention and actors working in health, education, employment, housing, environmental sustainability, local governance and community development.

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This report introduces a framework for understanding detention through the lens of sustainable development. It aims to:

- demonstrate why justice systems are integral to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals;
- illustrate how small-scale detention contributes to the five dimensions of the 2030 Agenda: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership;
- showcase inspirational practices from Europe and beyond that demonstrate these contributions in practice;
- identify opportunities for collaboration between justice actors and organisations working across health, education, housing, employment, environmental sustainability, local governance and sustainable development.

Ultimately, this report argues that detention houses should not be understood solely as an innovation within criminal justice. They represent an opportunity to recognise justice as part of the wider ecosystem that enables people, communities and societies to flourish.



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METHODOLOGY

DEVELOPING A **EUROPEAN FRAMEWORK** FOR **SUSTAINABLE** DETENTION

This report builds upon years of European cooperation on the development, implementation and monitoring of small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses. Rather than representing a stand-alone research exercise, it brings together knowledge generated through European projects⁶, comparative research, policy development, international knowledge exchange and continuous dialogue with policymakers, practitioners, researchers, civil society organisations and people with lived experience.

Since its establishment, RESCALED has supported the transition from large prison institutions towards detention houses that are embedded within communities and tailored to the individual needs of residents. Through collaboration with governments, prison administrations, municipalities, universities, international organisations and civil society organisations across Europe, RESCALED has developed an extensive knowledge base, including comparative research, policy recommendations, implementation guidance, the RESCALED Academy⁷, the Inspirational Practices database⁸ and multiple international partnerships.

The methodology brings these different sources together to examine detention houses through the lens of sustainable development. It combines the conceptual principles underlying detention houses with an ecosystem perspective and an analysis of their relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION: **DETENTION HOUSES**

At the centre of this framework are detention houses. Detention houses are characterised by three principles: small-scale, differentiation and community-integration. When many small detention houses are located in the community, and differ from each other they can provide the right context for each individual. These three principles are connected and reinforce each other. To fully grasp the value and potential of detention houses, we consider all dimensions of their ecosystem.

1.

SMALL-SCALE

At RESCALED, size is a means to achieve closeness and belonging, rather than an end in itself. Detention houses, with a capacity of 8 to 30 people, emphasize community and meaningful relationships. Hence, it is not about numbers. It is about people.

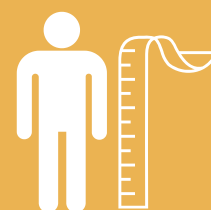
In these small-scale facilities, the environment is less bureaucratic and anonymous than in large prison institutions, allowing for a more personal approach and encouraging dynamic security. The approachable nature of staff in these settings enhances feelings of safety and helps prevent or quickly resolve incidents. Except in rare high-risk cases, incarcerated individuals live communally, share responsibilities, and learn to navigate the complexities of group living.

The small-scale nature of detention houses also strengthens ties with the community as they are more likely to be located in neighbourhoods accessible to staff, NGOs, and visitors. Small-scale facilities tend to be more visitor-friendly than large prison institutions, which is particularly relevant when the visitors are children.



2.

DIFFERENTIATED



Because detention houses are small and there are many of them, they offer the flexibility to provide housing that best suits each individual's needs, enabling them to fulfil their potential. This approach, known as differentiation, involves placing people in contexts tailored to their specific needs and conditions.

High-security measures, typical of large prison institutions, are necessary for only a few individuals and often make reintegration more challenging. In contrast, most incarcerated individuals benefit from lower security settings, which are not only more cost-effective to build and operate but also better suited to preparing them for reintegration. In a detention house, security may consist of (a combination of) relational security, static security and procedural security measures.

Instead of relying on traditional 'low - medium- high security' classifications, security is adjusted based on a scale from many restrictive measures in freedom of movement to very few measures and an individual's gradual regain of liberty.

Differentiated facilities, offering comprehensive and personalised support services, activities, and programs, ensure that incarceration aligns with each person's needs, ultimately making the reintegration process smoother and more beneficial for both the individual and society.



3. COMMUNITY-INTEGRATED

Detention houses are not isolated from society. They are integrated within the community, located at an accessible distance from the incarcerated persons' social network and the community where they will be living after release.

This enables a dynamic interaction with local stakeholders: teachers, psychologists, social workers, health care professionals and sports coaches, as well as local governments and volunteers from the community. Thus, people in detention houses make use of the same service providers as everyone else in the neighbourhood, and in low-security settings, they can go out to meet these providers.

This continuity helps build relationships that will support their reintegration after release.

These initiatives allow incarcerated people to engage in meaningful activities that benefit society and themselves, helping to restore the harm caused by their offences both symbolically and financially. Even in high-security detention houses, added value can be created by sharing spaces with local NGOs or community groups.

Why not let the local art school gather in the detention house visiting room when it is not in use?

By fostering thorough preparation and ongoing dialogue with the neighbourhood, community-integrated detention houses contribute to a general sense of safety, fairness, and justice.

An essential consideration is the prevention of net-widening. Small-scale detention should not become an additional layer within justice systems or result in more people being deprived of liberty. Instead, detention houses should contribute to a transformation away from large prison institutions by providing more appropriate, proportionate and socially sustainable responses where deprivation of liberty is necessary.

THE ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE

The conceptual foundation of this report is RESCALED's Ecosystem Perspective (RESCALED, 2024).⁹ The ecosystem perspective provides a framework for understanding detention houses not as isolated detention facilities, but as part of interconnected systems involving individuals, families, communities, public services and institutions.

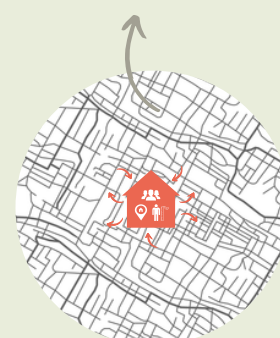
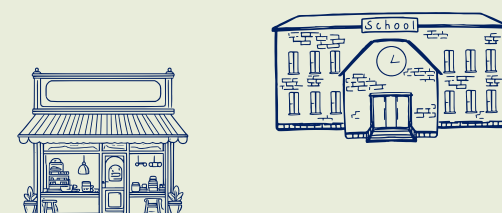
Inspired by Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, the ecosystem perspective recognises that human development is shaped through interactions across multiple levels: immediate personal environments, relationships between social settings, institutional structures and wider societal contexts.

Applied to detention, this means that reintegration and restoration are influenced not only by what happens inside a detention house, but also by the interaction between healthcare, education, employment, housing, municipalities, families, communities and civil society organisations.

Within this perspective, detention houses function as connecting infrastructures: places where justice, social services and communities intersect. Their small scale enables stronger relationships; their differentiated character allows support to respond to individual needs; and their community integration creates connections between residents and the wider systems that support inclusion and participation.

The ecosystem perspective also recognises that interactions between systems can either support or disrupt reintegration. Harmonious factors strengthen connections between systems and contribute to positive outcomes. Disruptive factors create barriers, such as fragmented services, lack of housing opportunities, insufficient cooperation between organisations or limited continuity of support.

Understanding these relationships provides the conceptual bridge between detention houses and the Sustainable Development Goals.



FROM THE ECOSYSTEM PERSPECTIVE TO THE SDG FRAMEWORK

Existing approaches to detention monitoring have traditionally focused on legal compliance, detention conditions and human rights safeguards. These remain essential foundations, but they do not fully capture the wider societal relationships and potential impacts associated with small-scale detention.

The SDG framework developed in this report therefore complements, rather than replaces, existing human rights and detention monitoring approaches. It examines the wider systems connected to detention houses and considers where these relationships can contribute to sustainable development.

The development of the framework involved four complementary analytical steps.

1.

CONCEPTUAL SYNTHESIS

The first stage examined existing conceptual frameworks relating to:

- small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention;
- reintegration and restoration;
- sustainable development; and
- social inclusion and community participation.

This conceptual work also built upon knowledge generated through previous European cooperation projects led or supported by RESCALED. In particular, the WISH-EU project explored the relationship between nature and detention through research on nature-based detention houses and the mapping of inspirational practices across Europe. Together with RESCALED's broader body of comparative research, implementation guidance and the [Inspirational Practices database](#), this work provided an important foundation for understanding detention houses as part of wider societal systems rather than isolated detention facilities.

The conceptual synthesis also reviewed existing work linking prisons and detention to the Sustainable Development Goals, including two publications by Penal Reform International (UNICRI & PRI, 2025; PRI & TIJ, 2017).^{10,11} These provided an important reference point for identifying existing connections between detention and the SDGs. The FRAME framework builds on this work by applying an ecosystem perspective specifically to small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention and by examining its contribution across the five dimensions of the 2030 Agenda: People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership.

2.

POLICY ANALYSIS

The second stage examined European and international policy developments relevant to sustainable and evidence-informed detention. Particular attention was given to the Council Conclusions on detention conditions and the use of small-scale detention facilities (2024) and the United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution on the social reintegration of detained persons (2024).

The Council Conclusions encourage Member States to strengthen the evidence base for small-scale detention, promote the exchange of knowledge and good practices, and support its implementation. The UN resolution highlights the importance of social reintegration and recognises the potential contribution of appropriate detention approaches to successful social inclusion after release.

Earlier European developments were also considered, including the European Parliament Resolution on prison systems and conditions (2017) and the European Commission Recommendation on procedural rights and material detention conditions (2022).

Together, these policy developments provided the strategic and normative context for a monitoring framework that goes beyond legal compliance and operational performance to consider broader societal objectives.

3.

PRACTICE-BASED AND LIVED EXPERIENCE KNOWLEDGE

The third stage drew upon practical implementation experience gained through European cooperation projects, study visits, workshops, expert consultations and exchanges with practitioners, policymakers, prison administrations, monitoring bodies, researchers and people with lived experience.

Consistent with the ecosystem perspective, people with lived experience are recognised as knowledge holders whose insights are essential for understanding how detention environments, support systems and reintegration function in practice. Their perspectives ensure that the framework reflects not only institutional and policy viewpoints, but also the realities of those directly affected by detention.

The European Symposium on Detention Houses 2026 (ESDH26) in Tirana was an important contribution to this process. The symposium brought together policymakers, practitioners, researchers, architects, monitoring bodies, civil society organisations and people with lived experience from across Europe and beyond. Discussions on the relationship between detention houses, communities and sustainable societies informed the further development of the framework.

4.

SDG MAPPING AND ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS

The final stage systematically explored the relationship between detention houses and the Sustainable Development Goals through the lens of RESCALED's Ecosystem Perspective.

The ecosystem perspective was used to identify the principal societal systems connected to detention houses, including:

- health and well-being;
- education and lifelong learning;
- employment and economic participation;
- housing and community development;
- environmental sustainability;
- governance and institutional cooperation;
- and partnerships and networks.

These systems were subsequently mapped against the five dimensions of the 2030 Agenda - People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership - to identify the ways in which detention houses can contribute to sustainable development.

Finally, inspirational practices from Europe and beyond were selected through RESCALED's knowledge base, previous European projects, study visits and partner expertise. These examples do not represent a ranking of good practices; rather, they illustrate different ways in which small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention can contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

SCOPE AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

This report should be understood as the foundation of an evolving European framework rather than a final model. The relationship between detention houses and the Sustainable Development Goals will continue to develop as implementation expands, evidence becomes available and cooperation between justice and other societal sectors grows.

The framework does not claim that detention houses automatically achieve sustainable development outcomes. Instead, it identifies ways in which small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention can contribute to sustainable societies when embedded within supportive ecosystems of institutions, services and communities.

Future monitoring, research and implementation activities will be required to further develop indicators, assess outcomes and strengthen the evidence base for sustainable detention across Europe. Sustained political will and adequate financial resources will also be essential to translate this evidence into lasting change.

PEOPLE

"We are determined to end poverty and hunger, in all their forms and dimensions, and to ensure that all human beings can fulfil their potential in dignity and equality and in a healthy environment."

— Preamble, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

IDEA OF CHANGE

JUSTICE THAT SERVES PEOPLE: FROM ISOLATION TO INTEGRATION

By Idil Aydinoglu — Regional Programme Manager, Penal Reform International Europe Programme (the Netherlands)

Most people in prison will eventually return to society. The question is not whether they come back — but in what condition. And more specifically, will they be in a better situation to settle compared to the moment they entered in. If we even pause to answer yes, then we certainly are doing something wrong. The scale, location, and philosophy of imprisonment shape people's lives profoundly and mostly in ways that are rarely visible from the outside. For those of us working in criminal justice reform, this is not an abstract policy debate — it is a question about human dignity, about whether we design systems that widen exclusion or systems that challenge exclusion.

But first, we must keep in mind that the people who enter our justice systems do not emerge in a vacuum.

There are well-documented, powerful links between poverty, social exclusion, lack of education, trauma, and contact with the criminal justice system. But perhaps academic evidence is not that needed to what can be seen with a naked eye. Marginalised communities — ethnic and religious minorities, migrants, LGBTQ+ persons, those living in economic precarity — are more heavily surveilled, more aggressively policed, and more harshly sentenced - who form an important portion of prison populations. In the Justice chapter of their book, *All About Love*, Bell Hooks reminds us many adult men encountered in prisons carried wounds from their childhood — not metaphorical ones, but the kind left by years of being told that pain was love, that punishment was care. That observation belongs here, in this room, because many of the people who enter our justice systems bear those same scars. This may not mean that they should be 'acquitted' in legal terms, or let go from any accountability mechanism. But it's a reminder of a troubling truth: When a justice system ignores that history, it does something dangerous: it individualises structural problems. It punishes a person while leaving untouched the conditions that shaped that person's life.

Punishment, in this framework, is not a response to harm — it becomes a reinforcement of inequality.

Where and how people serve their sentences shapes who they become.

Prisons are built the same way we build everything we place outside our cities: massive, isolated structures, closed off from the communities around them. Far from public transport, far from families, far from community. Visits become costly and time-consuming. How many vacation days can a person use to visit their loved one in prison? These are not neutral design choices. They are decisions that quietly erode the family bonds that are among the most important protective factors for well-being in prisons and life after release.

The absence of human connection is more impactful once we zoom in to the lives of different groups. I remember a man who reached out to me for legal advice as he feared his release after 20 years imprisonment. Prison was the only place where he still had relationships. Outside, he said, he felt he belonged nowhere and was worried about going back to the only place he could consider “home”. For women and queer people in prison, isolation is not only a product of distance — it is compounded by stigma and discrimination. At an international event just last month, a woman described the contrast between the crowded visiting days at a men’s prison — families waiting in long queues, children in tow — and the women’s unit nearby, where some women had gone years without a single visitor. Being close to community, close to chosen families, matters for everyone in prison, but it matters most for those who are most stigmatised for being there.

When prisons become massive, something else is also lost: the individual connection between staff and the people in their care. Anyone who has lived in a large apartment block knows how easily connections with neighbours can fade. Prisons with high capacities or worse prison complexes, leave no space for the kind of human attention — consistent, attentive, personalised — that is a precondition for any meaningful support. The Mandela Rules and the European Prison Rules are clear on this. But rules mean little when the architecture works against them.

Conversely, restorative approaches — built on dialogue, accountability, and community involvement — offer a different path. A justice approach that focuses on healing, rather than punishing, an approach where everyone is involved, including the one causing or experiencing harm, even the social texture. And this is where the question of scale becomes urgent: community-based settings, smaller facilities, halfway houses are not simply more humane — they are the infrastructure that makes restorative models possible. A justice rooted in peaceful cohabitation, rather than permanent exclusion, cannot be built in a fortress.

The question comes to: What Kind of Justice Do We Want?

The question before us is not whether people in prison will return to society. Most of them will. The question is in what condition they return — and whether the systems we design help or hinder that return.

And are we ready to do more? Are we ready to change our perspectives? Are we ready to really listen to understand the complexity of the lives of people in conflict with the law?

People-centred justice starts with realising that people in conflict with the law are part of our societies because they are borne out of it and they will return. It means recognising that distancing is not a solution but perhaps an escalating factor. It means building a system that is inclusive to all, facilities closer to communities, with access, with individualised support, with meaningful interaction between staff and those in their care. It means including people with lived experience not as footnotes, but as essential voices in reform. It means community-based models that maintain social ties, reduce stigma, and support gradual, humane reintegration

SDGs

SDG 1 — NO POVERTY — END POVERTY IN ALL ITS FORMS EVERYWHERE

	IN THE NETHERLANDS, INCARCERATED PEOPLE EARN ON AVERAGE JUST €0.95 PER HOUR. Despite international human rights recognizing access to decent work for incarcerated people.	RUBIKON'S NON-PROFIT EMPLOYMENT AGENCY WON THE ECPA 2024 FOR IMPROVING JOB OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL HISTORIES. Increasing employability through counselling, training, and job placement, while working with employers to create an inclusive labour market.
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ISSUE

Many people in prison come from poor and socially marginalised backgrounds, and poverty itself can be closely linked to contact with the justice system. Homelessness, unemployment and offences linked to poverty or social exclusion can increase vulnerability to criminal justice involvement, while in some justice systems, people may remain in pre-trial detention because they cannot meet financial conditions for release, rather than because they pose a risk.

Imprisonment can further deepen existing economic disadvantage through the loss of employment, income and housing, while legal costs and financial pressure on families can push households further into hardship. After release, barriers to employment, housing and social inclusion can make it difficult to regain economic stability and increase the risk of continued exclusion (United Nations , 2011, para. 43; PRI & TIJ, 2017).¹²

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 1 by reducing the social and economic disruption caused by detention. Unlike traditional prisons, they enable people to maintain employment, education, family relationships and connections with local services throughout their sentence. By preserving these protective factors, detention houses can help prevent detention from becoming a driver for poverty and support more sustainable reintegration into society.



Ferme Baudonne (France)

As work is compulsory in this facility, each resident is offered a work integration contract lasting from four to twenty-four months. Each resident works 26 hours a week in organic market gardening, paid at the French minimum wage (€11.52/hour from May 2023). This enables residents to pay rent for their room (€280/month), food, and use of facilities. Staff and volunteers also provide comprehensive personalised support covering daily life, social support, financial and household management, rebuilding family and social ties, and returning to work.

The facility's twelve residents live in single rooms, most with a private bathroom, and share a bright dining room, kitchen and lounge; the site also houses a primary school serving around 40 local children, further blending the farm into daily neighbourhood life. The municipality leases farmland to the project on favourable terms, and residents sell their produce at a weekly farm stand and the Saturday town market, alongside an annual free summer concert open to the whole community.

Link to the SDG: By paying the full minimum wage rather than a token allowance, and enabling residents to contribute towards rent, food and other living costs from their income, Ferme Baudonne supports financial stability during detention and helps residents develop the resources and routines needed to sustain themselves after release.



Hostel Boschdijk (Netherlands)

Hostel Boschdijk is a supported-housing facility in the Netherlands, for people with long-term addiction who are homeless or formerly homeless — a group with very few alternative housing options. Five of its spots are reserved for people with a forensic status, placed through the justice system, often coming directly from a detention facility or serving a conditional sentence; the remaining spots are for residents staying voluntarily. It follows a policy of tolerance: rather than requiring abstinence, it allows residents to use substances in a controlled way, with methadone available at a clinic in the neighbourhood and clean needles and other harm-reduction supplies provided on site. Despite the small number of house rules, residents have a high degree of autonomy and freedom to move around the facility and the wider community; the hostel is managed by Novadic-Kentron, the regional addiction care organisation for Brabant.

Link to the SDG: Homelessness and addiction often lead people into contact with the justice system, and Hostel Boschdijk shows how stable, tolerant housing can break that cycle. By removing housing insecurity as a barrier that so often leads to renewed offending, Hostel Boschdijk directly addresses SDG 1's goal of ending poverty in all its forms — including the link between homelessness, addiction and criminalisation.

RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **FEANTSA**: FEANTSA is the European network working to prevent and combat homelessness through research, advocacy and cooperation between organisations supporting people experiencing homelessness. Its expertise is highly relevant to detention houses, as stable housing is a fundamental condition for dignity, autonomy and successful reintegration. Many of the inspirational practices mapped by RESCALED are managed by organisations that are active in the field of homelessness support and are connected to FEANTSA's network. This illustrates the strong overlap between community-based detention approaches and housing-first, social inclusion and reintegration practices. Cooperation with homelessness organisations strengthens the ecosystem around detention houses and helps ensure that people leaving detention can access stable housing, social support and meaningful connections within their communities.
- **Campaign to decriminalise poverty & status**: The Campaign to Decriminalise Poverty and Status challenges approaches that criminalise poverty, homelessness and social vulnerability instead of addressing their underlying causes. This perspective strongly connects with the detention house movement's aim to move away from punitive responses towards supportive, community-based approaches. By recognising poverty and exclusion as factors requiring social responses, the campaign contributes to the broader shift towards justice systems that promote dignity, inclusion and restoration.
- **European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)**: The European Anti-Poverty Network brings together organisations and people with lived experience of poverty to advocate for social inclusion and the eradication of poverty across Europe. Its focus on participation, empowerment and access to social rights reflects key principles of detention houses: supporting people to maintain agency, strengthen their social networks and remain connected to their communities.
- **Housing and social-support organisations**: Local housing providers, homelessness services, municipalities and social welfare organisations are essential partners in addressing the material conditions that can undermine reintegration. Detention houses can act as a point of connection between residents and these services, helping to maintain or establish access to housing, income support, debt advice and other forms of social protection before and after release.

SDG 2 — ZERO HUNGER — END HUNGER, ACHIEVE FOOD SECURITY AND IMPROVED NUTRITION AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



ISSUE

Food provision in many traditional prison institutions falls short of meeting nutritional and public health standards. Meals are often of poor quality, lack variety and fail to meet individual dietary needs, while limited budgets, logistical constraints and expensive prison canteens reduce access to healthy food. Opportunities to prepare meals, grow food or contribute to sustainable agriculture are generally absent (PRI & TIJ, 2017).

Issues identified in the Belgian prison system

In Belgium, the prison diet is widely reported to harm rather than maintain people's health: food is often monotonous and lacking in fresh produce, contributing to weight gain and chronic conditions, while the daily food budget is extremely low, at only €3.94 per incarcerated person. Prison canteens, the main way incarcerated people can supplement their diet, mark up prices by 42% to 200%, putting healthier food out of reach for more than one in four people with no financial resources at all. Sustainable food production is rarely a priority for the prison administration itself — vegetable gardens and food-waste initiatives tend to be driven by outside non-profits rather than built into daily operations (Guémas, 2021).¹³

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 2 by creating opportunities for healthy nutrition, local food production and sustainable food practices. Their small-scale and community-integrated character can facilitate initiatives such as growing, preparing and sharing food, as well as connections with local producers and organisations. Where these opportunities exist, food-related activities can provide a context for practical learning, participation and community engagement.

Establecimiento Prisional de Torres Novas (Portugal)

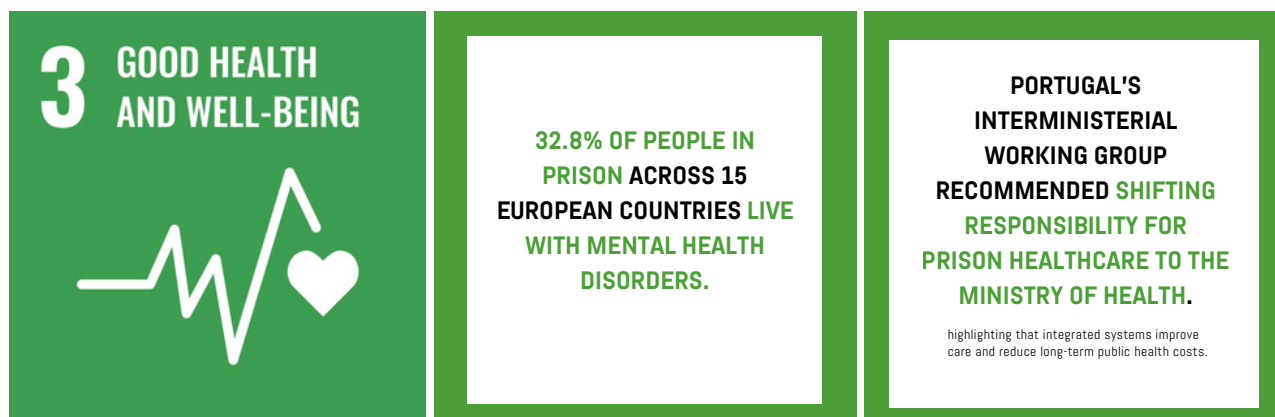
Torres Novas operates under an open regime for men nearing the end of their sentence, allowing residents to leave each morning for work in the community. The facility also runs the Upfarming project, a vertical garden that residents helped establish and now maintain, producing food on-site as part of their development and earning a certification in farming. Beyond the harvest itself, the project includes informal discussions on improving nutrition and activities on environmental and food literacy, for residents and the wider community alike. The harvest supplies the facility's own kitchen, and the surplus is distributed to around 300 food-insecure local families through the Red Cross.

What started as a small initiative has grown steadily: after running independently in its first year, the project is now, in its fourth year, supported by the local mayor, reflecting the positive impact it has had on residents and the surrounding community.

Link to the SDG: By producing food on-site and channelling the surplus to food-insecure families in the surrounding community, Torres Novas turns a detention facility into a net contributor to local food security — a concrete, replicable answer to SDG 2's call for sustainable agriculture and improved nutrition, for residents and neighbours alike. Beyond the harvest, the project's focus on food literacy extends its impact well past the food itself.



SDG 3 — GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING — ENSURE HEALTHY LIVES AND PROMOTE WELL-BEING FOR ALL AT ALL AGES



ISSUE

People entering detention often have greater and more complex health needs than the general population, reflecting existing social and health inequalities. These may include mental health needs, substance use, chronic conditions and unmet healthcare needs, which can be difficult to address effectively in large prison institutions (WHO, 2014; PRI & TIJ, 2017).¹⁴

Overcrowding, isolation, limited access to specialised healthcare, disrupted continuity of treatment and poor living conditions can worsen existing health problems. Mental health support is frequently insufficient, while transitions between prison and the community often lead to interruptions in medication, treatment and social support. These gaps contribute to poorer health outcomes and increase the risk of crisis after release (Christie N., 2025).¹⁵

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 3 by providing greater opportunities for continuity of care, access to community-based health services and attention to individual health needs. Their smaller scale and community integration may facilitate cooperation with local healthcare providers and help maintain connections with health and social services during and after detention. The potential contribution to health therefore lies not simply in the physical setting, but in the continuity, stability and access to appropriate care that it can facilitate.

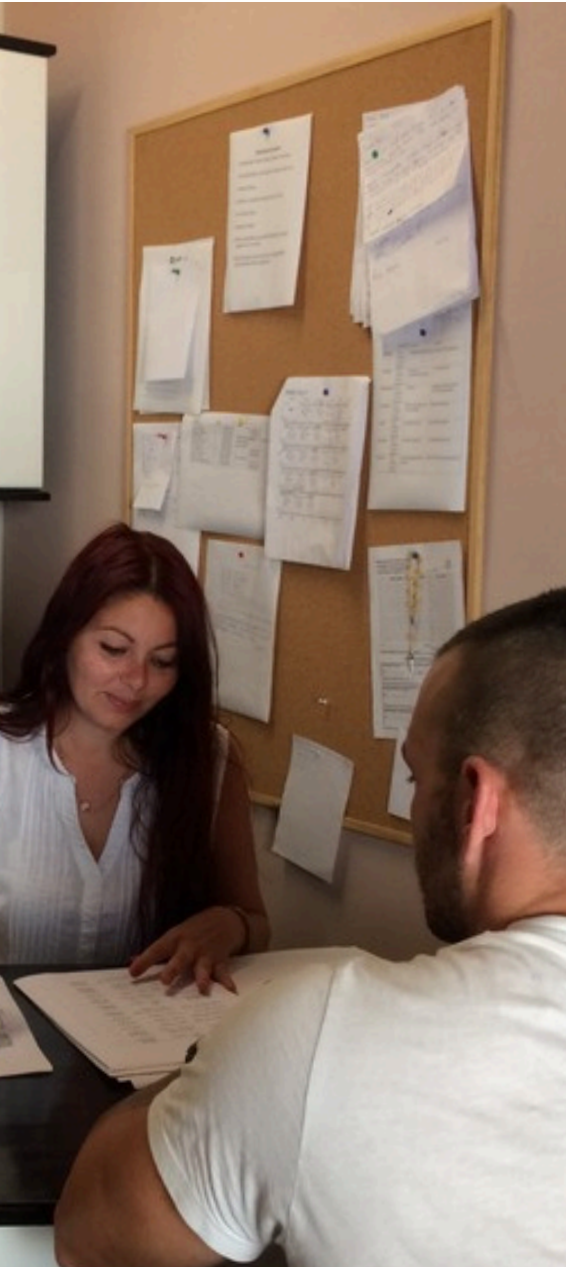
VANAJA UNIT (FINLAND)

The Vanaja Unit is an open women's facility, operating as part of Vanaja Prison under the Finnish Criminal Sanctions Agency (RISE) and the Ministry of Justice. Residents live in small-scale houses for three to eight people, as well as a larger Family House. The facility has a capacity of 57 residents. One of the houses is specifically dedicated to up to 10 (pregnant) mothers or fathers with young children up to three years old; it is run by an NGO focused on the well-being of the child, preserving parental responsibility and family unity while safeguarding both parent and child.

The Prison and Probation Service of Finland stands on the values of justice, safety, the belief that people can change and grow, and respect for human dignity. Finland limits the use of incarceration, with an average sentence of just 5.7 months in 2023 — 25% lower than the European median. Finland increasingly uses community-based sanctions, which in 2024 averaged over 1,700 daily, facilitating social reintegration and helping to prevent reoffending through education and work.

Link to the SDG: By keeping mothers, fathers and young children together in a small-scale, family-oriented setting rather than separating them, Vanaja directly protects the physical and psychological well-being of both parent and child — addressing SDG 3's call for healthy lives and well-being for people whose needs are otherwise routinely unmet in detention.





RISE FOUNDATION'S RESIDENTIAL HOME (MALTA)

RISe Foundation's residential home in Valletta provides shared accommodation for 10 men in the final year of their sentence. Everything in the residential home is shared, highlighting the community and peer support aspect. Residents are free to leave the facility and use services from the community, just like everyone else in the city.

Transition houses and reintegration services are often managed by NGOs. In 2016, the first transition house was opened by the NGO RISe Foundation under a formal agreement with the Ministry for Family, Children's Rights, and Social Solidarity, with additional support from the Ministry for Home Affairs, National Security, Reform, and

Link to the SDG: The peer-support model at the heart of RISe's residential home directly counters the isolation and mental-health strain that ordinarily builds during the final stretch of a sentence, supporting SDG 3's aim of promoting well-being at every stage of a person's life, including the transition out of detention.

RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **World Health Organization (WHO)**: WHO provides extensive expertise on prison health, including communicable and non-communicable diseases, mental health, vulnerable groups and prison health management. Its Prisons and Health guidance emphasises the importance of addressing the health needs of people deprived of liberty and connecting prison health with wider public-health systems. For detention houses, this supports an approach in which healthcare is integrated into community health services and continuity of care is maintained before, during and after detention.
- **European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA)**: EUDA provides evidence and guidance on health and social responses to drug-related problems in prisons, including treatment, harm reduction, infectious diseases and preparation for release. Its work is particularly relevant to detention houses because smaller, community-integrated settings can facilitate closer cooperation with local addiction services and continuity between treatment in detention and treatment in the community.
- **Harm Reduction International (HRI)**: HRI brings specialist expertise on harm reduction, including overdose prevention, HIV and hepatitis prevention, drug treatment and health rights. Cooperation with harm-reduction organisations can help detention houses respond to substance use through health-based rather than purely punitive approaches, while strengthening links with community services.
- **Local healthcare and mental-health providers**: Healthcare providers, mental-health services, addiction services and community health organisations are essential to ensuring continuity of care. Their involvement can allow residents to maintain existing treatment relationships and establish links with services that can continue supporting them after release. This directly reflects the report's argument that detention houses can use their smaller scale and community integration to facilitate continuity of care.

SDG 4 — QUALITY EDUCATION — ENSURE INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE QUALITY EDUCATION AND PROMOTE LIFELONG LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALL

4 QUALITY EDUCATION 	PEOPLE THAT HAVE ENGAGED IN PRISON EDUCATION ARE 24 % MORE LIKELY TO FIND EMPLOYMENT THAN THOSE WHO HAVE NOT.	RESHAPE CERAMICS IS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE THAT TRANSFORMS LIVES THROUGH POTTERY, OFFERING TRAINING AND JOB SKILLS DURING DETENTION. It supports people deprived of liberty in building autonomy and a path toward an independent future.
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ISSUE

People entering prison often already experience educational disadvantages. For adults, these barriers may also include limited formal qualifications, interrupted vocational training, weak digital skills and limited access to continuing education or skills development. These inequalities are closely linked to unemployment, poverty and increased contact with the criminal justice system (PRI & TIJ, 2017).

However, education in traditional large prison institutions is often limited by overcrowding, security restrictions and insufficient resources. Courses may not correspond to individual needs or the requirements of the labour market, and transfers between prisons can interrupt educational progress (United Nations Human Rights Council [UNHRC], 2009, para. 12).¹⁶

At the same time, learning in detention is generally considered to have a positive influence on reintegration and restoration, and more specifically on employment outcomes after release. However, the Special Rapporteur stresses that education should not be treated only as a tool for change: it is an entitlement in its own right, essential to the full development of the person, regardless of any measurable impact on reoffending (UNHRC, 2009, para. 4). The report further recommends that education programmes be integrated with the wider public education system, so that learning can continue without interruption after release (UNHRC, 2009, para. 94).

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 4 by creating greater opportunities for continuity in education, vocational training and skills development during detention. Their community-integrated approach can facilitate links with local schools, training providers and other educational services, while their smaller scale may allow educational activities to be more closely aligned with individual needs. Where these opportunities are available, education can support continued learning and help maintain pathways towards employment and social reintegration.

KVJJ THEN HAGUE (NETHERLANDS)



KVJJ Den Haag is one of the small-scale juvenile justice facilities in the Netherlands, accommodating up to eight young people aged 12 to 23 who are awaiting trial, serving pre-trial detention or a sentence, or nearing the final phase of their detention. Each resident has a personal plan to maintain activities such as school and sports, as they did before their sentence, and staff aim to maintain contact with neighbours and support local businesses.

The small-scale juvenile justice facilities (KVJJs) originated from a movement to close juvenile prisons. There are five such facilities in the Netherlands, jointly managed by the prison service and an NGO. They are based on three principles: preserving the positive elements of the young person's life, providing chain cooperation, and

ensuring a low-security environment is suitable to the young person — meaning placement should be close to their network, existing care, and daily activities such as school or work.

Link to the SDG: By allowing young people to remain connected to their existing schools and daily activities, KVJJ Den Haag helps prevent interruptions to education and supports continuity of learning during detention. Its community-based approach enables young people to continue developing educational, vocational and life skills while remaining connected to the networks and opportunities that support their longer-term development.

LARVIK FACILITY (NORWAY)

Søndre Vestfold fengsel, Larvik avdeling ("Larvik prison") is the only prison in Norway built specifically for young men aged 18–25. Because it only holds this age group, staff can shape the whole place around them, its own school, programmes like anger management and financial literacy, and a system that rewards good behaviour rather than only punishing bad. With just 16 residents, staff get to know each person individually and can step in early, which helps prevent young people from being pulled into more serious crime, something that's more likely to happen in bigger prisons where younger residents may mix with older residents who may be re-incarcerated.

Link to the SDG: Larvik demonstrates how education can be integrated into detention as part of a broader approach to personal development. By providing access to a dedicated school alongside programmes such as financial literacy and anger management, the facility offers young adults opportunities to develop knowledge and practical skills that can support their independence and participation in society beyond detention.

RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **European Association of Institutes for Vocational Training (EVBB)**: EVBB is a European umbrella organisation for vocational education and training providers, promoting cooperation and innovation in VET. Its network can support connections between detention houses, vocational education providers and labour-market opportunities.
- **European Prison Education Association (EPEA)**: EPEA brings together professionals and organisations working on education in detention and provides expertise on learning opportunities for people deprived of their liberty. It can contribute specialist knowledge on ensuring that education remains accessible and connected to mainstream education systems.
- **Local and regional education and training providers**: Schools, adult education centres, universities, libraries and community learning organisations can help residents maintain continuity in education during detention. VET providers and apprenticeship organisations can provide practical skills linked to employment opportunities. Maintaining these connections reduces disruption to learning and supports lifelong learning before, during and after detention.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:

- **United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners** (United Nations, 2015, Rules 104–105)¹⁷: Education and vocational training should be available to people in detention, supporting continuity of learning and preparation for life after detention.
- **Council of Europe European Prison Rules** (Council of Europe, 2020, Rule 28)¹⁸: The European Prison Rules establish education as an integral part of the prison regime and state that it should have no less status than work. Rule 28 calls for education to be provided to all people in prison and, as far as practicable, to be integrated with the country's educational and vocational training system and provided under the auspices of external educational institutions. The Rules also emphasise the importance of enabling people in detention to continue their education and vocational training after release. They therefore support a model in which detention facilities maintain strong links with community-based education and training providers and ensure continuity of learning before, during and after detention.

SDG 5 — GENDER EQUALITY — ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWER ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS



ISSUE

Women represent a minority of the prison population, meaning that many detention systems are designed primarily around the needs of men. As a result, women may be placed far from their families and have limited access to gender-specific healthcare and appropriate facilities for parenting responsibilities (ICRC, 2020, pp. 3–4).¹⁹ The United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules) similarly emphasise the need for gender-sensitive healthcare, including specific attention to women's reproductive health, and for measures that take account of women's family responsibilities (United Nations, 2011, Rules 5, 10–18).²⁰

Many women entering prison have experienced domestic violence, exploitation, poverty or social exclusion before their incarceration (PRI & TIJ, 2017). Yet traditional prison systems often focus primarily on security rather than addressing these underlying factors. Women may also face specific barriers within justice systems, including limited access to alternatives to detention, inadequate healthcare and insufficient trauma-informed support (United Nations, 2011, Rules 57–62). Separation from children and communities can further disrupt family relationships and undermine social reintegration (ICRC, 2020, pp. 3–4).

Gender equality within detention also concerns LGBTQ+ people, who face heightened risks of violence and discrimination from staff or from other people sharing the same facility. Placement systems can present particular challenges for transgender people, including questions around allocation to male or female facilities and access to gender-appropriate healthcare (Penal Reform International, 2023).²¹ At EU level, the European Commission Recommendation on detention conditions (2022) explicitly identifies LGBTQ people among those in situations of particular vulnerability and calls on Member States to prevent violence and ill-treatment and to ensure that detention does not further aggravate their marginalisation.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 4 by creating greater opportunities for continuity in education, vocational training and skills development during detention. Their community-integrated approach can facilitate links with local schools, training providers and other educational services, while their smaller scale may allow educational activities to be more closely aligned with individual needs. Where these opportunities are available, education can support continued learning and help maintain pathways towards employment and social reintegration.

👉 READ MORE

INSPIRATIONAL PRACTICE

HALBE TREPPE (GERMANY)

Halbe Treppe is an open detention facility for women located in the Mohorn district of the town of Wilsdruff, in the German state of Saxony. The facility was established in 2022 through a collaboration between the Saxon State Ministry of Justice, Chemnitz Prison, and the NGO Outlaw gGmbH, which is responsible for its daily operations. Halbe Treppe was created to address the lack of suitable open facilities for women serving a prison sentence in Saxony, offering an environment focused on reintegration and autonomy.

Its approach centers on pro-social learning within a small group structure that encourages a “positive group culture.” The facility supports participants in developing personal goals, preparing emotionally and structurally for release, and building toward an independent and socially responsible life. The name Halbe Treppe (“Half the Staircase”) symbolizes the incremental and reflective journey each woman takes on the path to reintegration.

Link to the SDG: Halbe Treppe provides an example of a smaller, community-integrated detention setting for women and mothers with children. It can therefore be seen as contributing to more gender-responsive approaches to detention, particularly by providing an alternative setting for women within the detention system.





PIS D'ACOLLIDA (SPAIN)

Penitentiary Pastoral Association, also known as APP, is a non-profit association that runs a transition house, named Pis d'Acollida, located on the outskirts of Palma, a city in Mallorca. Pis d'Acollida is described as a comprehensive support and counseling service for former people in detention in the process of social-employment integration. In addition to the transition house, APP offers non-residential support to people who have been released from prison and are in a situation of social exclusion. Furthermore, they run a project to support people in detention during their leave from prison. This mixed-gender transition house accommodates 12 individuals who experience social exclusion after their sentence, based on three fundamental principles: normalisation, responsibility, and autonomy. Residents interact daily with the community both inside and outside the facility, supporting a diverse age group (18–60 years).

Link to the SDG: As a mixed-gender facility, Pis d'Acollida shows that reintegration support built around normalisation, responsibility and autonomy — rather than a security model designed by and for men — can serve women and men equally well, addressing SDG 5's call for equal access to services regardless of gender.

RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **RESCALED knowledge workspace on women:** The RESCALED Knowledge Workspace on Women is a collaborative knowledge platform dedicated to advancing gender-responsive detention houses and justice reform for women. Developed through the Erasmus+ WOMEN project (Workspace for Mapping, Engaging, and Networking with, for, and by Incarcerated Women), it brings together research, policy, lived experience and inspirational practices to support the transition from large prison institutions to small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses. The workspace provides practical tools, evidence, personal stories, communication resources and opportunities for networking and peer learning, enabling policymakers, practitioners, researchers and people with lived experience to co-create more humane and effective responses to women's detention.
- **WOMEN beyond walls:** The global mapping of organisations with and for women affected by the criminal legal system is developed by WOMEN Beyond Wall. It is a global, interactive directory of organisations, initiatives and services working with women in conflict with the law. It provides an overview of community-based programmes, advocacy organisations, research centres and justice initiatives across different countries, making it easier to identify partners, exchange knowledge and learn from innovative practices. For organisations developing detention houses or gender-responsive justice policies, the Map serves as a valuable resource for connecting with practitioners and experts working to reduce the over-incarceration of women and promote community-based alternatives.
- **Women against violence in Europe (WAVE):** WAVE is a European network of organisations working to prevent and combat violence against women and children, with a particular focus on domestic and gender-based violence. Given the high prevalence of prior victimisation among women in detention, WAVE's expertise on trauma-informed, survivor-centred support is directly relevant to detention houses seeking to address the underlying experiences of violence that often precede women's contact with the justice system.
- **ILGA-Europe:** ILGA-Europe is the European region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, working to advance the human rights of LGBTI people across Europe and Central Asia through advocacy, research and capacity-building with member organisations. Its work on LGBTI people in detention, asylum and the criminal justice system provides evidence and policy expertise directly relevant to gender-responsive and LGBTQ+-inclusive detention houses.
- **Local women's, LGBTQ+ and gender-based violence organisations:** Local women's shelters, domestic-violence services, sexual-violence support organisations, LGBTQ+ community organisations, healthcare providers and social services can provide direct support to residents and help detention houses maintain continuity between detention and community life.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:

- **United Nations Rules for the Treatment of Women Prisoners and Non-custodial Measures for Women Offenders (Bangkok Rules, 2010)**: The Bangkok Rules provide gender-specific standards for women in detention and support gender-responsive approaches to detention and the use of non-custodial measures where appropriate.
- **Yogyakarta Principles (2007)**²²: The Yogyakarta Principles set out how existing international human rights standards apply to sexual orientation and gender identity across a wide range of areas. Principle 9, on the right to treatment with humanity while in detention, affirms that everyone deprived of liberty must be treated with humanity and dignity and that sexual orientation and gender identity are integral to that dignity. It calls on states to address placement, searches, access to gender-affirming healthcare and the use of protective isolation in ways that respect the rights and dignity of LGBTQ+ people.
- **Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5**²³: Adopted unanimously by the Committee of Ministers in 2010, this recommendation sets out measures for member states to combat discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity across many areas of life, including criminal justice and detention. It calls on states to ensure that LGBTQ+ people deprived of their liberty are protected from violence and discrimination, treated with dignity, and given access to appropriate healthcare and privacy protections. It remains the Council of Europe's principal reference instrument on LGBTQ+ rights.

PLANET

"We are determined to protect the planet from degradation, including through sustainable consumption and production, sustainably managing its natural resources and taking urgent action on climate change, so that it can support the needs of the present and future generations."

— *Preamble, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*

IDEA OF CHANGE

JUSTICE, PLANET, AND COMMUNITY: RETHINKING DETENTION THROUGH TERRITORY

By Suzann Cordeiro — Architect & Professor, The Federal University of Alagoas; UNODC Consultant (Brazil)

For decades, debates about detention have been shaped by conceptual frameworks produced primarily in the Global North. These frameworks are often presented as universal, especially the idea of normalization. As Foucault reminds us, this concept emerged to describe mechanisms of discipline and control. Over time, it has been reformulated as a path to humanization. Today, however, I want to invite a more critical analysis of this notion. Because justice matters—and because the conditions that define what we call “normal” are profoundly unequal in the world.

I would like to begin by recognizing something essential: justice and the planet are deeply connected.

The built environment of detention is not neutral. It produces ecological, economic, and social impacts that shape the communities around it. But to answer the question of how detention facilities can respect the planet and local communities, we must first acknowledge that global contexts are profoundly unequal. This inequality becomes clear in the cost and scale of prison infrastructure. In the Global North, a large capacity prison costs \$120 million for 300 beds. In Latin America and the Global South, it costs \$20 million for 1,000 beds. These numbers are not just technical data; they reveal different economic realities and social priorities. And they show why imported models, based on Northern standards, are often unsustainable in territories marked by structural inequality.

In many regions of the Global South, conditions outside prison — access to health care, education, drinking water, and basic safety — are so precarious that, paradoxically, prison may offer more stability than freedom. This is not a defence of incarceration, but a diagnosis of social fragility that forces us to ask: How can we speak of normalization inside the prison when the social environment outside it is profoundly unequal? This became even clearer to me during a project in Angola. I was hired to design a prison for one thousand people in the province of Malanje, six hundred kilometres from Luanda. When I arrived, I began observing the territory and speaking with residents of the nearby town of Damba.

I discovered that the town had grown because of the penitentiary, which had originally been an agricultural farm with a small Portuguese colonial village — later destroyed during the civil war. The prison produced much of the region's food, allowing incarcerated people to support their families through agriculture. In other words, the prison was part of the local ecosystem — economically, socially, and historically.

By understanding this, I proposed restoring the old colonial village: houses, a school, a church, a public square, and a space for a weekly market where products from the penitentiary could be sold. This semi open unit is still considered a national model in Angola and has received several human rights awards. This experience taught me that architecture has the ability to transform spaces, but only when it listens to the territory and the people who inhabit it.

So, how can detention facilities respect the planet and local communities?

First, by recognizing the built environment as a strategy for ensuring rights — adopting the idea of integral capacity, which includes physical, psychosocial, symbolic, and humanitarian dimensions. We must develop methodologies that allow us to design spatial solutions that truly correspond to local realities. This means working with local construction materials, understanding local climate, local labor, and local cultural practices. It also means recognizing that many people who end up in detention were never fully included in the social systems that teach rules, norms, and expectations, since they did not have access to schooling, stable work, or family support structures. So when we design detention facilities, we are not only designing buildings. **We are designing spaces of learning, re-socialization, and belonging.**

And this requires methodologies that are not imported, but co-created with the community — methodologies that understand the social literacy of the territory, the gaps in formal education, and the symbolic meaning of space. Second, by creating design solutions rooted in the territory, built with the participation of local actors.

Third, for detention facilities to be sustainable - socially, environmentally and economically, we must rethink the very idea of capacity. Nowadays, many systems calculate capacity only by counting beds. But a bed is not a unit of dignity or a unit of rights. We must adopt **integral capacity**, also known as "bed plus." Integral capacity means that a vacancy is only valid if it includes a bed plus access to healthcare, education, work, green space, and social support. Without these, a bed is just a number, not a place.

When we treat people as numbers, we produce the overcrowding — that destroys communities, the environment and any possibility of rehabilitation. Integral capacity forces us to design facilities that are smaller, distributed, territorial, and connected to local ecosystems.

It is a strategy that respects the planet by reducing environmental pressure, communities by preventing the creation of massive isolated complexes and people by guaranteeing that deprivation of liberty does not mean deprivation of humanity.

Fourth, by integrating agriculture, green spaces, and food production as forms of connection between the facility and the community. And finally, by ensuring that detention facilities are not fortresses that drain resources, but nodes of shared prosperity, connected to local services and social networks.

Respecting the planet and local communities requires moving away from a model of punishment as subtraction and toward a vision of justice as investment — in people, in communities, and in the environment. Detention facilities can respect the planet when they stop working as isolated structures and become integrated ecosystems, committed to sustainability and dignity.

But inequality is not only material. It is also institutional. Many international forums and organizations that shape global debates on detention unintentionally reproduce exclusion. When events are priced in high-value currencies like dollars or euros, participation becomes nearly impossible for countries with devalued currencies, while language becomes another barrier. English is often required — but in the Global South, English is a privilege not a public right. Only those with higher socioeconomic status can afford international language courses. This means that entire regions — entire perspectives — are systematically excluded from global conversations.

If we want global standards, we must first ensure global access.

This is the future of detention. A future built not on numbers, but on dignity.

THE PLANET DIMENSION

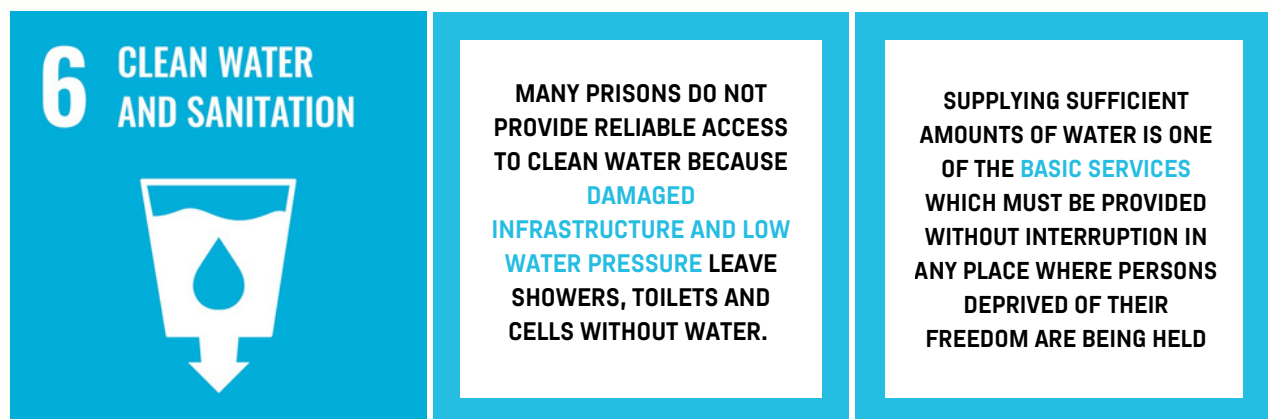
The Planet dimension of sustainable development focuses on protecting natural resources, reducing environmental harm and ensuring that human activities remain within ecological limits. In the context of detention, this means recognising that prisons are significant consumers of energy, water, food and materials, while also offering opportunities to develop more sustainable and community-oriented approaches.

Small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses create opportunities to rethink the relationship between detention, people and the environment. Because they are embedded within local communities and territories, they can function as part of the local ecosystem of people, services and natural resources. Their smaller scale allows for more sustainable use of existing buildings, reduced resource consumption, shared resources with local actors and participation in environmental initiatives. Sustainability is therefore not only about reducing the negative impact of detention facilities, but also about creating places where residents can contribute positively to their surroundings.

The following SDGs show how detention houses can contribute to more sustainable justice systems through responsible resource use, environmental awareness and stronger connections with local ecosystems.

SDGs

ESDG 6 — CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION — ENSURE AVAILABILITY AND SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WATER AND SANITATION FOR ALL



ISSUE

Many prison systems struggle with 200-year-old infrastructure, overcrowding and insufficient investment in water and sanitation systems. Large institutions place significant pressure on water networks and wastewater treatment facilities. Poor sanitation conditions can contribute to health risks for residents and staff, while untreated or inefficiently managed wastewater can negatively affect surrounding ecosystems and communities (Nembrini, 2013).²⁴

In Greece, for example, a 2025 inspection by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture found that sanitary facilities across several prisons were regularly out of order, with insufficient access to hot water, compounding already severe overcrowding (Council of Europe CPT, 2026).²⁵

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 6 by creating opportunities for appropriate water, sanitation and hygiene management. Their smaller scale may allow water and sanitation facilities to be managed more closely and can provide opportunities to incorporate efficient water use and environmentally responsible practices into the design and operation of the

Access to safe water and sanitation is a fundamental human right. Sustainable detention therefore requires attention both to the environmental management of water and wastewater and to living conditions that protect the health, dignity and well-being of people in detention.

LA FERME DE MOYEMBRIE (FRANCE)



La Ferme de Moyembrie is a transition house for men over 25 in the final six months of their sentence, part of a wider network of "farms" run under the Emmaüs France movement since 1990. Residents live and work on-site under the legal statute of placement à l'extérieur, recovering dignity through work and a family-style living arrangement, while the farm's income — from selling its produce and residents' contributions toward accommodation and food — keeps

the daily cost to the prison administration three times lower than in standard French prisons.

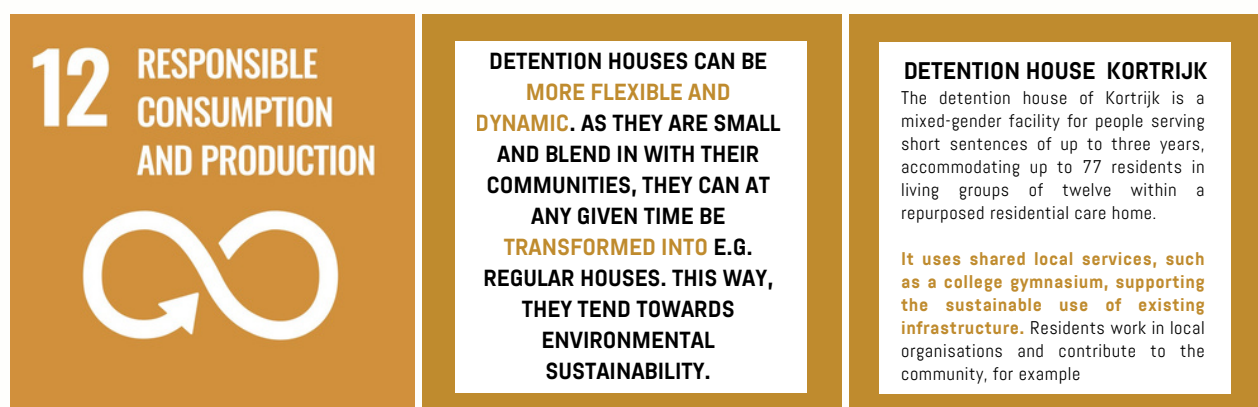
As part of its farming operations, the site treats the wastewater from its animal husbandry through an on-site phytopurification station — a natural, plant-based filtration system — rather than relying on external treatment (Courrier Picard, 2022).²⁶

Link to the SDG: By treating its own wastewater on-site through natural filtration, alongside its broader model of financial self-sufficiency, Ferme Moyembrie shows how even a small, resource-limited detention setting can take responsibility for its environmental footprint rather than depending entirely on outside infrastructure.

 **READ MORE**



SDG 12 — RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION — ENSURE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION PATTERNS



ISSUE

Beyond energy, a large prison institution relies on constant supplies of food, water, cleaning products and other materials — and generates substantial waste in return. Much of this is linked to ageing infrastructure: older facilities may have outdated heating systems, poor insulation and inefficient lighting, while limited natural light and ventilation can increase resource use. Round-the-clock lighting and security operations, combined with high occupancy, can further increase this footprint (UNICRI & Penal Reform International, 2025).

Because many large prison facilities were designed primarily around security and capacity rather than circularity, opportunities for reuse, repair and local sourcing may be limited, resulting in significant consumption of materials and generation of waste.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 12 by creating opportunities to reduce resource consumption and waste in everyday operations. Their smaller scale can make activities such as cooking, shopping, waste separation, recycling, repair and reuse more manageable, while community integration can facilitate links with local services and organisations. The reuse of existing buildings can be another opportunity. Adaptive reuse can extend the life of existing buildings and avoid some of the material and resource demands associated with new construction. It can also create opportunities to integrate resource efficiency and long-term sustainability into decisions about how detention infrastructure is planned, renovated and operated.

DETENTION HOUSE KORTRIJK (BELGIUM)

Detention House Kortrijk is a mixed-gender facility for people serving short sentences of up to three years. It accommodates up to 77 residents in living groups of twelve within a repurposed residential care home, demonstrating how existing infrastructure can be adapted for justice purposes rather than replaced through new construction. Located in the heart of the city and easily accessible by public transport, the detention house is embedded within the local community and makes use of existing neighbourhood services, such as the gymnasium of a nearby college.

Community participation is an integral part of daily life. Residents work in local organisations, undertake voluntary activities as part of their restitution to society, and contribute to community initiatives. Examples include baking waffles for a local primary school, participating in a buddy project with VIVES University of Applied Sciences, organising a poetry slam, and taking part in football activities that bring together residents of the detention house and the surrounding neighbourhood.

Link to SDG 12: Kortrijk illustrates that responsible consumption and production is not only about reducing the environmental footprint of buildings, but also about organising justice infrastructure more efficiently. By repurposing an existing building and making strategic use of local services, facilities and community partnerships, the detention house avoids unnecessary duplication of resources. More broadly, it demonstrates how detention houses can become part of an existing local ecosystem, where infrastructure, knowledge and community assets are shared, contributing to more sustainable patterns of consumption and production.

MARIBO HALFWAY HOUSE (DENMARK)

Maribo Halfway House is a small-scale, mixed-gender facility for 20 residents, created through the adaptive reuse of a former detention centre. Rather than building new, the Danish Prison and Probation Service transformed the heritage-listed building into a community-integrated space geared towards restoration and reintegration: barred rooms became brighter, more home-like spaces with larger windows, while a stark exercise yard was transformed into a landscaped terrace with a shared kitchen, workshop, sports field and playground for visiting children.

Link to SDG 12: Maribo shows how responsible consumption and production in detention can start with the decision to reuse what already exists. By renovating existing infrastructure rather than constructing a new prison institution, the project extends the life of an existing building and avoids the material demands associated with new construction. It demonstrates how adaptive reuse can be part of a more sustainable approach to developing detention infrastructure.



SHELTON ABBEY OPEN CENTRE (IRELAND)

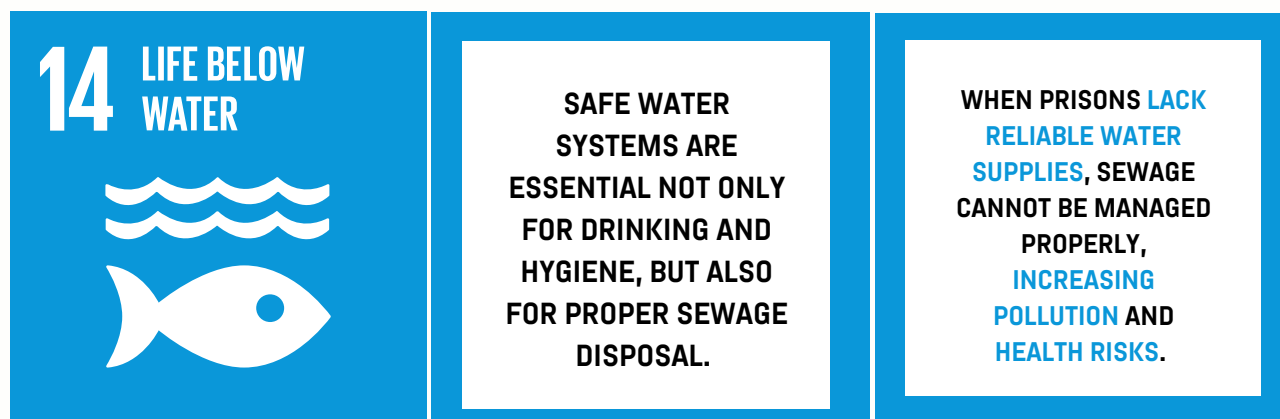
Shelton Abbey is an open prison operated by the Irish Prison Service, accommodating up to 115 men in two buildings within a former stately home in County Wicklow. Residents are housed either in the predominantly single-room Avoca House or in dormitory-style accommodation in the main building. The open nature of the facility encourages active participation in daily life, education, work and community engagement. Residents are involved in initiatives such as the Dogs for the Disabled training programme, farm work and a range of outdoor activities connected to the surrounding environment.

As part of the [Irish Prison Service Climate Action Roadmap](#), Shelton Abbey has also been identified as a site for renewable energy development, including the installation of solar photovoltaic panels. These investments aim to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, lower greenhouse gas emissions and improve the environmental sustainability of the facility's operations. The open setting further enables residents to develop a closer connection with the natural environment through outdoor work and environmental stewardship.

Link to SDG 13: Shelton Abbey doesn't just aim to do less damage — by installing solar panels, it's actively contributing to the country's renewable energy goals, showing that justice infrastructure can be part of the climate solution, not just a smaller part of the problem.



SDG 14 — LIFE BELOW WATER — CONSERVE AND SUSTAINABLY USE THE OCEANS, SEAS AND MARINE RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



ISSUE

Wastewater and runoff from buildings eventually enter rivers, coastal areas or other aquatic ecosystems, and detention facilities are no exception. While SDG 6 focuses on access to safe water and adequate sanitation, SDG 14 also highlights the importance of preventing pollution from reaching aquatic environments. Detention facilities located near rivers, coastal areas or other sensitive ecosystems may therefore have environmental impacts, particularly where wastewater infrastructure is outdated or poorly adapted to local conditions (UNICRI & Penal Reform International, 2025).

The environmental impact of detention is consequently not limited to what happens within the facility itself. Wastewater management, runoff and resource use can affect the ecosystems surrounding detention facilities and should therefore be considered as part of their wider environmental footprint.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can provide opportunities to consider these wider environmental impacts when planning and operating detention facilities. Their smaller scale and connection to local communities may facilitate locally adapted approaches to water management, wastewater treatment, rainwater collection and cooperation with municipalities or environmental organisations.

However, there is currently limited documented evidence of detention houses specifically contributing to the protection of marine or freshwater ecosystems. This should therefore be understood as an area of potential rather than an established impact. Further monitoring, research and good practices will be needed to assess how different approaches to water and wastewater management in detention houses can contribute to SDG 14.

SDG 15 — LIFE ON LAND — PROTECT, RESTORE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE USE OF TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS, SUSTAINABLY MANAGE FORESTS, COMBAT DESERTIFICATION, AND HALT AND REVERSE LAND DEGRADATION AND BIODIVERSITY LOSS



ISSUE

People in detention often have limited access to natural environments. Access to outdoor space, and even views of the outdoors from living areas, can influence how people experience detention, while contact with vegetation and green surroundings has been associated with reduced self-harm and violence (Pape & Johnsen, 2026; Moran et al., 2021)^{27,28}. Limited access to nature can also restrict opportunities for meaningful activities involving care, responsibility and learning.

The environmental dimension extends beyond individual well-being. Many large prison institutions occupy substantial areas of land and may have extensive paved or impermeable surfaces, while their isolated location can limit opportunities to connect detention with surrounding green spaces and ecosystems (UNICRI & Penal Reform International, 2025). The relationship between detention facilities and the land they occupy therefore has implications for both people in detention and the surrounding environment.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 15 by creating opportunities to integrate nature, biodiversity and sustainable land use into detention environments. Their smaller scale and community integration can facilitate activities such as community gardening, ecological restoration, sustainable agriculture and nature-based learning, where appropriate to the location and setting.

This approach has been described as the “nature-based detention house” (Fokker, 2023)²⁹: a small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention facility that goes beyond minimising environmental harm and actively considers the ecosystem in which it is located. This can involve architectural choices such as green facades, rooftop gardens and accessible outdoor spaces, as well as activities involving food growing, ecological management and care for the surrounding environment.

The potential contribution is therefore twofold: creating greater opportunities for people in detention to engage with nature while also considering biodiversity and the ecological value of the site itself. However, the extent to which these approaches produce measurable biodiversity outcomes will depend on their design, implementation and local context.

TRONDHEIM PRISON (NORWAY)

Leira Unit is the low-security section of Trondheim Prison and accommodates around 30 residents. Located close to the city of Trondheim, the unit focuses on gradual reintegration by promoting responsibility, autonomy and meaningful connections with society. Its location enables residents to maintain links with the local community while serving the final part of their sentence.

Community engagement and practical learning are central to the facility's approach. Through Norway's school import model, residents participate in vocational programmes such as gardening and car maintenance delivered by teachers from local educational institutions. Residents also contribute to gardening and the maintenance of shared outdoor spaces. In addition, Leira Unit operates Leira Gartneri, a public garden centre where residents work alongside staff and interact with members of the local community through everyday activities.

Link to SDG 15: Leira Unit illustrates how detention can foster a meaningful relationship between people and the natural environment. By engaging residents in gardening, land stewardship and the care of shared green spaces, the unit encourages responsibility for local ecosystems while creating opportunities for learning, wellbeing and community interaction. More broadly, it demonstrates that detention houses can integrate nature into everyday life, supporting both personal development and more sustainable relationships with terrestrial ecosystems.

SHELTON ABBEY OPEN CENTRE (IRELAND)



In 2024, Shelton Abbey set up a native tree nursery on site, working together with the social enterprise Pocket Forests, the Irish Prison Service and Coillte. Residents look after more than 2,000 saplings from nine different native Irish tree species, guided by prison staff. Once the trees are ready, they're moved to community-created "pocket forests" in urban areas, helping bring nature back into cities and supporting local climate and biodiversity efforts (Agriland, 2024)³⁰.

Link to SDG 15: This nursery shows how detention can bring people closer to nature. By giving residents a hands-on role in growing trees that will end up in their communities, the initiative builds ecological skills and a sense of purpose, while directly supporting reforestation and greener cities. It's a good example of how detention facilities can play an active part in protecting biodiversity and tackling climate change, rather than standing apart from it.

PROSPERITY

"We are determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature."

— Preamble, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

IDEA OF CHANGE

BECAUSE JUSTICE MATTERS: **FROM EXCLUSION TO PROSPERITY**

By Alessio Scandurra — Director of Research, Associazione Antigone (Italy)

For decades, the human rights movement has fought against the "darkness" of prisons—against torture, overcrowding, and the stripping of basic dignity. It has been an existential and precious challenge for many of us, without which many of the tools and institutions we have today to protect the rights of people deprived of their liberty would not exist. But today, I want to invite you to look beyond the fight against abuse and toward the fight for prosperity.

Prosperity is a state where individuals and societies are stable, have access to real opportunities, and live with a sense of security, health, and well-being. In the context of justice, prosperity represents a radical shift in the notion of deprivation of liberty. For too long, the prison has functioned as a social institution designed to create and reproduce social exclusion. The idea was, and in large part remains, that security and prosperity should be guaranteed through social exclusion. And the prison has contributed to fulfilling this task—a device that takes those on the margins and pushes them further into the void.

It tells the person incarcerated: "You do not belong". And it tells the community: "This is not your problem." The current system acts as a shield. It protects us from our social responsibilities by creating a false binary: the "goodies" on one side of the wall, and the "baddies" on the other, strengthening our self-representation as "good people" who need to be defended from "dangerous people".

The prison thus becomes a wall that doesn't just keep people in; it keeps society out. It allows us to outsource our failures to a closed box, hoping that "rehabilitation" happens in a vacuum. But we know the truth. You cannot teach a person to live in freedom by keeping them in a cage. You cannot create social cohesion and prosperity through isolation.

To move toward prosperity, we must transform this system from one that marginalizes to a network of services that does the exact opposite. We are talking about a system where society—which means all of us—must engage directly.

We must stop hiding behind the wall and start building bridges. We need a network of services that, when it enforces deprivation of liberty, does so in forms integrated into the fabric of the neighborhood. These are not fortresses; they are part of the local ecosystem. When a detention house is integrated, it ensures continuity. The person is not "removed" from society and then "re-inserted" like a broken part. Instead, they remain connected to the local health services, the local job market, and their families. This integration can create shared prosperity. When we stop spending billions on massive, isolated warehouses for human beings and start investing in community-based structures, the resources are shared. The money is invested in the community, and for the community.

In this context, prosperity means that the detention house contributes to other social systems rather than draining them. It becomes a place where harm is repaired, not multiplied. Our goal is to move from a logic of "punishment as subtraction"—subtracting time, subtracting rights, subtracting humanity—to a logic of "justice as investment". We are calling for a system that recognizes that the well-being of the person who has caused harm is inextricably linked to the well-being of the community.

You cannot have a prosperous society if you have "wasteland" zones where human rights go to die. Let us stop settling for "better prisons." Let us demand prosperity. Let us build an ecosystem where security is found in connection, not in locks; where health is a right, not a luxury; and where every individual has the opportunity to create lasting value. The wall is a temporary fix. Prosperity is the lasting structure. Let's build it together.

THE PROSPERITY DIMENSION

The Prosperity dimension of sustainable development focuses on ensuring that all people can lead fulfilling lives and that economic, social and technological progress benefits society as a whole. In the context of detention, this means recognising that detention should not create further exclusion, but should support the conditions necessary for people to rebuild their lives and contribute to their communities.

The following SDGs demonstrate how detention houses contribute to prosperity by promoting employment, innovation, inclusive communities and reduced inequalities.

SDGs

SDG 7 — AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY — ENSURE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE, RELIABLE, SUSTAINABLE AND MODERN ENERGY FOR ALL



ISSUE

Heating, lighting, ventilation and round-the-clock security systems make energy one of the largest recurring costs of running a large prison institution. Older prison buildings often suffer from poor insulation and outdated infrastructure, resulting in high operational costs and unnecessary environmental impact. At the same time, people in detention often have limited opportunities to participate in sustainability initiatives or develop skills connected to emerging labour markets.

A sustainable justice system therefore needs to consider both how energy is used within detention facilities and how people in detention can participate in the transition towards more sustainable practices (UNICRI & Penal Reform International, 2025).

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 7 by creating opportunities to integrate energy efficiency and renewable energy considerations into the design and operation of detention facilities. Their smaller scale can facilitate approaches such as energy-efficient renovation, renewable energy systems and the adaptive reuse of existing buildings, depending on the characteristics of the site.

Beyond energy consumption itself, these approaches can provide opportunities for residents to develop practical skills related to energy efficiency and the green transition, where appropriate training and partnerships are available.

LOUGHAN HOUSE (IRELAND)

Loughan House is an open, low-security facility operated by the Irish Prison Service for men who are suitable for a gradual transition back into the community. Its approach is based on trust, responsibility and preparation for life after detention. Residents can access education, employment opportunities and community-based activities, reflecting a facility where detention remains connected to society rather than functioning as an isolated institution.

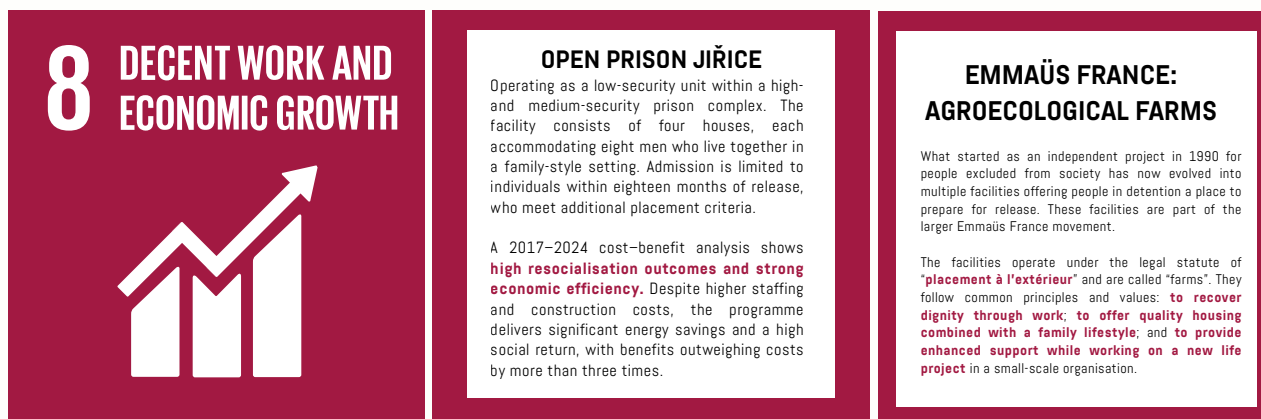
As part of the Irish Prison Service Climate Action Roadmap, Loughan House has been identified as a location for renewable energy initiatives, including planned solar photovoltaic installations aimed at reducing energy consumption and carbon emissions across the prison estate. The initiative demonstrates how existing detention facilities can contribute to the transition towards cleaner and more efficient energy use.

The open character of Loughan House also creates opportunities for residents to engage with sustainability in practice. By living in a setting based on responsibility and participation, residents can develop skills and awareness that support more sustainable lifestyles beyond detention.

Link to the SDG: Loughan House demonstrates how detention facilities can move from being passive consumers of energy towards becoming more sustainable and responsible infrastructures. For detention houses, the lesson is that affordable and clean energy is not only about reducing operational costs, but also about creating environments where people can develop responsibility, practical skills and a stronger connection with their surroundings. This reflects the wider ambition of SDG 7: ensuring that sustainable energy contributes to inclusive and prosperous communities.



SDG 8 — DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH — PROMOTE SUSTAINED, INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH, FULL AND PRODUCTIVE EMPLOYMENT AND DECENT WORK FOR ALL



ISSUE

People entering detention often already experience significant barriers to employment, including limited education, unstable work histories, poverty and social exclusion. Incarceration can further deepen these disadvantages by disrupting employment, reducing income and creating additional barriers after release.

Although prison work exists in many countries, opportunities are often insufficient, poorly connected to labour market needs or offered under conditions that do not reflect decent work principles. In some contexts, people in prison receive very limited compensation, lack labour protections or perform work that provides few transferable skills (PRI & TIJ, 2017).

Women in detention can face additional inequalities, with fewer work opportunities and training programmes that often reinforce traditional gender roles rather than supporting economic independence (UN Human Rights Council, 2009, para. 51; UN, 2013, para. 68)³¹.

The absence of meaningful work and skills development increases the risk of unemployment, poverty and reoffending after release. Supporting access to decent work is therefore a central element of sustainable reintegration (PRI, 2016, p. 7)³².

“The UN Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery has called for people in prison to be recognised as workers and to enjoy labour rights comparable to those of workers outside prison, including fair remuneration, safe and decent working conditions, reasonable deductions and access to social security and vocational training” (Obokata, 2024, paras. 44–51)³³.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 8 by creating greater opportunities for access to decent work, vocational training and economic participation during and after detention. Their community-integrated character can facilitate connections with local employers, training providers and employment services, while their smaller scale may make it easier to accommodate work or training as part of an individual's pathway through detention.

Where employment opportunities are available, maintaining or developing skills and competencies can help limit some of the disruption to employment caused by detention and support preparation for life after release. This is particularly relevant to the principle of decent work, which encompasses not only employment itself but also fair remuneration, safe working conditions, labour rights and opportunities for skills development.

The potential contribution of detention houses to SDG 8 therefore lies not simply in providing work during detention, but in maintaining pathways towards meaningful and appropriately protected participation in the labour market.

READ MORE

INSPIRATIONAL PRACTICE

HOUSE OF RECOVERY TWENTE (NETHERLANDS)



House of Recovery Twente provides accommodation for men during the final 18 months of their sentence, supporting their transition back into society through a strong network of cross-domain partnerships. The facility brings together actors from the justice system, municipalities, healthcare, housing, employment and social services to ensure that residents receive coordinated support before their release.

The initiative emerged from the Dutch white paper on the future of sanctions, *Koers en Kansen* (2017), which called for greater collaboration between the justice sector, local governments and public services. This integrated approach has proven so valuable that, following the withdrawal of national funding on 1 January 2026, all fourteen municipalities in the Twente region jointly decided to finance the continuation of the House of Recovery. Their collective investment reflects a shared recognition that successful reintegration benefits not only the individual but also the wider community.

Link to SDG 8: House of Recovery Twente demonstrates that sustainable economic growth depends on investing in people's successful participation in society. By coordinating support across justice, healthcare, employment and local government, the facility helps remove barriers to work, housing and social inclusion before release. More broadly, it illustrates how detention houses can strengthen local economies by investing in human potential and reducing the long-term social and economic costs of exclusion and reoffending.



 **READ MORE**

INSPIRATIONAL PRACTICE

OPEN PRISON JIŘICE (CZECH REPUBLIC)

Open Prison Jiřice is a low-security facility located on the grounds of a high- and medium-security prison. It accommodates residents in four houses, each providing a family-style living environment for up to eight men. Admission is limited to men within 18 months of release who are medically fit for work, motivated to actively participate in the programme, and willing to acknowledge responsibility for their offence.

Community engagement is a defining feature of its way of working. Although the municipality initially opposed the establishment of the open prison due to safety concerns, this relationship changed significantly following public dialogue and the opening of the facility. Today, a formal cooperation agreement enables residents to undertake voluntary work in the community, such as maintaining public spaces and contributing to village improvement projects. The mayor serves on the prison director's advisory board, and the facility also creates employment opportunities for local residents.

A cost-benefit analysis covering the period 2017–2024 demonstrates the facility's broader societal value. While the open prison requires higher staffing levels and greater initial investment than a traditional prison, these costs are more than offset by its social and economic returns. The analysis found strong resocialisation outcomes, significant energy savings and a social return on investment that exceeds the additional operating costs by more than threefold.

Link to SDG 8: Jiřice demonstrates that investment in reintegration can generate long-term economic and social value. By combining meaningful responsibility, community participation and strong local partnerships, the facility supports residents in developing the skills and social capital needed for successful reintegration. More broadly, it illustrates that detention houses should be understood not simply as a cost, but as a long-term investment in people and communities, one that can deliver measurable returns for society while contributing to more inclusive and sustainable economic development.

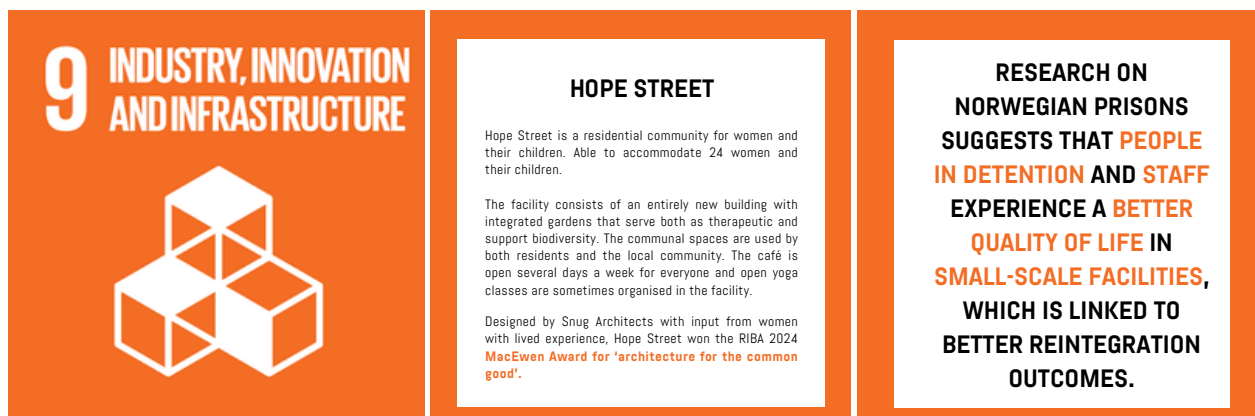
RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **EuroPris:** EuroPris is a European network of prison and correctional services that promotes professional practice and the exchange of knowledge between European prison administrations. Its work on employment, vocational training and reintegration can support detention houses and prison administrations in developing approaches to work that are aligned with European standards and connected to labour-market participation after release. EuroPris also provides a useful platform for sharing practices between prison administrations and other organisations involved in detention and reintegration.
- **Local employers and social enterprises:** Concrete partnerships — apprenticeship placements, work-release schemes with local businesses, or social enterprises that hire directly from detention houses — give residents access to real jobs rather than institutional work programmes. A detention house's small scale makes these direct, one-to-one employer relationships possible in a way that a large prison, negotiating at institutional scale, cannot easily replicate.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:

- **Council of Europe European Prison Rules (2020, Rule 26):** Prison work should be useful, support people's ability to earn a living after release, and provide opportunities for vocational training. Work should, as far as possible, resemble work in the community.
- **United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules, 2015, Rules 96–100):** The Nelson Mandela Rules recognise work as an important component of rehabilitation and preparation for life after detention. Rules 96–98 provide that sentenced people should have the opportunity to work, that prison work should not be punitive or exploitative, and that work should, where possible, maintain or increase their ability to earn a living after release. Vocational training should also be provided to people who can benefit from it. Rule 99 further states that the organisation and methods of prison work should resemble those of comparable work outside prison as closely as possible, supporting the transition to normal occupational life.
- **Council of Europe Resolution No. R (75) 25 on Prison Labour (1975):** Resolution No. R (75) 25 on Prison Labour provides an early Council of Europe framework for approaching prison work as preparation for life and employment after release. Its principles underpin the later European Prison Rules, particularly the emphasis on normalisation, vocational development and working conditions that resemble those outside prison. The Council of Europe commentary to Rule 26 explicitly identifies the Resolution as an important predecessor to the current European standards on prison labour.

SDG 9 — INDUSTRY, INNOVATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE — BUILD RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE, PROMOTE INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE INDUSTRIALIZATION AND FOSTER INNOVATION



ISSUE

Traditional prison infrastructure has often been developed around principles of security, separation and capacity, rather than connection, adaptability and social integration. Many prisons are large, centralised facilities that require significant upfront investment, are costly to maintain, and are disconnected from the communities to which residents will eventually return (ICRC, 2020, pp. 8–9).

The design and location of these facilities can create additional barriers to reintegration. Distance from families, limited access to local services, and environments focused primarily on control can weaken the relationships and support networks that reintegration depends on. Institutional cues — from building materials to layout — can also reinforce a sense of being processed rather than supported, undermining trust between residents and staff from the moment someone arrives (Worthington, 2026)³⁴.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 9 by offering opportunities to rethink justice infrastructure as more inclusive, human-centred and connected to its surroundings. Their smaller scale can facilitate integration into existing communities and allow infrastructure to be adapted to local circumstances, services and social networks.

Architecture is not neutral (Marconi, 2026)³⁵: the organisation of space, the materials used, and the relationship between buildings and their surroundings all shape behaviour, relationships and opportunities for recovery. A building can communicate who is included, valued and trusted through its design choices as well as through its policies (Worthington, 2026).

In this context, detention houses can provide spaces that facilitate interaction, responsibility and connection rather than relying primarily on separation and control. However, infrastructure alone cannot produce reintegration. Its potential contribution lies in creating environments that support the relationships, services and forms of participation through which reintegration can take place.

HOPE STREET (ENGLAND)

Hope Street is a residential facility for women serving community sentences, designed by architect Mike Worthington around a "home, not an institution" principle. Built from consultations with justice-involved women and staff, the design deliberately avoids institutional cues: houses are built of brick rather than concrete, with informal detailing and a domestic feel from the moment of arrival. Shared spaces such as a café connect residents to the surrounding community and offer employment skills training, while dedicated, acoustically soft spaces with natural materials and connection to landscape give residents room for emotional regulation (Worthington, 2026)³⁶.

Link to the SDG: Hope Street shows that infrastructure choices — brick over concrete, a café instead of a processing desk, a door handle instead of a lock — actively shape whether people feel trusted, valued and included, or merely processed. It is a concrete demonstration that justice infrastructure can be redesigned around dignity rather than control.

HALBGEFANGENSCHAFT WINTERTHUR (SWITZERLAND)

The Halbgefängenschaft Winterthur facility applies the Swiss model of semi-custodial detention, where residents continue working, studying or fulfilling other responsibilities in the community while returning to the facility for overnight stays. Rather than being isolated from society, the facility is integrated into an urban environment, placing detention within the everyday context of the community.

By enabling residents to maintain employment, education and social relationships, Winterthur reduces disruption to daily life and supports a gradual transition towards greater independence. In addition to its location, the facility's design reflects a flexible approach to detention infrastructure. Its layout allows spaces to be adapted according to changing needs, with hallways and internal arrangements that can be reorganised to create different units depending on the profile and needs of residents.

Link to the SDG: The Halbgefängenschaft Winterthur facility demonstrates how innovation in justice infrastructure can be achieved through adaptable design and multifunctional use of space. Its integration into an urban environment, combined with a flexible internal layout, shows how detention facilities can be designed to respond to changing needs while making efficient use of existing infrastructure. Winterthur illustrates how the built environment can actively support more sustainable, inclusive and future-oriented approaches to detention.

 **READ MORE**



RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **New European Bauhaus (NEB)**: The NEB connects sustainability, inclusion and the quality of the built environment, promoting places that are responsive to people's needs and shaped through participation and co-creation. It offers a useful framework for positioning detention houses within European discussions on human-centred architecture. Its 2026 Council Recommendation encourages Member States to promote a people-centred, participatory built environment through renovation, circularity and citizen participation (Council of the European Union, 2026) — closely aligned with adapting existing buildings into neighbourhoods rather than building large, isolated institutions.
- **Placemaking Europe**: This network brings together practitioners and communities working on inclusive, people-centred places, with a focus on participation, public space and local identity. Since community integration depends on how residents interact with their neighbourhood, placemaking approaches can help detention houses become part of everyday community life, building trust and reducing stigma rather than remaining disconnected institutions.
- **European Council of Spatial Planners (ECTP-CEU)**: Where a facility is located shapes residents' access to transport, employment, education, healthcare and family networks. ECTP-CEU's work on spatial planning can help position detention facilities as part of the social infrastructure of communities, rather than at the margins of cities (ECTP-CEU, n.d.).
- **Municipalities and local architects/urban planners**: Community-integrated detention requires cooperation beyond the detention system and justice ministries. Municipalities can facilitate access to housing, employment, healthcare and local services, and help identify suitable buildings. Architects and urban planners can support this by repurposing existing buildings and embedding community participation into the design process — critical, since a detention house's success ultimately depends on its connection to the wider ecosystem around it.

SDG 10 — REDUCED INEQUALITIES — REDUCE INEQUALITY WITHIN AND AMONG COUNTRIES



ISSUE

Justice systems often reflect and reinforce wider social inequalities. People experiencing poverty, discrimination, homelessness, unemployment and unequal access to legal support are disproportionately represented in detention populations (RESCALED, 2025)³⁷. A criminal record can further limit employment and housing after release — even a "clean record" requirement for roles in justice reform itself often excludes the very people whose insight could improve it (RESCALED, 2025).

Certain groups face additional barriers within detention systems. Women have specific needs that are not always adequately addressed in prison regimes and facilities historically designed around a predominantly male population (CPT, 2018)³⁸. Foreign nationals and ethnic or religious minorities may require additional measures to address differences in language, culture and access to information, while people with disabilities and mental health needs may require accessibility, reasonable accommodation and specialised support (Council of Europe & Penal Reform International, 2023; PACE, 2018)³⁹. Traditional prison institutions can therefore struggle to respond adequately to different needs and may risk deepening existing inequalities rather than addressing them.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 10 by creating greater opportunities for individualised support and maintaining connections with the services and relationships that people rely on. Their differentiated approach can allow responses to be adapted to individual circumstances, while community integration can facilitate connections with education, healthcare, employment, family and local support services.

Reducing inequality also concerns who has a say in shaping justice systems themselves. Criminological scholarship on lived experience argues that involving people directly affected by justice systems is essential to bridging the gap between personal experience and systemic change (Antojado et al., 2024)⁴⁰. RESCALED's work with people with lived experience reflects this principle, emphasising the importance of involving those directly affected in decisions that concern them and helping address community resistance to new detention facilities (RESCALED, 2025).

The potential contribution of detention houses to SDG 10 therefore extends beyond the physical setting: it includes the possibility of adapting support to different needs and creating more inclusive relationships between justice systems, communities and the people affected by them.

INSPIRATIONAL PRACTICE

EXODUS HOUSE (AMSTERDAM)



Exodus House provides accommodation and support for people before and after their release. The organisation works with residents on rebuilding their lives through housing, work, education, relationships and personal development. The approach is based on the idea that successful reintegration requires more than supervision: people need opportunities, trust and practical support to participate again in society. Residents live in a community-based environment where they receive guidance while gradually increasing their independence.

Run by the NGO Stichting Exodus Nederland (founded 1979), the Amsterdam house is one of eleven Exodus locations nationwide and uses a strengths-based "Your Power" methodology built around five areas: work, housing, finances, relationships and meaning.

Residents manage their own schedules but must spend at least 26 hours a week in organised activity, work or education, and the house itself, a converted school building on a busy central street, relies on everyday interaction with neighbours rather than formal community partnerships.

Link to the SDG: Exodus House addresses one of the central challenges of SDG 10: preventing social exclusion after detention. By providing housing, support and opportunities for participation, it reduces the inequalities created by imprisonment and helps people rebuild connections with society.

MOTHERS' UNIT OF PALMA (SPAIN)

The Mothers' Unit of Palma (also known as "La Unidad de Madre de Palma de Mallorca") is an open detention facility in Palma, in Mallorca. The Mothers' Unit of Palma was founded in 2008 and is managed by the national government of Spain, Ministry of Interior. This facility is unique because of its specific target group and its distinctive working approach. It is a facility where mothers can stay in detention along with their children to maintain the relationship between them. The idea is that a child should remain in the care of its mother, even if she is in detention, rather than being placed elsewhere. This facility provides a place where this is possible while the mother is serving her sentence. With this, they want to minimise the effect of detention on the relationship between mother and child and give the children a safe place to grow up.

Link to the SDG: By enabling mothers to remain with their children in a safe, child-focused detention environment, the Mothers' Unit of Palma reduces the inequalities experienced by women in detention and their children. Rather than allowing detention to separate families or expose children to environments designed primarily around security, the unit adapts detention conditions to the needs of mothers and children, helping to ensure that the consequences of detention do not disproportionately affect them.



RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **Penal Reform International (PRI) — Global Group of Experts by Experience**: PRI's Global Group of Experts by Experience brings together people with direct experience of criminal justice systems to contribute to justice reform. Their expertise is particularly relevant to SDG 10 because reducing inequality requires people affected by detention to have a meaningful role in shaping the systems that affect them. For detention houses, lived-experience perspectives can help identify barriers, challenge institutional assumptions and ensure that differentiated approaches respond to residents' actual needs.
- **European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA)**: FRA provides expertise and evidence on equality, non-discrimination and fundamental rights, including the rights of people in detention and groups facing particular vulnerabilities. Its work can support detention houses in identifying and addressing inequalities affecting women, migrants, minorities, people with disabilities and other groups, helping ensure that differentiated approaches are grounded in fundamental-rights standards.
- **European Forum for Restorative Justice (EFRJ)**: The European Forum for Restorative Justice brings together practitioners, researchers, policymakers and civil society organisations working to develop restorative justice across Europe. Its work promotes more inclusive approaches to justice by giving greater attention to the experiences and needs of people affected by crime, including those who may be marginalised or underserved by conventional justice processes. The EFRJ therefore provides a relevant knowledge network for exploring how detention and justice systems can better recognise individual circumstances, strengthen participation and reduce inequalities in access to support and meaningful reintegration
- **Victim Support Europe (VSE)**: Victim Support Europe brings together organisations working to ensure that victims of crime can access appropriate support and justice regardless of where they live or their personal circumstances. Its network promotes cooperation and the exchange of knowledge between victim support organisations across Europe. This is relevant to reducing inequalities because access to information, assistance and participation in justice processes can vary significantly between individuals and communities. Strong connections between justice institutions and victim support services can help ensure that people affected by crime are not left without appropriate support.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:

- **Non-discrimination and equal treatment:** The principle that detention should not compound existing inequalities is firmly embedded in international human rights law. The Nelson Mandela Rules require that the rules governing the treatment of people deprived of liberty be applied impartially and without discrimination on grounds including race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status (United Nations, 2010, Rule 2). This principle is further grounded in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which establish equality and non-discrimination as fundamental human rights (United Nations, 1948, Arts. 1–2; United Nations, 1966, Arts. 2, 26)⁴¹⁴². The Bangkok Rules recognise the specific needs of women in detention (United Nations, 2010), while the Tokyo Rules promote non-custodial measures and call for their application without discrimination (United Nations, 1990)⁴³. For detention houses, these standards underline that small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated approaches should be designed to reduce — rather than reproduce — the inequalities and disadvantages that people may experience before, during and after detention.

SDG 11 — SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES — MAKE CITIES AND HUMAN SETTLEMENTS INCLUSIVE, SAFE, RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE

11

SUSTAINABLE CITIES AND COMMUNITIES



Belgium has developed transition houses to support people in the final phase of longer prison sentences, usually **during the last six to eighteen months before release.**

Residents live in small-scale settings where they can work, study, and reconnect with the community while receiving structured support.

Transition houses emphasise gradual reintegration and strong community partnerships. They are typically operated by NGOs or external organisations under contract with the prison administration, creating a bridge between detention and life in society.

TRONDHEIM - LEIRA UNIT

As the low-security section of Trondheim Prison, Leira is one of Norway's fourteen 'drug managing units'. The facility operates on consequence pedagogy, a method that focuses on taking responsibility for one's actions and making informed choices for a crime-free life.

The Leira unit, which has a capacity of 31 places, is not only integrated into the community by using local services but also contributes to it. **It provides a dog day-care service and runs a garden centre that is open to the public and operates like any other business in the community.**

ISSUE

Historically, prisons have been designed to separate people from the communities to which they belong. Their location, architecture and security-focused organisation often create both physical and social distance from everyday community life. Facilities may be located far from people's homes and support networks, while their institutional design can reinforce the perception that detention is something that takes place outside ordinary society (UNICRI & PRI, 2025). This separation can make it harder to maintain family relationships, access community services and prepare for life after release, while also limiting opportunities for communities to understand and engage with people in detention (UNODC, 2018; Council of Europe, 2019)⁴⁴⁴⁵.

Cities face the challenge of creating inclusive environments where all residents can participate in social life. However, people involved in the criminal justice system are often excluded from this vision of citizenship. This is particularly relevant to SDG 11, which calls for inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements (United Nations, 2015)⁴⁶. Detention is frequently treated as something that happens elsewhere, rather than as part of the wider community ecosystem.

Community integration also presents challenges of its own. Physical proximity alone does not guarantee meaningful inclusion. Successful integration requires trust-building, communication and cooperation between residents, staff, neighbours, local authorities and community organisations.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 11 by creating opportunities to strengthen the relationship between justice systems and the communities in which they operate. Their small-scale and community-integrated character can facilitate connections with local services, schools, employers, healthcare providers and community organisations, while proximity to residents' families and support networks can help maintain relationships during detention.

Community integration can also create opportunities for dialogue and shared responsibility. Rather than treating detention as something that takes place outside ordinary community life, detention houses can become part of the local ecosystem in which reintegration takes place.

This does not mean that locating a detention house in a community automatically creates inclusion or stronger communities. Its potential contribution depends on how the facility is designed and operated, and on the quality of relationships between residents, staff, neighbours, local authorities and community organisations.

READ MORE

INSPIRATIONAL PRACTICE

SKEJBY FACILITY (DENMARK)

Skejby Halfway House is a small-scale facility in Aarhus that challenges the traditional separation between people in detention and the wider community. Established in 1973 as a social experiment, the facility intentionally combines residents who are serving a sentence ("plus residents") with people who have no connection to the criminal justice system ("minus residents"). Around 40% of the places are reserved for people without a criminal conviction, creating a shared living environment that resembles ordinary community life.

The aim of this facility is not simply to provide supervision, but to create opportunities for everyday interaction, responsibility and social connection. Residents share common spaces, follow daily routines and participate in a living environment where people are not defined solely by their status within the justice system. The presence of non-offending residents contributes to a more diverse and normalised social environment, reducing isolation and supporting reintegration.

Link to the SDG: Skejby demonstrates how sustainable communities can be built through inclusion rather than separation. By creating a shared environment where people in detention live alongside other members of society, the facility challenges the idea that justice should happen outside community life. It shows how detention houses can contribute to inclusive, safe and resilient communities by strengthening everyday relationships, reducing stigma and recognising people in detention as part of society.

DE KANSENFABRIEK — TRANSITION HOUSE LEUVEN (BELGIUM)



Located in a residential area in the heart of the city, the Leuven transition house accommodates sixteen men nearing the end of a long sentence. It offers an effective approach to reintegration by focusing on autonomy and strengthening community relationships, treating reintegration as a two-way street: residents contribute to the community, while society offers them a fair chance to participate. By blending in with the surrounding architecture, the house promotes inclusivity and actively works to prevent social exclusion.

Belgium has developed transition houses to support people in the final phase of longer prison sentences, usually during the last six to eighteen months before release. Residents live in small-scale settings where they can work, study, and reconnect with the community while receiving structured

support. These houses are typically operated by NGOs or external organisations under contract with the prison administration, creating a bridge between detention and life in society.

Link to the SDG: De Kansenfabriek demonstrates how detention can become part of an inclusive city rather than a source of exclusion. By integrating people in detention into neighbourhood life and strengthening community connections, it contributes to SDG 11's ambition of creating inclusive and cohesive communities.



PEACE

"We are determined to foster peaceful, just and inclusive societies which are free from fear and violence. There can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development."

– Preamble, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

SDG 16 — PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS

16 PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS 	ON 14TH OF JUNE 2024, THE 27 JUSTICE MINISTERS OF THE EU ADOPTED LANDMARK COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON 'SMALL-SCALE DETENTION'	THE UN RESOLUTION 57/9 ON SOCIAL REINTEGRATION (2024) BECAME THE FIRST UNITED NATIONS RESOLUTION TO EXPLICITLY RECOGNIZE SMALL-SCALE DETENTION AS A TOOL TO SUPPORT REINTEGRATION AND REDUCE REOFFENDING.
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ISSUE

Many detention systems rely on large, centralised institutions that are physically and institutionally separated from society. This isolation limits cooperation between justice actors, local services and civil society, fragments support before and after release, and makes it harder for the public to see how justice is actually delivered.

High rates of pre-trial detention illustrate the cost of this fragmentation: people awaiting trial can lose contact with employment, family and community support before any judgment has been made, at a significant and often irreversible cost to themselves, their families and the wider society (PRI & TIJ, 2017). Where institutions are closed and unaccountable, violence and corruption are also more likely to take hold — further weakening the connection between a justice system and the communities it is meant to serve (PRI & TIJ, 2017).

These challenges highlight the importance of justice systems that are connected to the communities they serve, while maintaining effective safeguards, accountability and independent oversight.

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 16 by creating opportunities for a more relational, transparent and community-connected approach to detention. Their small-scale and community-integrated character can facilitate stronger relationships between residents, staff, families, local services and civil society organisations, while supporting continuity of services and relationships during and after detention.

A sustainable justice system is not only concerned with the secure and lawful deprivation of liberty. It also requires respect for human rights, effective oversight, accountability and approaches that support people to return to society where appropriate. The smaller scale of detention houses can provide opportunities for closer interaction and more individualised support, although these outcomes depend on how facilities are designed, staffed and operated.

Strong institutions are also institutions that listen and evolve. Developing new approaches to detention requires transparency, evaluation and dialogue between policymakers, practitioners, civil society, communities and people with lived experience of detention (RESCALED, 2025). Detention houses contribute to this process by demonstrating how justice systems can become more humane, effective and aligned with human rights standards.

RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC):** UNODC provides expertise on criminal justice reform, prison management, and reintegration, including implementation of the Nelson Mandela Rules. Its work can support detention houses in connecting custodial practice with wider justice-system reform and the Sustainable Development Goals.
- **Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UN Special Procedures:** OHCHR and the UN Special Rapporteurs provide human rights expertise and independent scrutiny on issues including detention, torture, access to justice and the treatment of people deprived of liberty. Their work can help ensure that new approaches to detention remain grounded in international human rights standards and accountability.
- **Council of Europe:** The Council of Europe provides a comprehensive European framework for prison standards, human rights, probation and independent monitoring through instruments including the European Prison Rules and the work of the CPT. The European Court of Human Rights also plays a central role in ensuring that states respect the rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, including in detention.
- **National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs) and ombudspersons:** Independent national bodies play an essential role in making justice institutions accountable and ensuring that people's rights are protected in practice. NPMs monitor places of detention under OPCAT, while ombudspersons and equality bodies can investigate complaints, identify systemic problems and address discrimination. Together, these mechanisms provide important independent oversight of detention houses and help ensure that innovation goes hand in hand with accountability. The Council of Europe's work on independent equality bodies further underlines their role in protecting equality and combating discrimination.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND LEGAL FRAMEWORKS:

- **United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules, 2015)**⁴⁷: Imprisonment should support social reintegration and preparation for release, alongside the protection of society and reduction of recidivism.
- **European Prison Rules (Council of Europe, 2020)**⁴⁸: The European Prison Rules emphasise that the management of prisons should respect human rights and promote the social reintegration of people in detention. They encourage cooperation with outside social services and the involvement of civil society in prison life, recognising that prisons should operate as part of, rather than in isolation from, wider society. The Rules also establish independent monitoring as an important safeguard for accountability and the protection of prisoners' rights (Council of Europe, 2020, Rules 7, 8 and 92–93). This provides a strong European framework for the community-integrated and accountable approach underpinning detention houses.
- **United Nations Kyoto Declaration on Advancing Crime Prevention, Criminal Justice and the Rule of Law (2021)**⁴⁹: The Kyoto Declaration explicitly connects criminal justice reform with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and calls for stronger efforts to improve detention conditions, reduce unnecessary imprisonment and promote rehabilitation and reintegration. It emphasises community involvement and cooperation between public authorities, social services, local authorities and civil society as part of effective reintegration and reducing reoffending (United Nations, 2021). The Declaration therefore provides a particularly strong international link between SDG 16 and an ecosystem approach to justice.
- **Council of the European Union — Conclusions on Small-scale Detention (2024)**⁵⁰: The 2024 Council Conclusions on Small-scale detention: focusing on social rehabilitation and reintegration in society provide the most direct European policy reference for the detention-house approach. The Conclusions recognise that small-scale detention can improve the quality of life of detained people, create a constructive climate for reintegration and strengthen social rehabilitation. They also highlight the importance of cooperation with relevant services and call on the European Commission to explore funding opportunities for the development and implementation of small-scale detention, including detention houses (Council of the European Union, 2024).
- **United Nations Human Rights Council Resolution 57/9 (2024)**⁵¹: Resolution 57/9 on the social reintegration of persons released from detention and persons subjected to non-custodial measures places reintegration within a human rights and justice-system framework. It calls for stronger support for people returning to society and emphasises cooperation between relevant authorities and services. The resolution reinforces the principle that effective justice institutions cannot be understood solely through what happens during detention: successful reintegration requires continuity of support and connections with society beyond the detention setting (UNHRC, 2024).

PARTNERSHIP

"We are determined to mobilize the means required to implement this Agenda through a revitalized Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, based on a spirit of strengthened global solidarity."

— Preamble, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

SDG 17 — PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS

17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS 	LED BY PENAL REFORM INTERNATIONAL (PRI), THE GLOBAL ALLIANCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY ON PRISON REFORM BRINGS TOGETHER MORE THAN 80 CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TO ADVANCE PRISON REFORM WORLDWIDE.	RESCALED IS A EUROPEAN MOVEMENT BRINGING TOGETHER POLICYMAKERS, PRACTITIONERS, RESEARCHERS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS TO PROMOTE SMALL-SCALE, DIFFERENTIATED AND COMMUNITY-INTEGRATED DETENTION HOUSES.
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ISSUE

Traditional prison systems have often developed around a centralised institutional model, in which responsibility for detention lies primarily with prison administrations. This can create a separation between detention facilities and the communities in which they are located.

As a result, people in detention can lose connections with essential parts of everyday life — healthcare, education, employment and family. At the same time, communities are rarely involved in discussions about how detention is organised or how people can successfully return to society. European prison standards emphasise the importance of cooperation between prison authorities, healthcare and social services, probation, civil society and other relevant stakeholders in supporting people in detention and their reintegration (Council of Europe & Penal Reform International, 2023).

This highlights a broader governance challenge: detention cannot be addressed by justice institutions alone. Supporting people during detention and after release requires cooperation across sectors, as well as mechanisms for sharing knowledge, expertise and resources. This corresponds to the emphasis of SDG 17 on multi-stakeholder partnerships (United Nations, 2015).

EXPLANATION

Detention houses can contribute to SDG 17 by creating opportunities for stronger connections between justice institutions and other sectors. Their small-scale and community-integrated character can facilitate cooperation with municipalities, healthcare and social services, civil society organisations, employers, educational institutions, researchers and people with lived experience.

These partnerships can serve different purposes:

- municipalities can support local integration and access to community services;
- civil society organisations can provide expertise, activities and support;
- healthcare and social services can help maintain continuity of care;
- employers and educational institutions can create opportunities for work, education and training;
- researchers and practitioners can contribute to evidence development and evaluation; and
- people with lived experience can share their knowledge and experience, and play an active role in the implementation of detention houses and wider justice reform.

The quality of these partnerships matters as much as their existence. Clear roles, sustained cooperation, information sharing and accountability are needed to prevent gaps between services and responsibilities.

Independent monitoring can provide an additional layer of accountability. National Preventive Mechanisms established under the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), for example, can identify shortcomings through visits, make recommendations and follow up on their implementation (United Nations Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture [SPT], 2016)⁵². Their observations can also reveal weaknesses in cooperation between authorities and external partners.

FRAME provides a concrete example of cross-border partnership. RESCALED works alongside Antigone (Italy), the Irish Penal Reform Trust and Penal Reform International to develop a shared framework for monitoring small-scale detention. By bringing together national, European and international perspectives, the project illustrates how knowledge, expertise and experience can be shared across countries rather than developing approaches to detention in isolation.

In this sense, partnership is not simply an additional feature of detention houses. It is part of the governance ecosystem through which their implementation, monitoring and continuous development can take place.

EUROPEAN SYMPOSIUM ON DETENTION HOUSES (BELGIUM, 2024 & ALBANIA, 2026)

RESCALED's first European Symposium on Detention Houses was held on 20–21 March 2024 in the Belgian Senate, under the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, bringing together four European ministers of justice and representatives from 30 countries. Its findings fed directly into draft Council Conclusions on small-scale detention, formally adopted by all 27 EU justice ministers three months later.

Building on this, the European Symposium on Detention Houses 2026, held in Tirana, Albania under the theme "Sustainability and Justice," brought together policymakers, prison administrations, researchers, architects, practitioners, civil society organisations, people with lived experience and international organisations from across Europe. Rather than focusing on detention as an isolated justice issue, the Symposium explored how detention houses contribute to the broader goals of sustainable development through the interconnected dimensions of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnerships. It also launched the #1000HOUSES campaign, calling for the replacement of large prison institutions with small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses across Europe.

Together, the two editions show that sustainable justice is built through partnerships that grow over time. By creating a platform where diverse actors jointly exchange knowledge, co-create solutions and build political commitment, the Symposium strengthens the ecosystem needed to implement detention houses. It shows that justice reform is not the responsibility of prison administrations alone, but a shared endeavour involving governments, local communities, academia, civil society and people with lived experience. Through dialogue and collaboration across sectors and countries, the Symposium contributes directly to achieving SDG 17 by reinforcing the partnerships required for sustainable and inclusive justice systems.



RELEVANT PARTNERS AND KNOWLEDGE NETWORKS:

- **RESCALED – European Movement for Detention Houses:** Since 2019, RESCALED has brought together practitioners, researchers, policymakers, prison administrations and civil society organisations working towards the implementation of small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention houses across Europe. Through international conferences, study visits, research, advocacy, European projects and the RESCALED Inspire database, the network facilitates knowledge exchange and supports countries developing detention house policies.
- **Penal Reform International (PRI)**— Global Alliance of Civil Society on Prison Reform: A global network bringing together civil society organisations working on prison reform, human rights and improved conditions of detention. The Alliance aims to strengthen collaboration, share knowledge and amplify the role of civil society, including organisations involving people with lived experience of incarceration.
- **European Network of National Preventive Mechanisms (NPMs)**: National Preventive Mechanisms established under OPCAT form a network of independent monitoring bodies responsible for preventing torture and other ill-treatment in places of detention. Cooperation between NPMs allows monitoring bodies to exchange methodologies, experiences and findings across jurisdictions. For detention houses, this is particularly valuable because the transition towards smaller and community-integrated forms of detention raises new questions about how accountability and human-rights monitoring should operate in practice. Cross-border exchange can help identify common challenges and strengthen monitoring approaches as detention systems evolve.

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