RESIZE

Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

European Blueprint of the Correctional Ecosystem

Deliverable 2.1: Report

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Table of Contents

The Ecosystem Perspective 2

About this report 3

- The RESiZE Project
- The ecosystem of detention facilities
- Methodology

Visualising the Ecosystem Perspective of detention facilities 5

- Microsystem
- Mesosystem
- Exosystem
- Macrosystem
- Chronosystem

Countries

Albania 6

Austria 17

Belgium 28

Bosnia and Herzegovina 40

Croatia 55

Denmark 66

Germany 77

Greece 88

Italy 102

North Macedonia 114

Portugal 127

Romania 140

Slovenia 151

Spain 162

The Netherlands 177

The Ecosystem Perspective

This report utilizes the Ecosystem of Detention Facilities framework to analyze how justice-involved individuals are impacted by their environment. Detention is viewed not as an isolated issue, but as a component within a complex, interconnected social system

Understanding and visualising the ecosystem perspective

The ecosystem model is based on five distinct, interacting layers, which map the internal and external forces shaping individual experiences and reintegration pathways





About this Report

The RESiZE Project:

This report introduces the work and context of The RESIZE Project: Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation, an innovative European partnership dedicated to rethinking how correctional professionals are trained and supported across Europe.
RESIZE (2025–2029) is a four-year Erasmus+–funded initiative led by CPIP Romania, building upon the LiberateSkill Pact for Skills. The project brings together 24 partner organizations from 15 countries to address the evolving needs of staff within the correctional ecosystem.
As justice systems across Europe transition toward small-scale, community-integrated detention environments, correctional professionals are increasingly required to combine security expertise with social work, counseling, and reintegration skills. To meet these demands, RESIZE focuses on upskilling and professional recognition through micro-credentialing, certification, and the validation of prior learning—fostering a more dynamic, flexible approach to staff development.
At its core, RESIZE seeks to define the key competencies required for this new correctional landscape, develop innovative learning tools, and establish the European Correctional Competencies Observatory —a long-term platform for knowledge exchange and professional growth. Together, these efforts aim to drive systemic change in how correctional work is understood, taught, and practiced across Europe.

The ecosystem of detention facilities

The following pages explore the ecosystem of detention facilities across Europe, examining how individuals, institutions, and communities interact within this complex environment through the Ecosystem of Detention Facilities framework.
Rather than viewing detention as an isolated phenomenon, this approach views it as a dynamic social process shaped by interconnected systems, ranging from family and community to policy, ideology, and time. Within this broader societal ecosystem, collaboration, context, and care are central to meaningful reform.
The framework outlines five interdependent levels:

- **Microsystem**: Direct environment such as staff, peers, family, and the facility itself — shaping daily experience and reintegration.
- **Mesosystem**: Links between detention and community, including cooperation with NGOs, municipalities, and employers.
- **Exosystem**: Indirect influences, including policy, funding, and housing systems.
- **Macrosystem**: Cultural and ideological context, including laws, social values, and public attitudes toward justice and rehabilitation.
- **Chronosystem**: The impact of time, capturing reforms, significant events, and evolving social perceptions of justice.

Together, these levels reveal detention as a living system influenced by relationships, institutions, and history a framework for understanding and transforming justice toward more humane, community-based models.

Methodology

To map the ecosystem in each participating country, this work package began with a series of online inspirational sessions. In all of these sessions, detention houses played a central role. The sessions provided a theoretical framework for understanding the concept of an ecosystem, explored law and policy at the international level—while acknowledging differing national contexts—and addressed competencies and staff. The themes covered in these sessions closely aligned with the sections of the country profile questionnaire.

Each partner, or multiple partners from the same country where applicable, collaborated to complete a country profile for their respective country. This profile focused on the penal system, with particular attention to detention houses, and was structured into four sections: a general overview, a section on law and policy, a section on competencies and staff, and a section dedicated to the ecosystem. The information collected formed a valuable data source for subsequent phases of the project.

During the summer period, partners were also asked to visit four inspirational facilities in their country and to complete a questionnaire for each visit. The information collected through these site visits was combined with the country profiles to build a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem surrounding detention facilities.

As a final step, this combined information was translated into the present report and its visual representations through a common template. Partners were asked to complete this template based on their previously collected data, ensuring consistency across countries while allowing the results to be presented in a clear, comparable, and visually coherent way.

We aimed to present the information in a visually engaging way that clearly illustrates the ecosystem of a detention facility and informs the next steps of the project.

RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

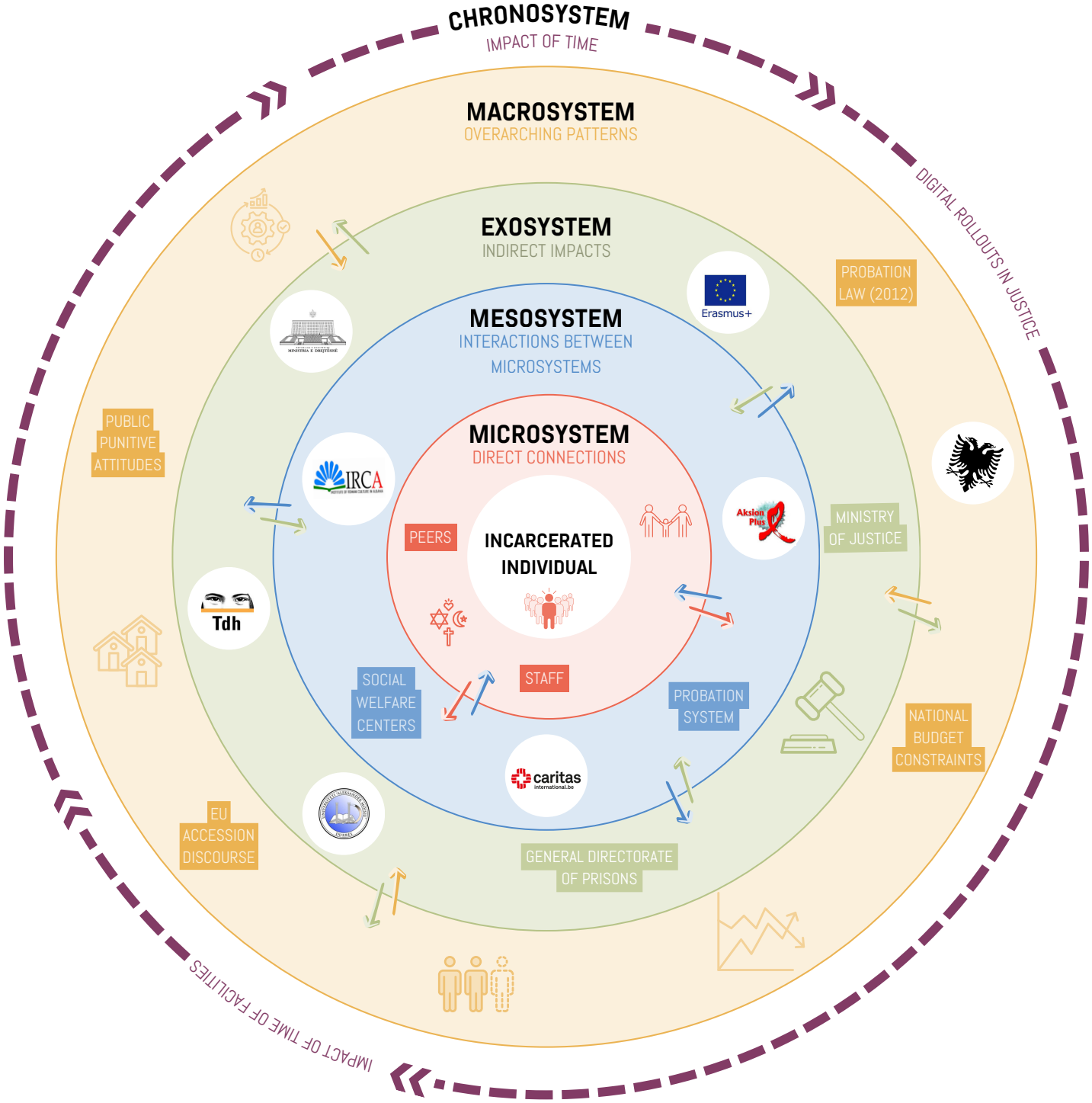
THE ECOSYSTEM OF DETENTION FACILITIES



RESCALED
EUROPEAN MOVEMENT FOR DETENTION HOUSES

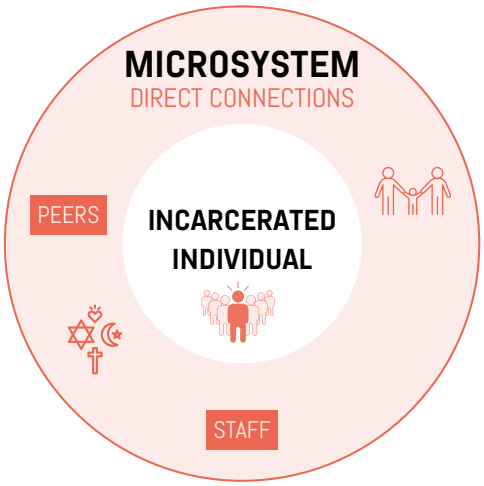
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

ALBANIA



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family Visits and phone calls are legally guaranteed, but many families face barriers due to long travel distances, high transportation costs, or poverty. For children of incarcerated parents, visits are often irregular, which increases emotional strain and weakens long-term bonds.	Family contact is supported by NGOs and social services, but also limited by overcrowding, understaffed facilities, and poverty. These weak connections increase the risk of intergenerational disadvantage. Strengthening family bonds requires coordination across detention, child protection services, and community-based organizations.
Staff Staff in Albanian prisons include security officers, psychologists, educators, and social workers. Chronic understaffing, limited training, and low salaries reduce morale and effectiveness, leaving many staff unable to provide individualized attention. Staff members often struggle to balance their dual role of maintaining order while encouraging integration.	Staff are the link between incarcerated people and external actors such as NGOs, schools, and healthcare providers. Their capacity determines whether reintegration initiatives can be delivered in practice. International projects often fund staff training, showing how external resources directly affect daily prison life.

Psychologists and social workers

Psychologists and social workers are formally present in Albanian facilities, but their numbers are very limited compared to the needs of the prison population. They carry responsibility for assessments, crisis interventions, and reintegration planning, but are overburdened and cannot offer consistent therapeutic support.

Their work is essential for connecting life in detention facilities with probation services, welfare offices, and community reintegration programs. When under-resourced, gaps appear in preparing people for release, increasing the risk of reoffending. Their reliance on project-based support (often EU-funded) illustrates how structural shortages affect continuity.

Healthcare staff

Each prison in Albania has basic medical staff, but shortages of doctors, nurses, and medication mean that many health needs are unmet. Mental health care is especially weak, with few specialists available and stigma often preventing open discussion of psychological problems. Overcrowded conditions further increase health risks.

In-prison medical staff depend heavily on referrals to external hospitals and clinics, but logistical and financial barriers limit access. Delays in care reduce participation in education, work, or reintegration programs. This weak healthcare infrastructure reflects and reproduces challenges of the broader Albanian health system.

Religion and cultural counselors

Religious practice plays an important role in Albanian detention facilities, reflecting broader cultural traditions. Both Muslim and Christian representatives provide spiritual services and guidance, while some NGOs with religious backgrounds organize rehabilitation activities. These services are often more accessible than psychological care.

Religious counselors connect prison life with community values of forgiveness, solidarity, and redemption. They complement overstretched psychological and social services, providing emotional support where the state system is weak. Their presence also strengthens links with families and communities, easing reintegration.

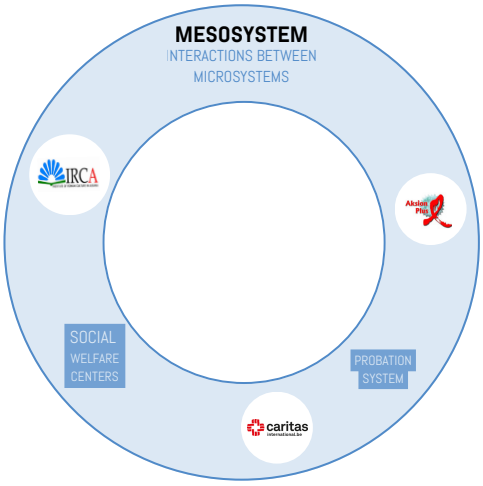
Peers

In Albanian prisons, peer relationships are a defining part of daily life because of overcrowding, understaffing, and the absence of consistent structured activities. People spend long hours confined together, which strengthens informal prisoner hierarchies. These hierarchies can foster solidarity and shared coping strategies, but they also create risks of bullying, intimidation, and the reinforcement of criminal subcultures. Younger people deprived of liberty, who often have limited education or unstable family backgrounds, are particularly vulnerable to negative peer influence.

The way peers interact affects participation in programs and daily functioning in facilities. Where group activities are available, such as those facilitated by NGOs, peer influence can be redirected into cooperation and reflection. When such opportunities are limited, peer hierarchies can replace other forms of guidance, with long-term consequences for reintegration after release .

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Probation services In Albania, probation is formally responsible for supervising individuals serving community sanctions and those conditionally released. Probation officers also cooperate with prison staff in preparing release and monitoring reintegration plans. However, the system remains understaffed, which limits its reach and effectiveness.	Probation services are the bridge between detention and community life. Their collaboration with prisons is essential for continuity of care, but gaps in staffing and resources weaken this connection. This reduces the chances of successful reintegration and increases reliance on NGOs or family networks for post-release support.
NGO's and civil society Albanian NGOs play an important role in providing reintegration services that state institutions cannot fully deliver. They are active in areas such as legal aid, vocational training, family support, and post-release assistance. Many operate with project-based funding, often supported by international donors.	NGOs link prisons with the wider community, offering both in-prison and post-release support. Their involvement ensures that people deprived of liberty have access to programs that otherwise would not exist. However, reliance on short-term projects creates instability, which can leave people without consistent support once funding ends.
Municipality-level social welfare centers Welfare centers and municipal social services are formally tasked with supporting families of people deprived of liberty and individuals after release. Child protection services step in when children are left without adequate care. In practice, coordination between these services and prisons is often weak.	The effectiveness of reintegration depends on how well welfare and child protection offices cooperate with prisons, probation, and NGOs. Where collaboration is strong, families receive social assistance and children are protected from further disadvantage. Where it is weak, poverty and social exclusion worsen reintegration outcomes.

Education and vocational training providers

In Albania, education inside prisons is organized in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and vocational training centers. Programs include literacy courses, continuation of compulsory education, and professional qualifications in trades such as carpentry, mechanics, and tailoring. Limited infrastructure, a lack of classrooms, and a shortage of teachers hinder consistent delivery. Many people deprived of liberty have left school early, so prison often provides their first structured education opportunity.

Cooperation with schools and training providers allows individuals to gain certificates recognized in the national system, improving their chances of employment after release. In some facilities, EU and donor-funded projects have expanded vocational training, showing the importance of international partnerships. However, inequalities in Albanian education (high dropout rates, limited rural access) are reflected in prison, which reduces reintegration chances if collaboration is weak.

Healthcare organisations

Prison health units in Albania can only provide basic services, so external hospitals and clinics are essential partners. People with serious physical conditions are transferred to civil hospitals, while psychiatric cases are referred to specialized institutions in Tirana or other urban centers. Transportation and security are often obstacles, and costs are a barrier for families. Reports highlight gaps in mental health services, as Albania has very few psychiatrists relative to need.

Cooperation with hospitals and clinics ensures access to treatment aligned with national healthcare standards, but systemic shortages in Albania's health system reduce the quality of care for people in detention. International donors have occasionally provided equipment and training for prison health staff, linking local services to broader health reforms. Weaknesses in these partnerships ripple into other areas of reintegration, as untreated health issues block participation in education, work, or family programs.

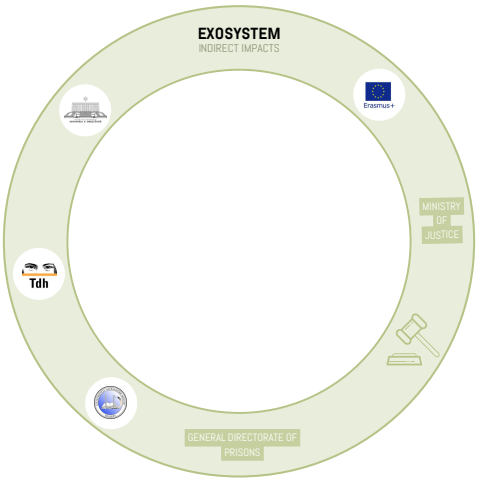
Faith based organizations

Religious practice is protected in Albanian prisons, and both Muslim and Christian communities play active roles. The Albanian Muslim Community and the Orthodox Church provide regular spiritual services, while Catholic Caritas and smaller Protestant organizations also support people in detention. Some faith-based NGOs combine religious counseling with practical aid, such as food parcels, family visits, or reintegration guidance.

These organizations link prisons with broader cultural traditions of forgiveness and solidarity. They often fill gaps left by limited psychological and social services, offering a form of moral support and community connection. By maintaining ties with families and offering post-release assistance, they reduce isolation and stigma. Their influence reflects the strong role of religion in Albanian society, which makes faith-based engagement in reintegration widely accepted.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
The General Directorate of Prisons (GDP) The General Directorate of Prisons (GDP), operating under the Ministry of Justice, manages all detention facilities in Albania. It oversees staff, infrastructure, and service delivery, but cooperation with other institutions is often informal and project-based rather than institutionalized. This creates differences in how prisons interact with municipalities, NGOs, and probation services.	GDP decisions directly influence daily conditions in detention and the scope of rehabilitation programs. International partners, especially EU-funded projects, frequently support the GDP in piloting new initiatives, showing how prison governance is shaped by external reform agendas.
Criminal justice legislation (sentencing, parole) Sentencing and parole in Albania are governed by the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedure Code. Judges decide between custodial sentences, probation, or alternative sanctions, but in practice imprisonment remains the most common outcome. Pre-trial detention is widely applied, contributing to overcrowding. Parole commissions play a role in deciding early release.	These legal frameworks shape the size of the prison population and the pressure on detention facilities. Overuse of custodial sentences increases strain on staff and services, while probation and parole decisions determine pathways for community-based supervision. International monitoring encourages Albania to expand non-custodial measures in line with EU standards.
Labor market The Albanian labor market is characterized by high unemployment, widespread informal work, and limited opportunities for people with a prison record. Discrimination and lack of trust from employers create significant barriers to reintegration. Vocational training in prisons is not always aligned with local labor market needs.	Labor market exclusion directly impacts reintegration outcomes. Even when vocational programs equip people with new skills, stigma and structural barriers prevent stable employment. Cooperation with municipalities and employers is essential but remains weak, leaving NGOs and donor projects to fill the gap.

Public health system

Prison health units in Albania rely heavily on the public health system for specialized and complex treatment. People deprived of liberty are referred to civil hospitals or psychiatric institutions when prison facilities cannot meet their needs. Access remains difficult due to logistics, costs, and shortages of specialists.

The challenges of the Albanian health system, underfunding, lack of specialists, and long delays, are mirrored inside prisons. Weaknesses in external healthcare cooperation reduce the quality of care for people in detention and limit their participation in education, work, or reintegration programs.

EU Funded Projects

Albania's detention and reintegration sector is heavily supported by EU-funded projects. These initiatives provide financial resources, training, and pilot programs in areas such as education, reintegration planning, and small-scale alternatives to detention. Funding is often delivered through NGOs or in partnership with the GDP.

EU projects bring international standards into Albanian detention policy and create opportunities that the state budget cannot sustain on its own. They connect national institutions with European reform agendas, but reliance on short-term funding creates discontinuity once projects end.

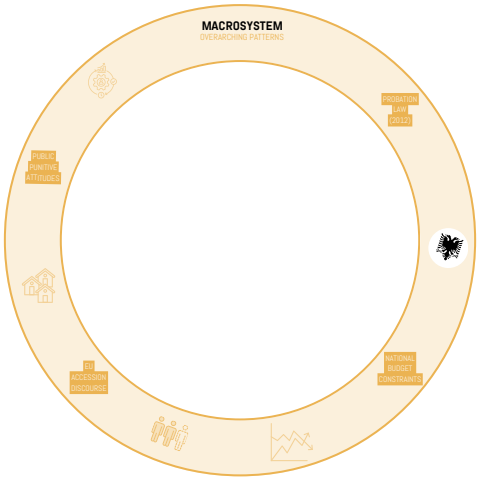
Probation service headquartes

The Probation Service Headquarters coordinates Albania's probation offices, which supervise people serving community sanctions or those conditionally released. They also cooperate with prisons to prepare release and manage reintegration plans. Despite their importance, the service struggles with limited staff and resources.

The headquarters link detention to community-based alternatives, ensuring supervision continues after release. Their capacity directly affects how effectively people transition back into society. Weaknesses in staffing and resources reduce their reach, making collaboration with NGOs and municipalities even more crucial for reintegration.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Press coverage and public opinion Public attitudes in Albania toward people deprived of liberty remain predominantly punitive. The idea of rehabilitation has limited visibility, and there is little public or political appetite for non-custodial alternatives. Media narratives reinforce this by focusing mostly on overcrowding, escapes, or failures of the justice system, rather than on reintegration or success stories.	These cultural and media narratives place pressure on judges and policymakers to impose custodial sentences, fueling overcrowding. They also reduce social acceptance of reintegration initiatives, making it harder for NGOs and municipalities to gain support for community-based programs.
Cultural attitudes toward people deprived of liberty People who have served sentences in Albania face persistent stigmatization, particularly when seeking employment or housing. Reintegration is often framed as an individual responsibility rather than a shared social goal. At the same time, Albania's religious and community traditions offer narratives of redemption, which some NGOs and faith-based actors use to promote second chances.	Stigma keeps many people excluded from jobs and housing, increasing the risk of returning to former criminal networks. Religious and cultural values of forgiveness and solidarity provide an important entry point for reducing stigma, but broader public opinion remains a barrier to sustainable reintegration.

Human rights standards (EU and international conventions)

As part of its EU accession process, Albania is required to address systemic issues in detention, such as overcrowding, poor material conditions, and excessive use of pre-trial detention. Reports from the European Commission and the Council of Europe repeatedly highlight these shortcomings. The government often frames prison reform under the banner of "modernization," but concrete reintegration policies remain weak compared to infrastructure investments.

EU monitoring has led to initiatives like compensatory measures for overcrowding and pilot reintegration projects funded by international donors. These external pressures drive legislative change and push the General Directorate of Prisons to align with European standards. However, without consistent domestic investment, reforms risk being limited to donor-funded projects rather than systemic change.

Economic constraints

Albania's justice system operates under tight national budget limits. Funding is prioritized for infrastructure maintenance and basic operational costs, while resources for staff training, psychological services, or probation development remain minimal. Municipal welfare centers and reintegration programs also report insufficient funding, relying heavily on NGOs and donor support.

Budgetary priorities shape daily realities in detention: staff shortages remain unaddressed, rehabilitation programs are inconsistent, and collaboration with community services is underdeveloped. International donors and EU funds temporarily fill gaps, but this reliance creates instability when projects end, leaving reintegration efforts vulnerable to financial fluctuations.

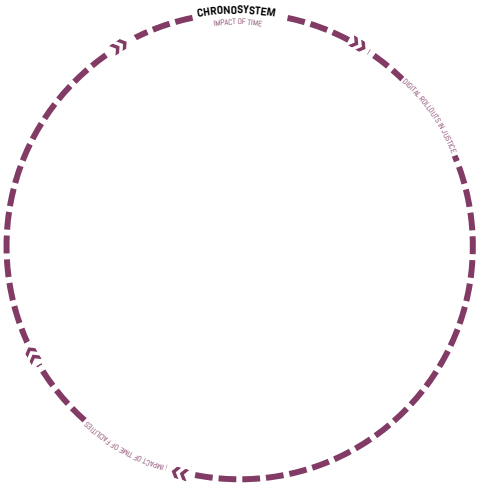
Political climate

Albanian politics often emphasize punitive measures in response to public pressure and media narratives about crime. Governments under electoral stress prioritize stricter sentencing and visible security actions. At the same time, EU integration requirements bring pressure to adopt reintegration-oriented reforms. This duality creates a policy environment where short-term political interests and long-term donor-driven reforms compete.

Political priorities directly affect prison overcrowding, probation development, and the allocation of funds to staff and programs. Frequent political changes disrupt continuity in justice reforms, forcing NGOs and international donors to step in to maintain momentum. As a result, reintegration policy depends as much on Albania's political cycles as on formal strategies.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Juvenile Justice Code (2017) The adoption of the Juvenile Justice Code in 2017 was a milestone in Albania's justice reform, introducing diversion measures, mediation, and probation options for minors. It aimed to replace automatic custodial sentences with educational and community-based alternatives, aligning with EU standards. The Code was the first to embed an "ecosystem" approach into law, requiring coordination between courts, probation, social services, and child protection units.	In practice, this reform opened space for multidisciplinary case management of minors, linking prisons with municipalities, schools, and probation offices. However, gaps in training and resources have limited full implementation, so custodial measures remain common despite the Code's intentions.

Probation Law (2012)

The Probation Law of 2012 established Albania's modern probation service, tasked with supervising community sanctions, alternatives to detention, and conditional release. While it represented a shift toward non-custodial measures, the service has faced chronic understaffing, limited infrastructure, and a narrow legal mandate, restricting its capacity to enforce supervision consistently.

This law laid the foundation for reducing reliance on prisons, but its limited implementation means probation has not yet fully absorbed cases that could be diverted from custody. The weak capacity of the service places pressure back on the prison system, highlighting the gap between legal reform and practice.

2001 Police Reform

In 2001, Albania introduced a reform of the police service that redistributed certain responsibilities across law enforcement and justice institutions. Tasks previously concentrated in penitentiary management were reassigned, creating new roles for community policing and separating some security functions from prison administration.

While not designed specifically as prison reform, this restructuring influenced detention culture by reducing the dominance of penitentiary management in the justice chain. Over time, it allowed other actors, including probation and municipalities, to play a larger role in justice processes and reintegration pathways.

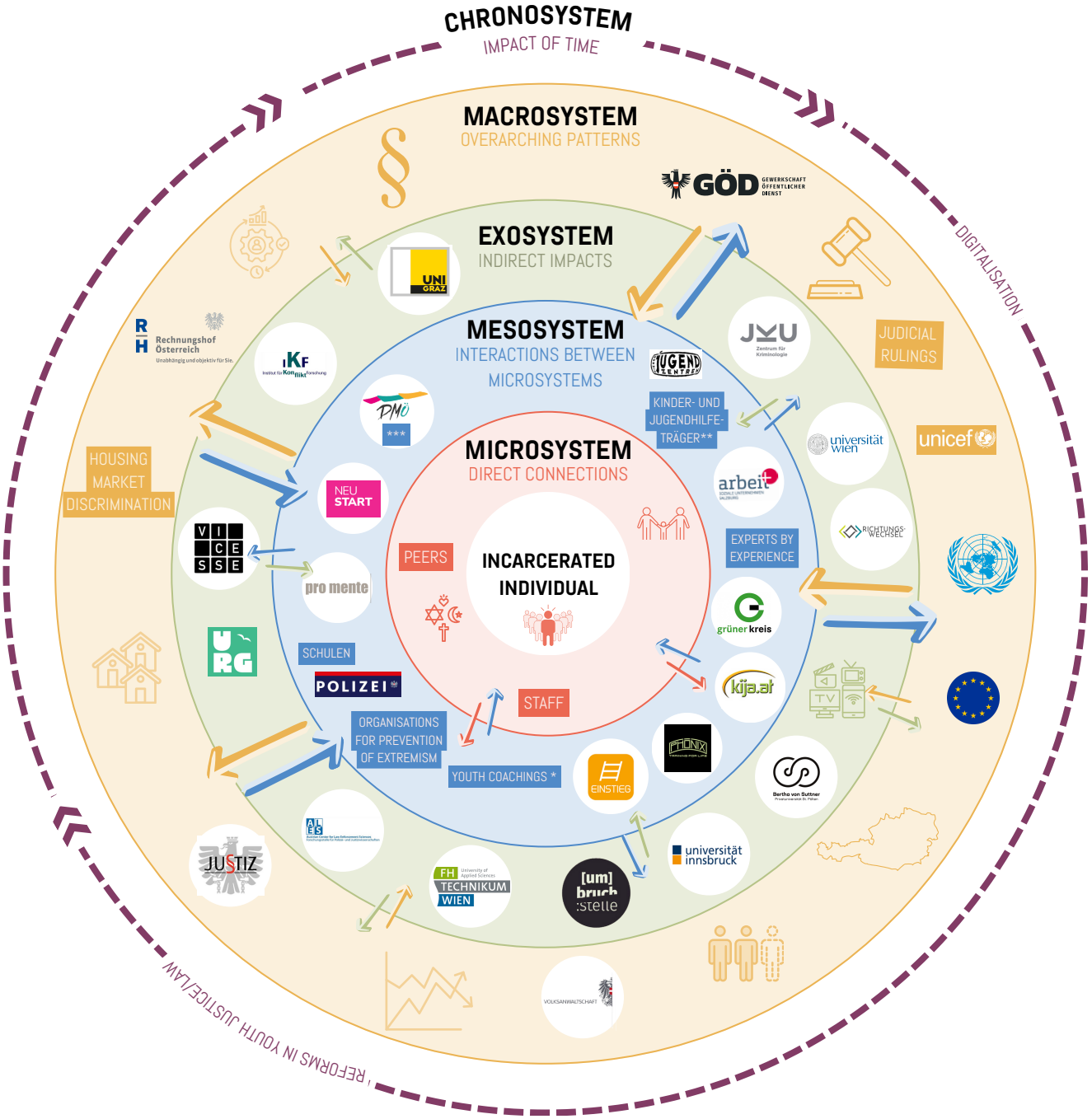
Recent digital roll-out (2023–2024)

In the past two years, Albania has introduced digital justice tools such as the E-registry for case management and e-visits for family communication. These systems were designed to modernize record-keeping, improve transparency, and make visits more accessible, particularly during COVID-19 restrictions.

If used effectively, these tools could improve coordination between prisons, courts, and probation services by centralizing data and streamlining procedures. However, implementation has been slow, and many facilities still operate largely on paper-based systems. Their potential impact on reintegration remains unrealized until full uptake is achieved.

RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

AUSTRIA



MICROSYSTEM

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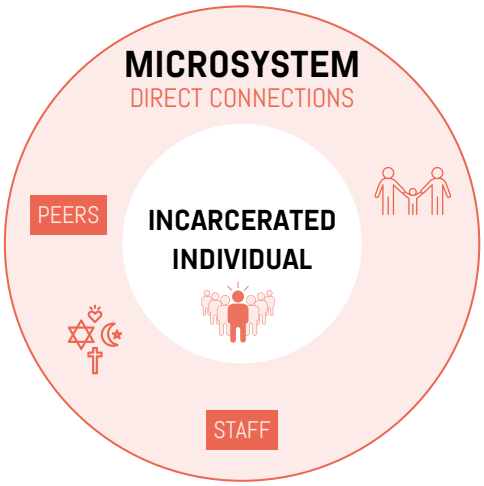


FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family Maintaining family bonds during detention is recognized as essential.. The penal code grants incarcerated individuals the right to weekly visits, written correspondence, and phone calls, with some prisons offering child-friendly visiting rooms and extended visitation times. However, no comprehensive national policy explicitly supports parent-child relationships, and extended visitation varies across facilities due to differences in capacity and security requirements. Video calls, introduced during COVID-19, are available, with priority given to those with relatives unable to attend in-person visits in Austria.	Family contacts are supported by the Prison Chaplaincy, the Vienna Youth Court Assistance Service and NGOs such as Neustart, Caritas, and the Vienna Family Association, which organize accompanied visits and provide family counseling. They are connected to broader legal frameworks, such as Austria's Penitentiary Act and international human rights standards, but further progress towards child- and family-sensitive practices and policies is still necessary.
Judicial representatives (judges, prosecutors) Incarcerated individuals have the rights for regular access to legal counsel; Direct interaction with judges or prosecutors within detention facilities are rarer. Legal support is typically provided through scheduled visits or written communication. There are no standard in-prison hearings or court dates held on site.	In the Federal Ministry of Justice, the General Directorate for the Penal System & Enforcement of Deprivation of Liberty Measures exercises strategic and operational leadership and has the highest instance in-service and technical oversight. Legal and human-rights oriented oversight is conducted through the Austrian National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) through regular inspections of prisons. It submits annual reports to Parliament. Additional audits, such as those conducted by the Court of Audit, focus on prison management and resocialization efforts; however, judicial personnel are not typically involved in daily prison monitoring.

Healthcare providers

The Federal Ministry of Justice provides and supervises healthcare in detention through the Judicial Care Agency. General practitioners hold weekly consultations in all prisons. Specialists provide care, such as psychiatric services, occupational therapy, psychotherapy, and physio therapy. In urgent cases, incarcerated individuals may be transferred to external hospitals, with costs covered by the state.

Mental health and addiction support is provided internally through the psychological services. In some cases, additional support is provided by external professionals and NGOs, such as Grüner Kreis, independent psychotherapists, which provides part-time services in form of individual and group psycho therapy, ForPsyCon provides consultancy for suicide prevention and risk assessments. The probation service provider NEUSTART offers post-release support and works closely with external organisations to ensure effective referrals.

Educational professionals and vocational trainers

The Federal Ministry of Justice provides and supervises education in detention through the Judicial Care Agency. The educators, vocational teachers, and social pedagogues who provide instruction in literacy, German language, and practical skills such as carpentry, metalwork, and cooking (some of 452 workshops in Austrian prisons). Incarcerated individuals also have opportunities to earn academic qualifications, with some universities offering distance learning or on-site classes in cooperation with correctional facilities.

The educational programs are not guided by a national correctional education strategy, however, a variety of education and vocational trainings exist across the 29 Austrian prisons.
Prisons with sentenced prisoners have a higher ratio of engagement in education and vocational training and the average duration of engagements amounts to 3,16 hours per week day.

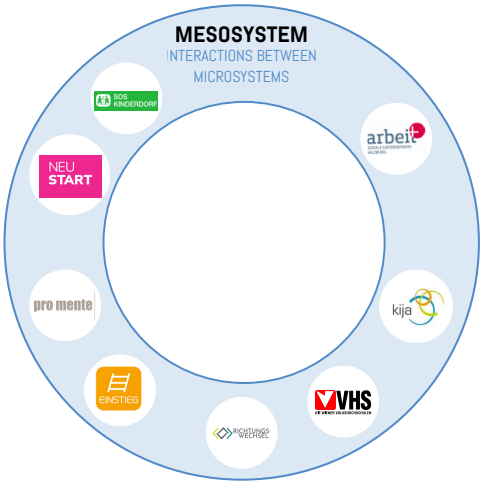
Staff

Staff play a central role in shaping daily life and rehabilitation outcomes within detention facilities. Positive, respectful interactions between staff and incarcerated individuals are essential for building trust, ensuring safety, and supporting reintegration. These relationships tend to function more effectively in smaller-scale environments, but require ongoing investment in staff training, supervision, and professional development to reach their full potential.

Understaffing among correctional officers and specialized staff (e.g., medical, psychological, social services) significantly affects daily life. Staff shortages result in increased cell confinement, limited access to work and recreational activities, and decreased psychosocial care. In overcrowded facilities, these impacts are intensified, leading to a lower quality of life and heavier workloads for staff. Concerns about burnout and bore-out have been identified amongst prison staff. These staffing issues weaken the relational foundation necessary for effective detention environments. In response, the Ministry of Justice initiated programs like “Service Plan Optimization” and a working group focused on enhancing the attractiveness of careers in the justice sector, aiming to stabilize personnel resources and improve institutional operations.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Stakeholder collaboration Austrian detention facilities collaborate with established NGOs, regional governments, and academic institutions. Organizations such as Neustart, Grüner Kreis, VHS, kija Salzburg participate in pilot projects and reform initiatives, often funded through regional or EU programs. Collaborations are usually formalized at the institutional level, although some relationships, like kija's support for youth in custody, remain informal.	These partnerships help bridge the gap between detention and external services in education, reintegration, and youth advocacy, while international and national projects like RESCALED promote community-based alternatives. The Judicial Support Agency coordinated key personnel (e.g., psychologists, social workers), serving as a structural link between policy and facility-level services.
Volunteers and civil service Direct volunteer work in prisons is rare in Austria, but civil service placements let young men support internal operations. In specific programs, such as pastoral care or NGO-led initiatives, volunteers may contribute indirectly, although documentation is limited. An exception is the probation provider Neustart, who runs a structured volunteer program supporting probation, reintegration, and offender outreach post-incarceration.	Volunteer and civil service roles strengthen ties between the justice system and civil society. However, limited transparency and a lack of standardized access restrict their widespread use, emphasizing the need for clearer pathways and recognition of community-based involvement in detention settings.

Religious and spiritual services

Austria guarantees religious freedom during detention under §85 of the Penal System Act (StVG). Incarcerated individuals have the right to participate in religious services and seek spiritual guidance. Catholic chaplaincy is the most established, with 31 full-time or part-time chaplains across 28 prisons. Other recognized faiths, including Protestant, Muslim, and Jewish communities, provide care through designated clergy or contracted spiritual leaders, although these groups often have limited personnel serving multiple facilities.

Prison chaplaincy is managed by an individual diocese and religious organization, often collaborating with the Federal Ministry of Justice. In some cases, volunteers support chaplains, broadening their reach. While care is generally well-organized, resources are limited for smaller faith communities, necessitating better coordination between detention facilities and religious groups to ensure equal access and continuity.

Sports organizations

Sports-based initiatives are increasingly used in Austrian detention facilities to promote physical health, social skills, and reintegration. Programs like Phönix (Training for Life) include structured in-prison training focused on personal development, while their Comeback Club supports individuals after release. Catch'n Serve Ball Austria used to provide physical activity and social connection for incarcerated women but has currently been seized, and Breaking Grounds encourages inclusion and empowerment through sport, especially for youth.

These programs operate through collaborations among NGOs, prisons, and community organizations, often backed by external funding or local initiatives. By connecting detention with a community-based sports network, they help promote resilience, teamwork, and continuity after release, supporting long-term social integration.

Social enterprises

They play a crucial role in supporting the employment and reintegration of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Neustart is the main provider and offers structured support before and after release, helping individuals access work, housing, and social services. Arbeit Plus, a national network of approximately 200 nonprofit integration enterprises, offers transitional jobs, vocational training, and workplace experience tailored to individuals facing barriers to employment, including formerly incarcerated people.

These organizations serve as links between detention facilities and the labor market, providing practical work experience and pathways for reentry. Their initiatives are supported through partnerships with public authorities and correctional institutions, promoting long-term social inclusion and reducing recidivism.

Family support

Austria promotes family ties through nationwide and local programs. A network of funded family counseling centers, coordinated by the Federal Chancellery's Division for Family and Youth, provides free, confidential support on topics like parenting, separation, and relationship issues. Although not specific to prisons, these services are available to families affected by incarceration. Some prisons also organize supervised child-parent visits in partnership with organizations like the Vienna Family Association.

These services operate at the crossroads of justice, family policy, and community welfare, helping to preserve emotional bonds during incarceration and support reintegration after release. However, access to in-prison programs varies across regions, with more potential for structured, child-focused visiting models.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
National policy frameworks Austria's justice system is governed by national laws like the Penal System Act (StVG), which establishes rules for incarceration, visitation rights, communication, and service provision. Strategic initiatives from the Federal Ministry of Justice, such as personnel reforms or prison infrastructure projects, influence staffing, the physical environment, and the social atmosphere of prisons, often without direct input from incarcerated individuals.	These frameworks determine how institutions operate, who they hire, and what services are prioritized, indirectly influencing everything from daily routine to resocialization efforts. Austria currently lacks national policies supporting the RESCALED approach of small-scale, community-integrated detention. While several NGOs and EU-funded projects pilot elements of this model, the lack of legal frameworks for decentralized alternatives currently impedes implementation.
Lack of policy on lived experience Austria does not have formal mechanisms to include the voices of people with lived experience, such as incarcerated individuals, their families, or victims, in the development of detention policies or programs. Whilst NEUSTART does not include affected individuals in shaping services, Grüner Kreis actively engages former clients. Complaints to the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) remain the only formal channel for feedback from people with lived experience.	This policy gap limits innovation, weakens legitimacy, and disconnects institutional change from those most impacted by the system.
Public services Austria offers free, nationwide family counseling services, funded by the Federal Chancellery for Family and Youth, which are available to families affected by incarceration. However, these services are not detention-specific, and participation depends on external access, individual initiatives, and local coordinators. NEUSTART also provides support for relatives of people who are incarcerated.	While such services can support families indirectly, the lack of tailored outreach to incarcerated populations means they often remain unused in the justice context.

Legislation

Legal categorization of facilities (§8 StVG) mandates a precise classification of detention facilities. It distinguishes between general and specialized prisons. It also legally enforces gender separation, requiring male and female individuals either to be housed in separate facilities or completely separated within the same institution. Forms of solitary confinement or special separation may be carried out in spaces otherwise used by the general population, as long as internal separation is maintained.

The law determines the type of facility, the level of separation, and the availability of tailored support, thereby shaping core aspects of institutional life and access to care.

Legal standards for treatment

Dignity, respect, and procedural norms (§ 22 StVG): incarcerated individuals must be treated with calmness, seriousness, fairness, and respect for their dignity and honor. Prison staff are legally required to address individuals using their preferred formal pronouns and titles, thereby reinforcing institutional norms of decency and formality. The law also regulates how decisions about restrictions or privileges are made: specific serious measures (disciplinary isolation) require official investigations and written decisions. Incarcerated individuals must be informed about the content and purpose of any measure concerning them and instructed in how to fulfill their obligations.

These norms guide staff behavior, communication methods, and fairness in procedures during daily interactions, indirectly influencing the psychological and social environment within detention.

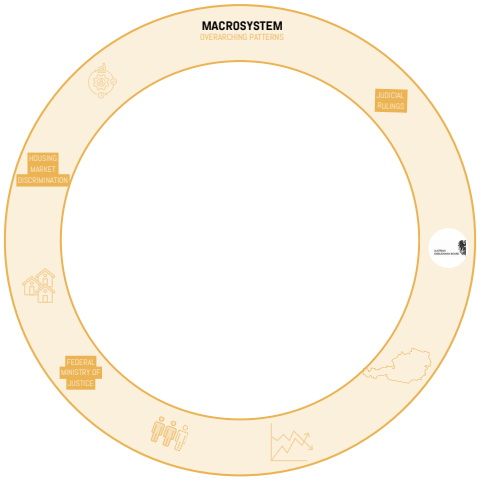
Justice Support Agency

Most key services in Austrian prisons, including healthcare, psychological support, and social work, are managed and staffed by the Justice Support Agency, a public institution operating under contract for the Ministry of Justice. While some NGOs or local groups partner with prisons, limitations exist for the entry of (specific) external expertise or experimental programs.

These structural arrangements influence which services reach incarcerated individuals and who is authorized to deliver them, shaping the ecosystem without directly involving them.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Federal Ministry of Justice The ministry is the main authority responsible for managing Austria's justice system. Its responsibilities include overseeing the regular courts, public prosecution offices, the penal system, and probation services. These areas are coordinated at the national level to ensure a consistent legal and institutional framework across all Austrian provinces.	Because detention facilities, staffing, legal prosecutors, and reintegration services fall under the BMJ's jurisdiction, all micro- and meso-level interactions within the detention system are influenced by federal structures. Its policies and administrative decisions set the boundaries within which detention houses, courts, and service providers operate.
Ombudsman Board It functions as an independent, state-mandated supervisory authority responsible for reviewing complaints submitted by the public and determining whether public administration acts in accordance with legal requirements. In addition to its supervisory role, the Ombudsman Board may recommend legislative changes when existing regulations cause societal burdens not intended by the legislator. It is authorized under the UN Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) to oversee places where individuals are deprived of or restricted in their liberty. This task is carried out through regular inspections of prisons and similar facilities, conducted in cooperation with independent commissions.	The Ombudsman Board plays a key role in external oversight and rights-based accountability. Its monitoring activities, official reports, and recommendations help identify systemic issues and guide evidence-based improvements in detention practices. By assessing compliance with legal and human rights standards, it influences institutional procedures and national correctional policies, thereby shaping the broader justice system.

Housing and labor markets

Institutions operate at the intersection of probation services, social housing, and employment support. A key component of this system is the provision of frontline social support services, designed to facilitate self-sufficiency. These services help individuals secure stable housing and transition into the job market after release. The probation service provider NEUSTART and other specialised organisations contact individuals before their release and provide ongoing assistance. Similarly, the "Verein für Integrationshilfe" offers transitional housing, starter apartments, and supervised employment opportunities. These coordinated efforts address immediate resettlement needs and encourage long-term reintegration.

Access to housing and employment shapes post-release outcomes and influences the effectiveness of micro- and meso-level interventions. These services form a bridge between detention facilities and the broader community, mitigating the risks of recidivism and social exclusion. Their success depends on cross-sectoral coordination between justice authorities, social services, and civil society actors.

Media and Press

The media play a vital role in the justice system by informing the public through trial reporting, serving as a democratic check on state power. Often called the "fourth estate," the press is regarded as a key pillar of the rule of law, promoting judicial transparency and fairness. Media outlets can hold the justice system accountable and build public trust. However, concerns remain about the potential for media coverage to lead to prejudgment and public condemnation, often labeled as "trial by media." Allegations of close cooperation between media and judicial authorities have sparked debate over the objectivity and independence of criminal justice reporting.

The media influences public perceptions of incarceration, reintegration, and justice policies. Sensational reporting can reinforce stigmas against incarcerated people or advocate for tougher punishment, while fair, balanced journalism can encourage reform, support reintegration efforts, and raise awareness of systemic issues. The way the media presents justice topics, therefore, indirectly impacts institutional practices, political priorities, and societal views on reintegration.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Historical legacies Austria's penal system evolved from early reliance on corporal punishment toward custodial sentences and structured prison regimes. Major legal milestones, from Enlightenment-era reforms under Maria Theresa and Joseph II to the abolition of the death penalty and the 1975 Penal Code, established proportionality, human dignity, and rehabilitation as guiding principles.	These long-term shifts created a justice culture that balances punishment and reintegration. They continue to shape staff training, institutional practices, and Austria's commitment to human rights-based detention.
Socio-political shifts and modernization The democratic reorganization after World War II and subsequent penal reforms emphasized reintegration and proportionality. The 1969 Penal Enforcement Act (StVG) and 1975 Penal Code still form the backbone of Austrian criminal justice today, updated with gradual modernization.	These reforms provided continuity and legal stability, shaping how prisons are designed, how sentences are enforced, and how reintegration is institutionalized within the correctional philosophy.

Integration of international standards

Since the 1960s, Austria has increasingly aligned its system with international conventions, most notably the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This includes the abolition of the death penalty, legal recognition of human dignity, and adoption of UN conventions against torture and ill-treatment.

Compliance with international standards has brought stronger monitoring and external oversight, such as through the Ombudsman Board, embedding accountability and rights protections in detention and reintegration practices.

Recent reforms in juvenile justice (2013-2015)

A high-profile case of abuse in a Vienna prison in 2013 exposed gaps in juvenile detention conditions. In response, Austria limited the number of juveniles per cell and reformed the Juvenile Court Act in 2015, reinforcing that pre-trial detention for minors must be a last resort.

These reforms introduced child-sensitive standards, fostered interdisciplinary cooperation, and institutionalized alternatives to custody for minors. They continue to influence reintegration practices for young people in conflict with the law.

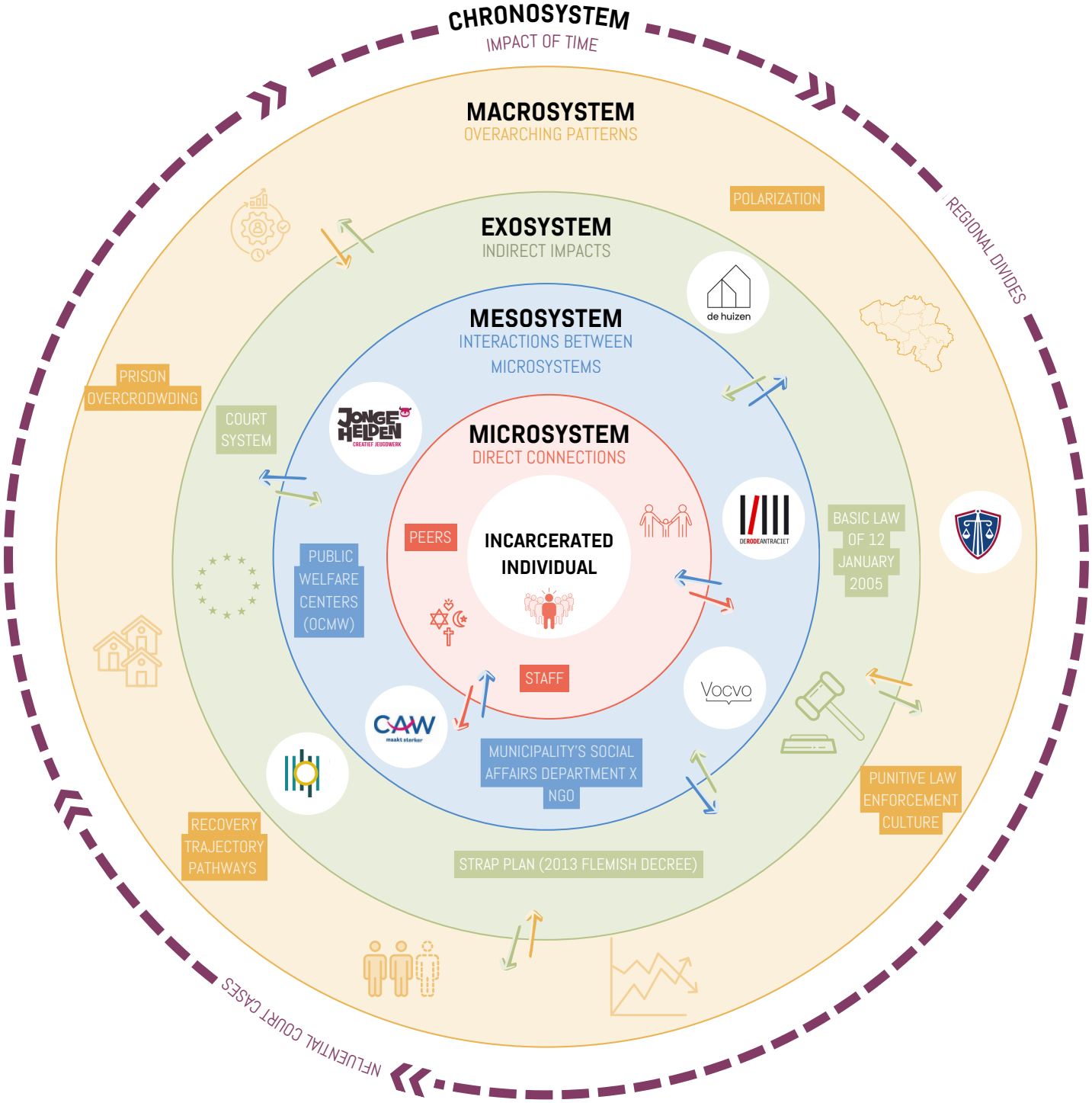
Ongoing digitalization and reforms

Austria has gradually introduced modernization measures, including digital record-keeping, structured reintegration planning, and enhanced cooperation between prisons and probation services. While rooted in its long penal history, the system increasingly relies on coordinated, evidence-based practices.

These developments strengthen links between detention facilities, probation, and community services, making reintegration efforts more data-driven and consistent with international standards.

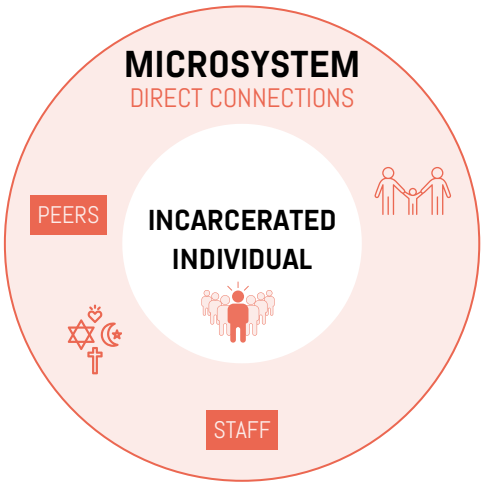
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

BELGIUM



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family connections Relationship support and structured interactions with relatives, and especially children, is crucial in the goal of maintaining ties with one's home community. In the prisons of Bruges, Hasselt and Lantin, and in select transition houses (THs) and detention houses (DHs) like Kortrijk, mothers are allowed to keep their children (up to three years old) with them and receive dedicated support. DHs and THs make an intentional effort to create welcoming spaces for family visits and to ensure consistent interactions.	These direct relationships are supported by community programs and NGOs (like Jonge Helden and Relais Enfants-Parents). They are also linked to higher level policies such as the Basic Law which regulates various aspects of prison or detention house life, including the rights and obligations of incarcerated people to have guaranteed family visitation.
Judicial system actors (judges and attorneys) Easier access to judges and attorneys from DHs and THs helps ensure fair representation and understanding of legal proceedings. Their location and flexibility make it easier for incarcerated people to attend court dates and stay connected to the justice process.	Traditional prisons do not have a fixed schedule or guaranteed visits from judges or prosecutors, while the laws around youth prisons ensure routine monitoring by designated inspection bodies like the CTRG.

Psychosocial service providers (psychologists, social workers, etc.)

Access to mental health professionals significantly affects an incarcerated person's well-being and reentry success. While psycho-social teams in prisons are legally required to conduct intake and support release preparation, ongoing support is often limited and delayed. In contrast, DHs offer the same services under shared legal frameworks but with greater flexibility, consistency, and accessibility. They also better facilitate connections to external healthcare.

DHs and other open facilities are integrated with the external healthcare system, providing residents with more comprehensive support. This integration allows individuals to regularly interact with external service providers and specific care organizations (such as for substance use), and its success also depends on broader systemic structures.

Physical healthcare services (doctors, nurses, dentists, etc)

In both traditional prisons and DHs, outside healthcare providers come into the facility to care for incarcerated individuals. However, DHs sometimes offer added access to local doctors or specialists, if required. In contrast, THs typically have all healthcare needs addressed outside the facility, as residents use their mobility to access care from local providers or trusted doctors. This supports better continuity and access to specialized treatment.

DHs and THs facilitate stronger connections to physical healthcare by partnering with external providers, NGOs, and volunteer programs, making care more continuous and responsive. This model allows for both service delivery into the house and residents to leave to access broader community resources. The quality of healthcare services provided in traditional prisons and DHs is largely linked to the overall standards set in the general healthcare industry, as these standards of care are legally required to be maintained in facilities, which is not always the case.

Schools and teachers

DHs and THs support education, sports, and cultural direct engagement by partnering with external organizations that deliver in-house programs and facilitate residents' participation in activities outside the facility. For example, the Kortrijk DH brings scholars into the facility routinely to give lectures, and residents often go as a group to a local soccer pitch.

Direct interaction with tutors and educators is shaped by formal policies, such as the Flemish StrAP plan and the federal 2025–2030 aid strategy, as well as informal collaborations with organizations and volunteers that provide educational and cultural services to the facility. In TH Leuven, former residents occasionally return to the facility to engage with current residents or even participate in roundtable conversations with external academic experts and advocates.

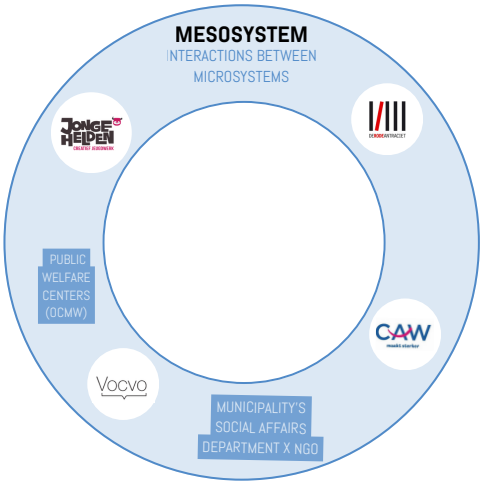
Staff

In DHs and THs, staff rely primarily on relational security rather than static measures. These facilities employ skilled professionals known as detention counselors, who are responsible for both daily supervision and individualized support. Detention counselors engage regularly with each resident, using positive communication and mutual respect.

Through consistent, person-to-person interaction, detention counselors build relationships rooted in trust and mutual understanding. This not only fosters a safe environment within the facility (grounded in connection rather than surveillance or control) but also reshapes how residents engage with outside actors and the broader community.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Social service organisations They play a vital role in supporting incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals with housing, financial assistance, and employment preparation. In DHs and THs, this support is integrated throughout the resident's stay, often in close collaboration with local authorities, including OCMW. These partnerships enable more personalized and sustained planning around reintegration. In prisons support for release is more fragmented. Here, organizations like Brug Binnen-Buiten and STRAP step in, often through volunteers, to help those who actively seek reintegration support.	Social workers in DH's maintain close, proactive ties with a broad network of external service providers, including OCMWs, municipal social support systems (WMO), housing agencies, and NGOs like Brug Binnen-Buiten and STRAP. These partnerships allow for individualized (re)integration planning from day one of a resident's stay and reflect a shift toward a more integrated justice approach. Unlike in traditional prisons, where reintegration often begins late and with less coordination, DHs structurally embed social service collaboration.
Local community collaborations Informal, community-rooted partnerships are central to how DHs and THs contribute to and integrate with their surroundings. TH Leuven, for example, partners with Groep Intro vzw for job coaching and placement, while DH Kortrijk engages residents in local clean-up initiatives and work with the football club. A new facility plans to collaborate with a nearby elderly care home to foster mutual benefit.	Collaborations with schools, universities, volunteer programs, care facilities, and other local organizations enable DHs to support resident well-being while strengthening community ties. These reciprocal relationships are supported by broader policy frameworks, such as the 2013 Flemish StrAP plan, which promote social integration through localized, participatory engagement.

NGO's and government programs

Volunteer programs run by NGOs and government agencies play an important role in enriching daily life within prisons, particularly through guidance, education, sports, and cultural activities. Organizations such as CAW (emotional support), De Rode Antraciet (sports, culture, education), VOCVO (adult education), Brug Binnen-Buiten (reentry and employment), and Jonge Helden (child-focused visiting support) are actively involved in these settings.
In DHs and THs, the presence of concrete programs is more limited because of the open and community-based nature of DHs and THs. Many activities and services are deliberately organized outside the facility to foster social reintegration. A few organizations, such as CAW, De Rode Antraciet, and VOCVO, are active in some DHs.

Volunteer-driven initiatives and NGO partnerships in both prisons and DHs connect facilities and residents to broader community resources (education, sports, emotional support, culture) and operationalize national goals and policies aimed at (re)integration and inclusion. Organizations such as CAW, De Rode Antraciet, VOCVO, and Jonge Helden serve not just as service providers but also as practical applications of policy. These programs also indirectly address systemic barriers like stigma through the normalization principle and lack of access to resources. In DHs and THs, where activities are intentionally community-embedded, these partnerships embody the core principle of detention as a continuation of life in society. These sustained and consistent interactions which often outlast formal policies and are less vulnerable to political or institutional shifts, reinforce the important role of civil society in justice reform.

Family support initiatives and organisations

Programs use creative expression and sports as tools for personal growth and skill-building. Examples include Peter Faber Stichting, which offers workshops in acting and storytelling; Werk via Sport and the INSIDE project, which use football to promote structure and resilience; and Turn-Over, which delivers rugby-based mentorship programs focused on discipline and self-confidence.

Cultural and sports programs strengthen engagement with the local community, self-expression, and personal growth. Small-scale facilities with flexible structures and easier access to the community are better positioned than traditional prisons to host these initiatives regularly. These programs are especially impactful in youth and small-scale facilities, where participation tends to be more consistent, personalized, and integrated into daily routines.

Government - NGO collaboration

In Leuven, the opening of a third TH in June, 2024 was initiated by the municipality's social affairs department in partnership with the NGO De Kansenfabriek. This partnership emerged in response to rising strain on local services and a recognized need for more targeted reintegration support for individuals leaving incarceration. By jointly identifying service gaps and mobilizing resources, the partners established a facility aimed at improving outcomes for returning citizens while relieving pressure on overburdened social workers.

Localized partnerships between public sector actors and organizations can unlock the policy and funding mechanisms often needed to address gaps in the justice system through new initiatives. In this case, the combined expertise and coordination of the municipality and De Kansenfabriek made it possible to secure the financial and institutional backing required to build a TH, a frequent challenge in the development of new detention facilities.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Basic Law of 12 January 2005 (legal framework) This foundational law governs the operation of traditional prisons and DHs, guaranteeing detainees' rights to maintain family ties, practice religion, and communicate with the outside world. Since 2024, DHs have been separately regulated under this law, allowing more flexible rules and financial arrangements tailored to local municipalities. It also formally defines different types of facilities, including DHs, THs, youth prisons, and forensic psychiatric centers.	The Basic Law underpins many core elements of DHs, such as family-friendly visitation, access to religious services, and technology use for communication. It also establishes the Central Monitoring Board (CTRG-CCSP31) to ensure detainees' rights and dignity are upheld. As such, it shapes both daily interactions and higher-level protections, embedding DHs firmly within Belgium's justice and human rights framework.
Oversight Committees Monitoring Legal Compliance (CTRG) Committees like the Central Monitoring Board (CTRG-CCSP31) are responsible for ensuring detention facilities comply with legal standards and respect the rights and dignity of incarcerated individuals. Their oversight influences conditions inside facilities, from access to legal counsel and communication rights to humane treatment.	Oversight bodies shape both daily experiences, such as rules around phone use or access to judicial actors, and broader systemic accountability, including monitoring for violations of legal human rights standards. Their role is crucial in identifying gaps between policy and practice at every level of the system. However, coordination and monitoring across the many involved ministries, agencies, and external partners is difficult and often inconsistent and limited, especially when it comes to innovate small-scale facilities.

Healthcare systems

In Belgium, healthcare for incarcerated people, including those in DHs and THs, is legally the responsibility of the Federal Public Service Justice, rather than the Ministry of Health. This arrangement applies to traditional prisons as well as DHs, with THs often relying more heavily on local external providers such as general practitioners, mental health specialists, and youth welfare services. While these partnerships enable some flexibility, they exist within a broader institutional framework where healthcare provision is managed and funded by the justice system.

This justice-led model of healthcare has prompted ongoing debate over funding streams, coordination gaps, and whether services can meet the same standard of care provided to the general population, as legally required. DHs and THs are typically more connected to community healthcare networks than traditional prisons, offering residents improved continuity of care. However, the current structure still raises systemic questions about accountability, resource adequacy, and the long-term viability of aligning detention-based healthcare with broader public health requirements.

StrAP Plan (2013 Flemish decree)

Koers en Kansen was a policy innovation program initiated by (JenV) that explored alternative, community-connected models of detention. A key example is the Small-Scale Detention Facility Middelburg (KVM), part of the "Detention Local and Flexible" initiative. The KVM pilot focuses on core RESCALED principles: maintaining employment, housing, and social relationships during detention.

Programs like KVM represent a positive shift toward reintegration-focused detention. These initiatives rely on coordinated efforts between the Ministry of Justice and Security and local organizations offering employment support, housing, and social services. However, many of these facilities were closed prematurely, highlighting a key challenge in the Netherlands: the lack of systemic infrastructure to sustain such projects.

VZW De Huizen (advocacy organization)

A complex legal framework enables differentiated placement of individuals across various facility types based on age, sentence phase, mental health status, and other characteristics. Key laws include the Penitentiaire beginselenwet, Jeugdwet, Wet forensische zorg, and Wet verplichte geestelijke gezondheidszorg.

These laws govern the criteria for their placement in traditional prisons, youth institutions, or alternative facilities such as transition houses and supported housing (beschermd wonen). This diversity of legal options is a major strength of the Dutch system—it allows for more tailored pathways that better match individual needs. For example, courts can apply juvenile sanctions to emerging adults, enabling their placement in JJI or KVJJ facilities instead of adult prisons.

Inclusion of small-scale detention in the Belgian Federal Agreement:

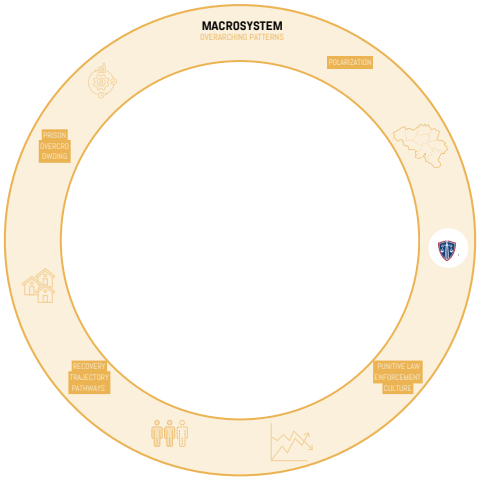
DHs and THs have been formally included in the Belgian Federal Agreement twice, most recently on January 31, 2025, with commitments extended through 2029. This affirms national-level support for their continued development and implementation.

The Federal Agreement connects local initiatives to systemic reform by embedding small-scale detention within national policy. It reinforces the work of organizations like De Huizen and ensures coordinated support across all levels of government for expanding and sustaining the implementation of small-scale DHs.

*Note: This overview includes more detail on Flemish policies and legal frameworks than those from the French-speaking Community (e.g. Wallonia)

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Government agencies (Agency for Justice and Enforcement in Flanders) This agency provides the formal legal and policy framework that shapes how DHs operate (when, where and how they open), including protocols and partnership agreements with external service providers.	As a key actor at the policy strategy level, the agency plays an essential role in enabling systemic reform. It supports initiatives like the StrAP plan and collaborates with organizations such as RESCALED and De Huizen to implement structural change across the justice ecosystem.
Prejudice in the housing and employment market Having a criminal record is one of the most persistent and systemic barriers to accessing housing and employment after detention. This discrimination, often rooted in stigma and fear, significantly impacts individuals' ability to rebuild their lives. NGOs and social services work to reduce these challenges, but the consequences remain especially severe for those released from traditional prison settings.	Initiatives like Brug Binnen-Buiten, Cellmade, and StrAP begin preparing residents for housing and employment when they enter a prison. However, because prisons are isolated from local communities, addressing these barriers flexibly remains difficult. In contrast, the community-based nature of DHs and THs allows for greater adaptability, better supporting residents in overcoming prejudice and securing stable futures.

From NIMBY to YIMBY

Public perceptions of justice facilities often carry stigma, which can lead to community resistance, especially when new DHs are proposed in residential areas. This is commonly known as NIMBYism ("Not In My Backyard"), where residents support a concept in theory but oppose its presence nearby. In Kortrijk, for example, initial protests and petitions against the DHs were shifted once neighbors were informed, welcomed into the facility, and saw the positive impact on community life.

Cultural attitudes can be major barriers to expanding DHs, regardless of policy, and are often linked to historical context, political ideologies, exposure and connection with the justice system (hence, the importance of incorporating lived experience), and media communications. Addressing this requires early and transparent community engagement, political communication, and education from advocacy groups. De Huizen recommends involving the community at all stage, from implementation and building developments to integration activities within the facility.

Media and press system

Media coverage plays a dual role in shaping public understanding of DHs. In Belgium, early reporting on new facilities often sensationalized local resistance, highlighting protests and stoking fears and stigma. However, media can also be a powerful force for destigmatization. A documentary series released around the opening of DH Kortrijk helped educate the public by transparently sharing the purpose, process, and human impact of the facility. When used responsibly, media becomes a tool for building trust and knowledge.

Media narratives influence not only public opinion but also policy, community acceptance, and institutional legitimacy. On a systemic level, press framing can impact political will and funding. Organizationally, it affects how DHs are perceived and supported by local actors. For individuals, it can shape stigma and reintegration outcomes. Positive media engagement fosters community integration, while negative coverage can reinforce opposition and undermine reform efforts.

Punitive law enforcement culture

Law enforcement generally has limited contact with DHs and THs, intervening only in exceptional cases. Policing in traditional prisons and the general public shape how individuals experience the justice system. In Belgium, emergency measures like extended prison leaves (congés pénitentiaires prolongés), introduced during Covid and again in 2024 to address chronic overcrowding, triggered backlash over perceived leniency. This reinforced more punitive public attitudes toward the role of law enforcement and detention facilities.

Law enforcement plays a powerful role in shaping the justice ecosystem, from how policies are designed to public perceptions of safety to how individuals experience the system firsthand. Public pressure, political narratives, and media influence the structure and focus of policing across regions, while the nature of police cooperation with DHs and THs can affect everything from referrals to occasional violence deescalation.

Recovery trajectory chamber (Hersteltrajectkamer)

This concept evolved from a previous Drug Treatment Chamber in Ghent, but has now expanded across multiple cities in Belgium. This specialized court initiative is designed for individuals whose criminal behavior is linked to underlying psychosocial issues. The court focuses on building a structured, supportive recovery plan with judicial assistants for up to 18 months. The individualized pathways include support for housing, employment, and financial stability.

This model reinforces therapeutic and problem-solving approaches within the justice system, offering a person-centered alternative that better connects courts with social services and community supports. It reflects a broader shift toward differentiated support over punishment and relies on coordinated engagement across judicial, social, and community sectors.

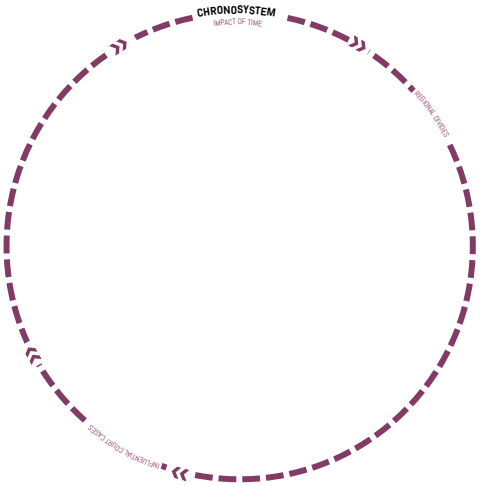
Chronic prison overcrowding

Traditional prisons in Belgium have consistently operated above capacity and faced criticism from international human rights bodies for poor conditions. A key contributor is the limited use of early release, alternatives to detention, and underinvestment in reentry infrastructure. In many facilities, up to four people are placed in cells originally designed for two, creating unsafe and unsanitary living environments.

Overcrowding affects the daily conditions of detention and stretches the capacity of staff, healthcare services, and reintegration programs. It also shapes public and political discourse around justice policy, whether the solution is to expand existing capacity or fundamentally shift the system. IIn this context, inspirational DHs are often cited as part of the solution, but it is essential they are not viewed merely as extra beds to expand the reach of incarceration.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Increasing role of technology in detention and reintegration Technology is playing an expanding role in the Belgian justice system, both as a reintegration tool and as a mechanism of control and surveillance. While digital communication can help individuals stay connected to family and support systems, there's a growing concern that it is replacing face-to-face interactions, weakening personal bonds. In DHs and THs, technological advances are welcomed, but integrated carefully, ensuring that residents possess skills needed for the outside world and can communicate with family. Belgium has also introduced electronic monitoring, biometric systems, and is beginning to integrate automated risk assessment tools.	While technology can enhance access and efficiency, over reliance risks dehumanizing detention by reducing meaningful human interaction. This shift affects how incarcerated individuals build and maintain relationships with family, staff, and community members. Ethical concerns around surveillance, algorithmic bias, and reduced personal contact highlight the need for careful policies and regulations around digitization in the justice system.

Regional divides in Belgium

Belgium's historical divide between Flemish-speaking Flanders and the French-speaking section also shapes the justice landscape. These linguistic and regional differences often complicate national consensus on justice reform, including the construction of DHs and the policies around reintegration like the StrAp Plan. Regional disparities in political priorities, administrative structures, and funding mean that some areas advance progressive models faster or with more success.

Law enforcement structures and local governance also differ across regions, affecting coordination with detention houses and external services. At a higher level, these cultural and political differences can result in differing narratives around detention, safety, and justice, complicating the unified national reform approach.

Influential Court Cases

High-profile legal cases often serve as cultural flashpoints that reshape public attitudes, legal norms, and political will. In 2019, Julie Van Espen, a young woman, was raped and murdered by a man with prior sexual violence convictions who had not been imprisoned despite his record. The case sparked national outrage, leading to protests and intense scrutiny of Belgium's handling of sexual violence. It contributed to significant legal reform, including the 2022 revision of Belgium's Sexual Criminal Law. The case shifted public discourse toward greater support for victim-centered justice and accountability. The Sanda Dia case exposed deep societal concerns around class-based injustice. Dia, a 20-year-old Black student, died during a brutal hazing ritual in 2018. The perpetrators, members of an elite Flemish student fraternity, received light sentences in 2023, triggering widespread criticism and debate over "class justice" in Belgium. The case galvanized public protest and media attention, fueling demands for legal reform and racial equity in the justice system.

These cases and others catalyze ideological and policy shifts across the ecosystem of detention facilities. They influenced how the public perceives incarceration, offender accountability, and who receives protection under the law. They also affect future judicial rulings by redefining standards around fairness, and by pressuring institutions to prioritize transparency. The media's portrayal of these cases, whether accurate or sensationalized, has a large impact on how they are understood and perceived by the public. They contribute to both short-term outrages or protest responses that call for change and also long-term ideological shifts in how law enforcement and the justice system are discussed by the general population.

Restructuring of the Belgian Police Force in 2001 ("Octopus Reform")

The arrest and mishandling of the Marc Dutroux case in the late 1990s, highlighted by the infamous "spaghetti judgment" and the massive public outcry during the White March, exposed deep flaws in Belgium's policing system. The public's loss of trust, combined with intense media scrutiny, led to the Octopus Reform in 2001. This restructuring created a two-tiered police system with a clearer division between local and federal forces, aiming to improve coordination, reduce internal competition, and rebuild credibility.

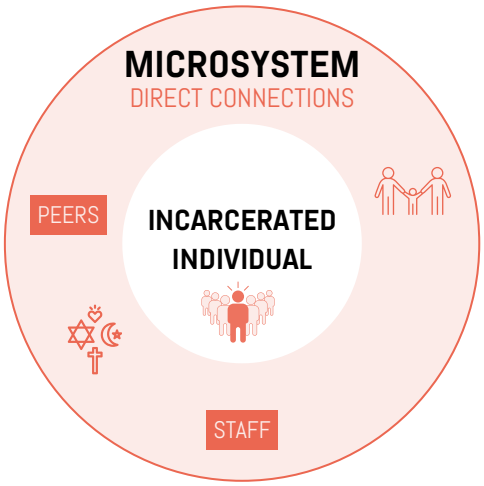
The reform marked a critical shift in how law enforcement is organized, perceived, and held accountable. This laid the groundwork for future justice system changes, although it was more law enforcement focused. This reform also introduced new layers of bureaucracy and ongoing challenges in cooperation between local and federal police. The creation of a two-tier system (local and federal police) aimed to clarify roles, but in practice, overlapping responsibilities and fragmented communication have persisted. This restructuring continues to shape (both positively and negatively) how law enforcement interacts with individuals, detention systems, and functions differently across regions in Belgium.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Staff Personnel in the justice system contribute to creating conditions for the realization and protection of the human rights of individuals serving sentences, as well as establishing the foundations for their resocialization and rehabilitation. This is achieved through direct communication and interaction between staff and incarcerated individuals, based on principles of professional conduct, understanding, and mutual trust. It is essential that staff have routine trainings and are motivated to work (through adequate salaries, advancement opportunities, humane conditions, etc.).	The competencies for the training of the prison staff are prescribed by the Law on the Execution of Criminal and Misdemeanor Sanctions. Framework plans and training programs for correctional officers are adopted by the Ministry of Justice, and annual training plans and programs are adopted by correctional institutions. In addition, additional trainings organized by the Council of Europe, the European Commission and the U.S. Government are carried out, which are of a continuous nature. Trainings of institute officers are carried out regularly, once a year.
Healthcare staff Correctional institutions employ healthcare personnel (doctors, dentists, medical technicians) who provide medical assistance in accordance with professional standards, medical ethics, and available resources. Of particular importance is the medical staff responsible for the mental health of individuals within the correctional system. Individuals with mental disorders must receive specialized treatment, and care for mental health is crucial for persons deprived of liberty, as imprisonment by its very nature impacts mental well-being.	A key issue here is the insufficient interest of medical professionals in working within the correctional system, primarily due to inadequate financial incentives and limited or nonexistent opportunities for professional advancement. On the other hand, healthcare services are also provided by medical professionals who work outside the correctional system but in cooperation with it. In this way, individuals in the correctional system can more easily and fully exercise their right to healthcare, one of the fundamental human rights, through services provided by external actors in coordination with the correctional system.

Educational staff

The right to education is one of the fundamental human rights and simultaneously serves as both a means and a condition for the resocialization of young adults within the correctional system. It represents a form of communication and cooperation with the outside world, as well as preparation for full and effective reintegration into social life upon release from a correctional facility. This includes personnel responsible for educating and professionally training individuals in the correctional system (instructors, teachers, etc.), as well as those regularly employed in educational institutions (schools and universities) who provide instruction to these individuals as part of the regular educational process.

Staffing regulations should ensure an adequate number of such positions and provide appropriate working conditions in order to motivate these professionals to work in correctional facilities. At the same time, it is necessary to establish organizational conditions and create a social climate conducive to the participation of individuals deprived of liberty in the educational process.

Judicial Officers (judges, prosecutors, attorneys)

The right to defense is guaranteed by the Constitution, and communication with a lawyer enables the exercise of this right, as well as the protection of the human rights of individuals in correctional institutions. The law stipulates that the president of the court or a designated judge must visit individuals in correctional facilities a certain number of times in order to assess the conditions of their confinement. These visits are of great importance for improving conditions of sentence execution and fulfilling the purpose of the correctional system.

Such visits must be carried out and reported to the highest court. However, a significant issue is that these visits do not always take place as scheduled or in accordance with the legally prescribed minimum, and there are no appropriate sanctions for such failures. Even when the number of visits is formally adequate, they are sometimes purely symbolic and do not lead to any meaningful changes in the situation of individuals within the correctional system.

Social workers

The role of social workers is crucial in the process of (re)integration. They provide support and assistance to incarcerated individuals. Their individual work with persons in the correctional system, as well as with their families, is essential. Social workers develop individualized plans based on the personal and family circumstances of each person (mental health, family environment, education, etc.).

Social workers engage with the families of incarcerated individuals to help them prepare for effective communication and support upon reentry. In this way, social workers help strengthen the relationships between incarcerated individuals and their families, aligning them with the core goal of successful (re)integration.

Religious figures

Religious communities and their clergy engage in communication with individuals deprived of liberty, helping them find spiritual peace, better cope with the conditions of life in correctional institutions, understand their circumstances from a spiritual perspective, and more easily coexist with other incarcerated individuals and staff.

The work of religious clergy with incarcerated individuals represents a distinct aspect of engagement with this population and contributes to a comprehensive approach to their personality and treatment. In this way, among other things, the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of conscience and religion is promoted and upheld.

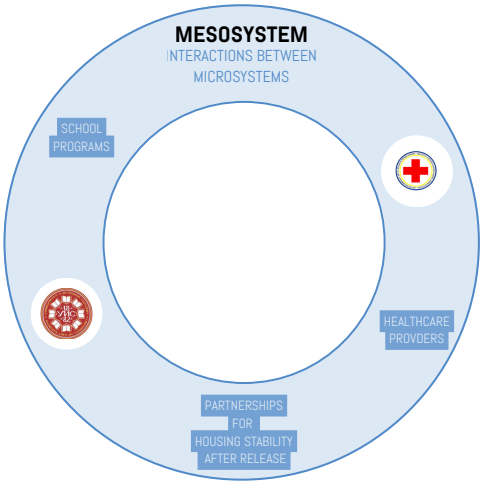
Family

Family is crucial in (re)integration. Mothers who care for children while serving their sentences (for up to children of two years) are accommodated separately from other incarcerated individuals. Individuals have the rights to visits, other communication, and special leave restrictions if certain family situations arise.

Legal regulations governing how and under what conditions individuals in the correctional system may communicate with their families are of great importance. This includes both the Law on the Execution of Sanctions and the bylaws issued by correctional institutions. These regulations should be sufficiently liberal to enable communication of all types.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
School programs For emerging adults who are entitled to primary and secondary education, the facility organizes classes. In this regard, institutions for the execution of criminal sanctions cooperate with primary and secondary schools. In addition, facilities organize special forms of professional training with appropriate organizations.	Courses are available in cooking, vegetable growing, sewing and knitting, construction work, cattle breeding, vegetable growing, waiter training, etc. If security reasons allow it and if the treatment program assesses that it is useful for achieving the purpose of the execution of the sentence, individuals can also study at the University of East Sarajevo.
Healthcare providers Incarcerated idividuals are provided with health care, and when there is no possibility of treatment in an institution, they are referred to an appropriate health institution. Despite improvements, health services in detention facilities still lack resources, especially medical staff.	The Ministry of Health does not formally cooperate with facilities, health workers do not receive any guidelines for their work, and there is no systematic monitoring of health care. In this regard, within pilot projects, protocols for the provision of health care in facilities have been drawn up, and there have been trainings of medical staff and studies about facility knowledge transfer. Reports have been submitted to the Ministry of Justice.
Cultural and Recreational organizations In order to acquire and satisfy the cultural, artistic and spiritual needs of incarcerated individuals, in accordance with their capabilities, institutions for the execution of criminal sanctions provide conditions for the use of free time.	In order to achieve these activities, drama, literary, music and other sections are organized and performances and competitions are held both inside and outside prisons in cooperation with cultural organizations.

Religious Partners

Every individual has the right to meet his or her religious needs, to attend religious ceremonies or gatherings organized within the institution for the execution of criminal sanctions, to pray according to the regulations of religious communities and to use religious literature. Institutions shall provide appropriate conditions for the performance of religious ceremonies in agreement with the competent representative of a particular registered religious community who regularly visits the institutions.

The visits of priests of the Serbian Orthodox Church are a significant factor in the justice ecosystem. During these visits, convicted persons are spiritually prepared for release from prison, and the experiences of others are shared with them. It also helps build a post-release support network. Religious needs may also be met by incarcerated individuals who are in the reception and discharge department, serving a disciplinary sentence of solitary confinement or solitary confinement, provided that this does not disturb the security situation in the institution.

Sports organizations

During the execution of the sentence, it is ensured that individuals can participate in sports activities. Sports activities include sections and tournaments within institutions for the execution of criminal sanctions (table tennis, basketball, football, chess, etc.). However, in some institutions for the execution of criminal sanctions, the departure of incarcerated people accompanied by educators to important matches in the place where the facility is located is occasionally organized.

In some facilities, during the summer months, the use of swimming pools is provided, and in others, incarcerated individuals who are members of a sports club from the same place are accommodated so that they can continue to perform in that club.

Social enterprises

Within the framework of the economic and instructor service in the institution for the execution of criminal sanctions, economic units can be established. The purpose of establishing economic units is for individuals who want to work while serving a prison sentence to acquire or maintain and increase their working abilities, work habits and professional knowledge, in order to facilitate their inclusion in life and work after release. A business unit in a facility can sell products and services on the market.

The Law on Social Entrepreneurship of the Republic of Srpska, which was adopted in 2021, stipulates that the social mission of the social enterprise, among other things, is achieved by employing categories of persons who are more difficult to employ while their status lasts, and among them persons serving sentences and dismissal from institutions are explicitly mentioned. Unfortunately, there are still no examples of social entrepreneurship in practice involving persons deprived of their liberty.

NGO collaboration

Representatives of various international organizations, as well as representatives of the IPTF work with facilities. The cooperation of the prison with the Red Cross is particularly developed, so incarcerated individuals also participate in humanitarian actions.

Correctional institutions in the Republic of Srpska also cooperate with NGOs to provide funds for the procurement of equipment for the work of incarcerated individuals. Some NGOs cooperate with facilities in the field of public health, by providing training to incarcerated individuals regarding infectious diseases such as AIDS.

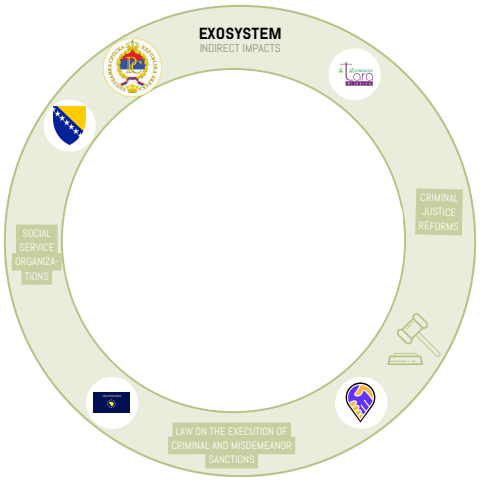
Community partnerships for housing stability after Release

For certain categories of incarcerated people (persons with violent behavior), projects with international organizations have been carried out to improve inter-agency cooperation related to their release and their successful integration into society, as well as enhancing inter-agency cooperation.

The project ensures the sustainability of actions taken with the aim of effective (re)integration and reducing violent reoffending. This model of multisectoral cooperation in penal and post-penal treatment by experts is also advocated for other offenders.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Law on the Execution of Criminal and Misdemeanor Sanctions This law is the central framework regulating the penal system in Republika Srpska. It defines the establishment, organization, and management of penal and correctional institutions, and covers all aspects of imprisonment—from labor relations and rights of incarcerated persons to disciplinary measures, parole, fines, community service, and house arrest. It also creates the legal basis for alternative measures, such as probation and community service, and for placing individuals with mental health conditions into specialized institutions like the Institute for Forensic Psychiatry in Sokolac	The law ties detention facilities to a wide network of external actors: courts (which impose sanctions), the Ministry of Justice (which oversees implementation), healthcare providers (for physical and mental health), and educational institutions (for schooling and vocational training). It also establishes cooperation channels with social welfare services for reintegration after release, ensuring that prisons are not isolated systems but linked to broader state and community structures.
Ministry of Justice, Department for the Execution of Criminal and Misdemeanor Sanctions This department, operating within the Ministry of Justice of Republika Srpska, is the core administrative body responsible for enforcing criminal sanctions. It sets internal standards for penal institutions, supervises their legality, provides conditions for their functioning, and ensures uniform implementation of laws. It also develops organizational rules, oversees staffing and training, and administers community service as an alternative to imprisonment.	The Department links prisons with courts, municipalities, NGOs, and international organizations. It signs agreements with legal entities where community service is carried out, cooperates with the Ministry of Health to address healthcare shortages in prisons, and works with donor-funded projects and the Council of Europe to improve staff training and rehabilitation programs. Through these connections, the Department acts as the coordinating hub between penal institutions and society at large.

Preventive Mechanism (The Institution of Human Rights Ombudsman)

The Preventive Mechanism, established in 2024 within the Ombudsman Institution of Bosnia and Herzegovina, monitors detention facilities to prevent torture and other forms of inhuman treatment. Operating under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), it has the mandate to conduct regular and unannounced visits, issue recommendations, and propose legislative reforms aimed at strengthening human rights protection in detention settings.

The mechanism connects detention facilities with domestic oversight bodies, the National Assembly, and international actors such as the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Torture. Its reports influence national policy and serve as a communication channel between prisoners' lived realities and legislative authorities. By doing so, it integrates Bosnia's prison system into global human rights frameworks and pushes for systemic improvements.

Non-governmental organizations

NGOs are active partners in Bosnia and Herzegovina's detention system, offering services ranging from health programs to advocacy. Some NGOs focus on practical contributions, such as providing equipment for prison workshops or supporting public health initiatives (e.g., prevention of hepatitis and HIV in Banja Luka prison). Others, such as Lara Foundation and United Women, advocate for legislative reforms to protect vulnerable groups.

NGOs connect prisons to both local and international networks. They collaborate with correctional institutions to deliver training, fund equipment, and raise awareness about health risks. International organizations like "Help" empower prison economic units, while advocacy NGOs push for systemic reforms in line with human rights standards. These connections make NGOs crucial intermediaries between detention facilities, civil society, and global policy actors.

Media reporting

The media exerts significant influence on how detention facilities are perceived by the public. Coverage often emphasizes negative stories, such as escapes, riots, or financial mismanagement, while rarely highlighting successful rehabilitation, education, or reintegration programs. This selective reporting fosters distrust and strengthens punitive attitudes in society.

Through its coverage, the media indirectly connects detention facilities with the political system and public opinion. Negative framing fuels political demands for tougher legislation, while the lack of positive reporting isolates prisons from community support. This dynamic affects funding priorities, legislative debates, and the broader social climate around criminal justice reform.

Social service organisations

Social services play a central role in the reintegration of former prisoners by providing post-release support in housing, welfare, and family reintegration. While detention facilities notify local welfare authorities when incarcerated individuals need community assistance, the system lacks formalized agreements with employers, housing bodies, and educational institutions, which limits its scope. Nonetheless, social services are often the first point of contact for individuals re-entering society

These organizations connect penal institutions with local communities, ensuring continuity of care after release. For example, collaborations with NGOs like Otaharin provide reintegration support for Roma populations, linking prisons with broader minority inclusion strategies. Although underdeveloped, these connections highlight the importance of coordinated work between justice, welfare, and civil society in successful resocialization.

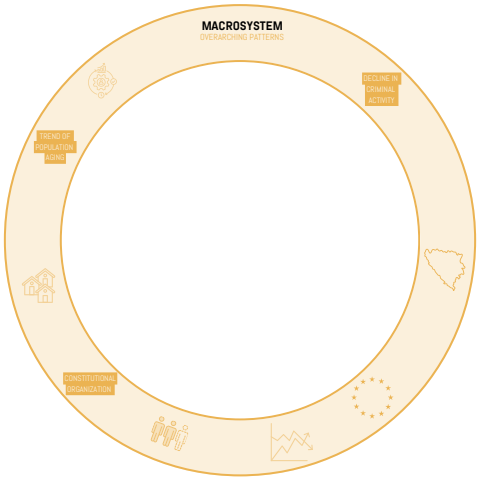
Initiatives for criminal justice reform

After the commission of certain criminal offenses that attract the attention of the media (commission of criminal offenses by children under 14 years of age, corruption of state officials, domestic violence with a fatal outcome, etc.), certain political parties, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, citizens' associations or informal groups of citizens with more or less success demand changes in criminal legislation in certain areas.

Depending on the social impact of the organization or movement that takes primary positioning on these reforms, they are adopted or rejected. Since the influence of international organizations such as the Council of Europe, the OSCE, etc., is strong in our country, many reforms have been carried out in the field of the execution of criminal sanctions, although so far there have been no stronger initiatives for small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention facilities.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Origin and Constitutional organization of Bosnia and Herzegovina Bosnia and Herzegovina's current constitutional setup is a direct result of the violent breakup of Yugoslavia and the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995). The state consists of two entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, plus the Brčko District with special status. Each entity has its own criminal legislation, judiciary, and penal system, while the state-level government has only limited competences in criminal justice. This fragmented system creates significant structural complexity, where responsibilities are split between different levels of governance.	The decentralized structure connects detention facilities and justice systems primarily to entity-level ministries, courts, and police, rather than to state-level bodies. However, international actors (e.g., the Office of the High Representative, the Council of Europe, and OSCE) frequently interact with both entities, shaping reforms and standards across BiH. Thus, prisons in Republika Srpska are indirectly influenced by both entity-level governance and international obligations, but less by central state institutions.
European frameworks Bosnia and Herzegovina is bound by European standards such as the European Convention on the Prevention of Torture, monitored by the CPT (Committee for the Prevention of Torture). Regular CPT visits assess detention conditions and issue recommendations, highlighting deficiencies in treatment, healthcare, and prison infrastructure. These frameworks ensure external oversight and guide BiH toward compliance with European human rights norms.	European institutions connect Bosnia's penal system with international monitoring, reforms, and capacity-building initiatives. CPT recommendations influence the Ministry of Justice, detention facilities, and local actors, creating a continuous feedback loop between domestic practice and European standards. This external layer of oversight integrates BiH prisons into a transnational governance ecosystem, ensuring that local practices are shaped by supranational obligations and reforms.

Economic system

Post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina transitioned from socialism to capitalism, marked by privatization of socially-owned enterprises. A small group gained wealth, while many workers lost jobs and social security. The shift eroded collectivist values and introduced stronger individualistic and profit-driven mentalities. This socioeconomic restructuring created vulnerabilities, inequalities, and insecurity, contributing to new social tensions and criminal behaviors.

The economic environment influences crime rates, rehabilitation prospects, and reintegration opportunities for former prisoners. High unemployment and weak social safety nets limit the options for ex-prisoners to rebuild their lives. This, in turn, affects prisons' effectiveness in resocialization, as the broader economic system is not equipped to absorb and support vulnerable individuals. Moreover, detention facilities themselves depend on budget allocations shaped by the wider economic performance of the state.

Trend of population aging

Like many European societies, Bosnia and Herzegovina faces demographic decline due to low birth rates, migration of younger populations, and the aging of the baby boom generation. This demographic shift alters the profile of offenders, with fewer juveniles and young adults being convicted. The aging trend also reshapes social priorities, with more attention given to pensions and healthcare systems than to youth issues.

The demographic shift influences crime structures and the needs of penal institutions. With fewer young offenders, correctional programs may need to adapt less toward juveniles and more toward adult or elderly prisoners. At the same time, migration and depopulation reduce the available workforce, which indirectly affects prison staffing, social services, and reintegration programs. These demographic realities connect prisons to broader population and labor market trends.

Decline in the number of defendants and criminal activity

In recent years, Bosnia and Herzegovina has seen a steady decline in the number of indictments and overall crime rates. For example, indictments fell from 3,347 in 2019 to 2,272 in 2024. This indicates a broader reduction in criminal activity and a shrinking prison population, reducing pressure on detention facilities.

The decline in crime rates connects penal institutions to broader societal changes, such as improved crime prevention, demographic decline, or migration patterns. Fewer indictments reduce prison overcrowding, freeing up resources for rehabilitation programs and alternative measures. This trend also affects how courts, prosecutors, and the Ministry of Justice allocate their workload and budget priorities, linking detention facilities to wider shifts in public safety and social policy.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:

Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS

Jurisdictional Distinctions and Facility Allocation in Bosnia and Herzegovina

At the state level, Bosnia and Herzegovina has a court, but for many years there was no dedicated state-level detention facility for individuals sentenced by this court. Instead, they were placed in entity-level detention facilities, contributing to overcrowding.

In 2020, the Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions, Detention, and Other Measures was established, allowing many individuals to be transferred from entity facilities to the new institution. This significantly reduced the burden on the entity-level facilities.

The Brčko District, which does not have its own detention facility, presents unique challenges. According to current legal provisions, incarcerated individuals from Brčko can choose which entity facility to serve their sentence in. However, this flexibility can create inconsistencies in treatment within the same facility. For example, solitary confinement as a disciplinary measure can legally last up to 20 days under entity laws, while under state-level laws (applicable to Brčko District), the maximum is 10 days. As a result, two incarcerated individuals in the same facility could receive different disciplinary penalties for the same offense, solely due to differing legal frameworks. This raises concerns about unequal treatment and legal coherence across jurisdictions.

Emergence of extremist behavior

In response to the rise of extremist behavior, the Ministry of Justice of Republika Srpska, in partnership with the Council of Europe Office in BiH, launched a four-year project titled Structured Sentence Management for Convicted Persons with Violent and Extremist Behavior in BiH. Completed in 2021, the project aimed to create a coordinated, long-term response to radicalization by strengthening institutional collaboration and ensuring support for incarcerated individuals during and after detention. The focus was on building mechanisms for inter-agency cooperation to support individuals with violent or extremist behavior throughout their reintegration into the community. The initiative also sought to ensure that prison staff and institutions are equipped to manage risks and promote rehabilitation effectively.

The project, implemented with justice ministries and partner institutions across BiH, focused on four core areas:

- Developing strategic and operational guidelines for managing extremist behavior;
- Creating staff selection and training strategies for high-security units;
- Establishing a case management system (CMS);
- Evaluating risk assessment tools and designing tailored rehabilitation programs.

It resulted in four main documents and a digital Center of Excellence platform to support inter-agency knowledge sharing and best practices. The initiative emphasized the importance of coordinated, multi-agency reintegration planning, ensuring all stakeholders, including local communities, understand their roles and responsibilities in supporting individuals post-release.

Legal reforms introducing alternatives to detention

Recent amendments to the Criminal Code of Republika Srpska have introduced several alternatives to imprisonment, including probation, probation with protective supervision, and community service. Under Article 46(3), prison sentences of up to one year may, in exceptional cases, be served under house arrest. This option is available for elderly, frail, seriously ill, or disabled individuals, as well as pregnant women and single parents of minor children, if the court deems it appropriate and the individual agrees. In 2021, the Criminal Code was further amended to allow courts to replace prison sentences of up to one year with a fine, upon request by the convicted individual. This provision, once part of the law but abolished in 2017, was reinstated in 2021. Approximately 120 sentences are converted into fines each year.

To support the use of community service, two key regulations were adopted in 2019:

- One outlining the procedure for implementing community service,
- And another defining the criteria for selecting legal entities willing to host individuals sentenced to community service.

Following these regulations, the Ministry of Justice published an official list of approved legal entities in 2021. Although this enabled courts to impose community service as a sanction, the measure has been rarely applied in practice.

COVID 19 - pandemic

Many incarcerated individuals typically had multiple factors that put them at greater risk of a more severe form of COVID 19. Outbreaks in prisons affected not only the incarcerated individuals or the people who work there, but also the communities associated with them.

During that period, visits were prohibited or largely limited. Sports activities and forms of recreation were suspended in many facilities of all types. That resulted alongside reduced visits, isolation and longer timeframes needed for the adaption for improved conditions.

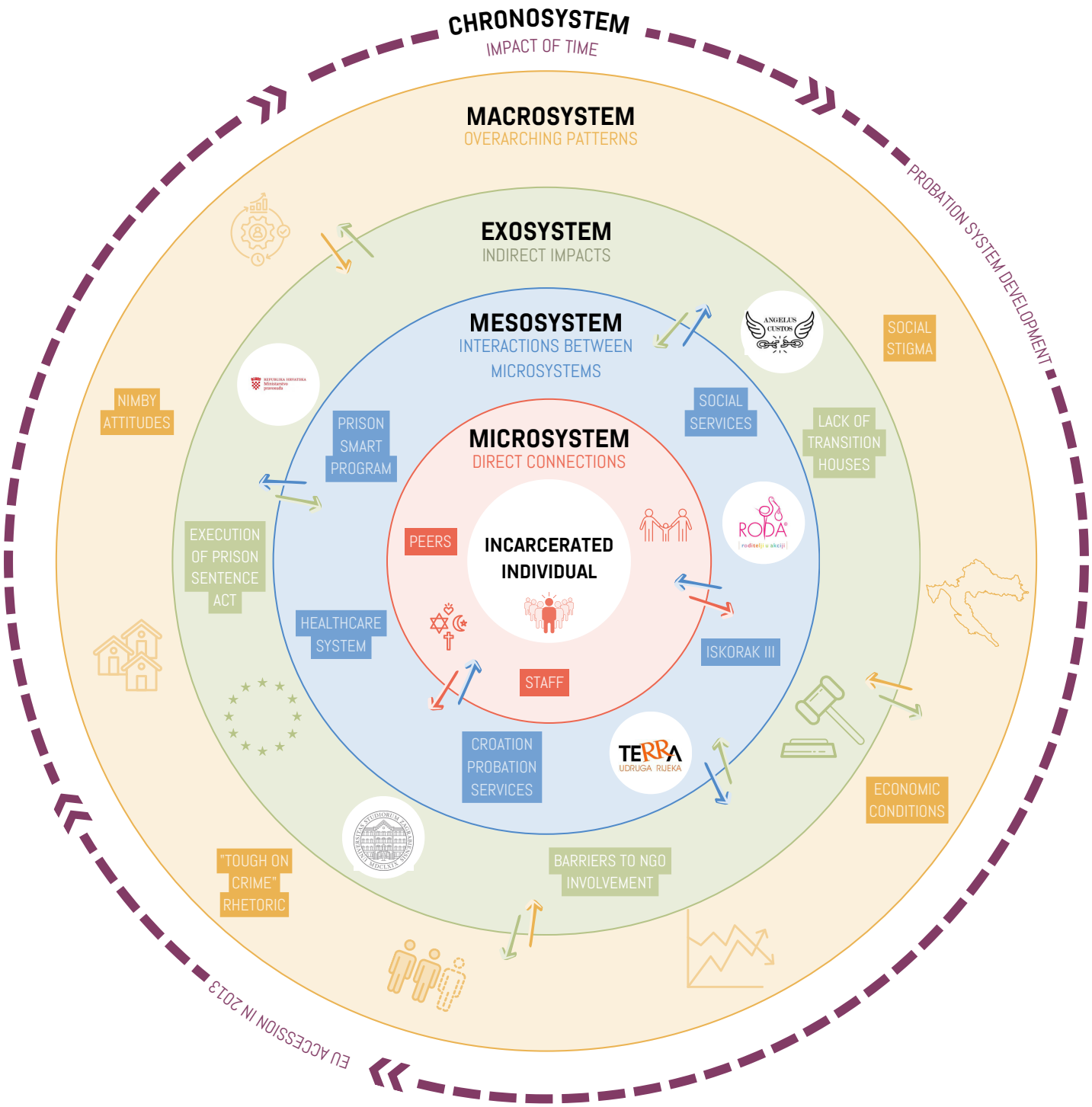
Amnesty Law (2018)

This law granted amnesty to individuals convicted by final court judgments in Republika Srpska who were, at the time of the law's entry into force, serving sentences in detention facilities in Republika Srpska, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, or abroad. It also applied to those sentenced by final judgment but not yet transferred to serve their sentence. Under the law, sentences were reduced by 25%. For individuals aged 70 or older at the time the law took effect, the reduction was 40%. The law clearly outlined which categories of individuals were excluded from the amnesty.

As a result of this amnesty, a significant number of incarcerated individuals were released, easing overcrowding and reducing pressure on detention facilities across the region.

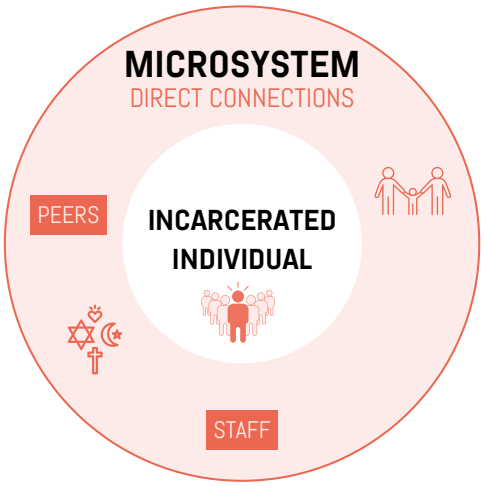
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

CROATIA



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family connections In Croatia, family ties are generally recognized as important for (re)integration. Most facilities provide designated "family rooms" that allow for more private interactions, and video calls were introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, geographic distance, administrative procedures, and a lack of consistent psychosocial support still create barriers. Child-parent accommodation in prison settings is limited to rare cases, such as in Požega for mothers with infants. Structured programs to support parenting and child contact exist but are mostly led by NGOs and vary by facility.	Maintaining relationships with family, especially children, is a key element of (re)integration in Croatia. While most prisons allow visitation, there are limited resources for structured family programs. NGOs such as RODA offer parenting and reentry support, and some initiatives (e.g. Children of Prisoners Week) aim to maintain family bonds. However, these efforts are fragmented and lack formal integration into prison policy. National-level coordination or guaranteed family-oriented programming is still missing.
Security staff in correctional facilities Security staff in Croatian prisons primarily operate within a control- and order-based framework. Training tends to emphasize procedural and safety elements, with limited exposure to rehabilitative or relational models. However, a shift is slowly emerging, particularly among younger officers, who show openness to relational security and more humane approaches.	Despite some openness, there is no systematic training in dynamic security or communication strategies that support rehabilitation. Security staff are rarely included in multidisciplinary planning for reintegration.

Psychosocial Staff in correctional facilities

Psychologists, social workers, and social pedagogues form the core of psychosocial teams within Croatian prisons. While their role is essential for rehabilitation, they are often overburdened and unevenly distributed across facilities. Resources, training, and institutional recognition for their work remain limited.

Collaboration with community services such as health care, employment offices, and housing support is irregular and typically driven by individual initiative. There is no national framework to support sustained, ecosystem-based work by psychosocial teams.

Peers

Peer relationships within prisons have a significant impact on behavior, mental health, and motivation. However, there are few peer-led initiatives or formal structures (such as peer mentoring or lived-experience groups) that could channel this influence positively.

There are no structured peer mentoring programs, and informal dynamics can be either supportive or risky. Their potential is not systematically harnessed.

Judicial system actors (judges and attorneys)

Judges and attorneys play a key role in shaping the early experiences of individuals in the justice system. Their understanding of rehabilitative opportunities and discretion in sentencing or diversion significantly affect outcomes. However, in Croatia, training for judicial actors on social reintegration and ecosystem-based approaches is minimal.

Judges rarely participate in multi-sector coordination, and referrals to alternative or rehabilitative pathways depend heavily on individual discretion rather than institutional practice.

Schools and teachers

For young offenders or individuals with disrupted education histories, schools and educators can be essential support systems. In Croatia, however, there are few systemic links between schools and the correctional system, and education for juvenile or young adult offenders is often limited or delayed.

Educational institutions are not consistently involved in reintegration planning. Where collaboration exists, it is typically through NGO-led projects rather than formal institutional pathways.

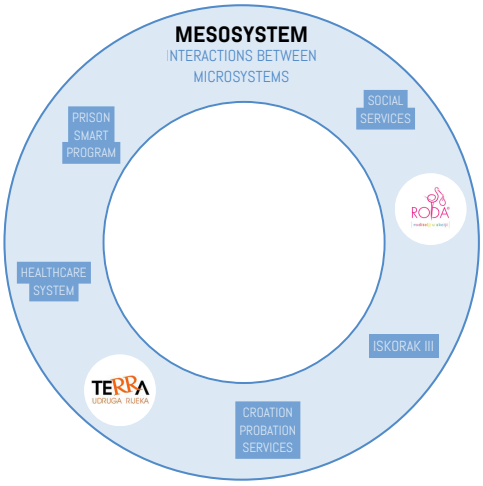
Personal faith and spirituality

Many incarcerated individuals rely on personal faith or spiritual practices for coping and resilience. In Croatian prisons and other detention facilities, religious representatives have access to facilities and chaplaincy services are available, though their involvement and scope vary widely.

Faith-based organizations are not formally integrated into reintegration networks, but may offer valuable emotional and moral support during and after incarceration.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Probation services Since its establishment in 2009, the probation service has contributed to expanding the use of non-custodial sanctions and supervision, thereby reducing the prison population and increasing the application of community measures for offenders where imprisonment was not necessary. In addition to its supervisory role and efforts to strengthen offenders' personal capital, the service could, in the future, place greater emphasis on developing the social capital of released prisoners through a balanced approach.	Although probation is organizationally linked with the prison system, its integration into sentence planning during imprisonment remains limited, and the implementation and availability of services vary across regions. Nevertheless, the potential for greater involvement of the probation service already during the execution of prison sentences is a positive development, as it would ensure more continuous support in the reintegration process
Collaboration with external healthcare services Healthcare in Croatian detention facilities is managed by the Ministry of Justice, not the Ministry of Health, which creates systemic separation from mainstream services. Mental health and addiction treatment are especially under-resourced.	Mental and physical healthcare are formally available in prisons, but often limited in scope and quality. Transition to external care is fragmented. Upon release, most individuals are expected to reconnect with general healthcare providers independently. Some NGOs help bridge this gap, but systemic coordination is lacking.
Social welfare services Although social welfare centers are legally mandated to support vulnerable populations, including formerly incarcerated people, their practical engagement with reintegration is inconsistent. Staff often lack specialized training, and services such as housing or psychosocial support are limited and overstretched.	Coordination with correctional services is informal, reactive, and heavily reliant on individual initiative. There are no national protocols or inter-ministerial agreements to guide systematic collaboration.

Education and employers

Access to education and employment support in Croatian detention facilities is highly uneven. While some prisons collaborate with local schools or NGOs, vocational and job-readiness programs are rare and inconsistently funded.

Access to education and vocational programs varies widely. Some facilities have partnerships with adult education centers or NGOs, but consistent pathways to employment are rare. Initiatives that link incarcerated individuals with job preparation or employer engagement exist. Employment offices are rarely involved in pre-release planning. Where partnerships exist (e.g., through EU-funded initiatives), they are local and temporary, lacking national coordination.

NGO programs (edcuational, cultural, psycho-social)

Croatian detention facilities host a range of non-mandatory programs, including art workshops, drama, and yoga. Programs like Prison SMART or ISKORAK III offer mindfulness and addiction recovery support, but are often dependent on short-term NGO or EU project funding. Educational services exist but are inconsistently implemented.

Initiatives like Prison SMART, ISKORAK III, and Clubture are valuable but remain dependent on external funding and individual institutions. They are not part of a systemic approach. Their success points to the potential of broader institutional integration, which is currently lacking.

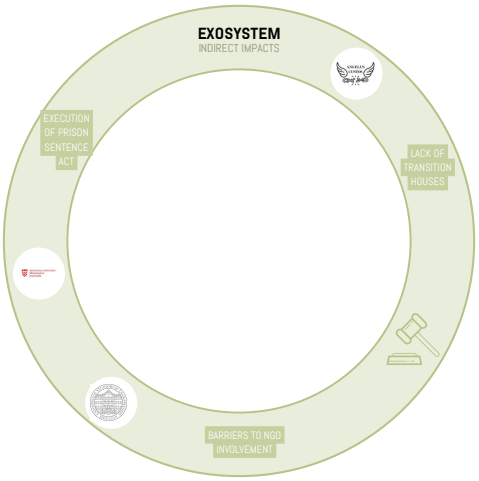
Family support initiatives and organizations

A small number of NGOs in Croatia work to support incarcerated individuals' families, particularly children of incarcerated parents. Organizations such as RODA have developed targeted programs offering parenting support, emotional counseling, and structured visits. However, such initiatives are not systematically embedded in prison services.

These family-oriented programs often bridge the gap between detention facilities and the community, helping to maintain relationships during incarceration and support reintegration. Still, their reach is limited to individual projects and local partnerships, with no national policy framework to ensure continuity or expansion.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Legal framework (Execution of Prison Sentence Act; Probation Act) While Croatia's laws enable probation, early release, and alternatives to incarceration, they do not sufficiently operationalize reintegration or mandate cooperation across sectors. There is also no legal obligation to provide post-release housing, health, or employment support.	The legal framework allows for alternatives to imprisonment and recognizes probation, but it does not systematically promote ecosystem-based reintegration. Legal amendments often focus on technical aspects of execution rather than continuity of care or reintegration. There are no legal guarantees for coordinated reentry planning involving housing, employment, and healthcare. Recent amendments have weakened minimum detention conditions, which may hinder more humane, small-scale alternatives.
Institutional structure (Ministry of Justice, Prison Administration) The correctional system is centrally governed, with a top-down structure that limits flexibility and local innovation. EU-funded projects occasionally introduce new practices, but there is no clear mechanism for scaling successful models.	The justice system is centrally managed and highly hierarchical, which often slows innovation. While some EU-funded projects have introduced good practices, they are rarely sustained or scaled up. There is no dedicated national strategy for small-scale or community-integrated facilities. In addition to that, lack of horizontal cooperation between ministries (e.g., justice, health, social affairs) hinders the development of integrated services for reintegration.

Barriers to greater NGO's and civil society involvement

NGOs play a critical role in bridging gaps in services such as housing, counseling, cultural engagement, and addiction recovery. However, their involvement is often informal and project-based, without long-term contracts.

NGOs play a crucial role in filling systemic gaps, offering reintegration support, housing, and counseling. However, cooperation with state institutions varies and is often informal. These actors often lead innovative pilot projects, but without long-term contracts or structural support, their impact remains fragile.

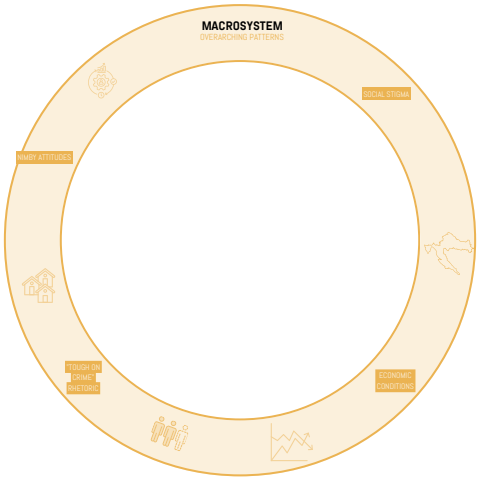
Lack of transitional facilities

Croatia does not have a structured network of transitional or halfway houses under state administration. Most transitional support is offered by NGOs such as Terra on a small scale, often tied to short-term projects

The absence of transitional housing options limits continuity of care and increases the risk of homelessness and recidivism, especially for high-risk or marginalized groups.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Social stigma and public attitudes Formerly incarcerated individuals face significant social stigma in Croatia, particularly in employment and housing. Public discourse rarely supports rehabilitation, and media coverage often reinforces punitive narratives.	The lack of awareness campaigns or public education on reintegration issues contributes to exclusion and undermines community-based efforts.
Political will and penal culture Although policy documents reference rehabilitation, political discourse remains dominated by "tough on crime" rhetoric. There is little investment in or advocacy for alternatives to incarceration.	Most progress in ecosystem-based work comes from donor-funded projects rather than national leadership or legislative reform.
Economic conditions Justice institutions operate under financial constraints, affecting staffing levels, infrastructure, and available programs. Many services are funded by external donors rather than state budgets.	EU funds have enabled some innovations, but sustainability is a key challenge without long-term national investment.

Media representation

Media coverage of justice and detention facility-related issues in Croatia often focuses on incidents such as escapes, violence, or corruption, while successful reintegration stories are rarely presented. This perpetuates negative stereotypes and contributes to public resistance toward rehabilitation-focused policies.

Media narratives shape societal attitudes and political agendas, making it difficult to advocate for systemic reintegration measures.

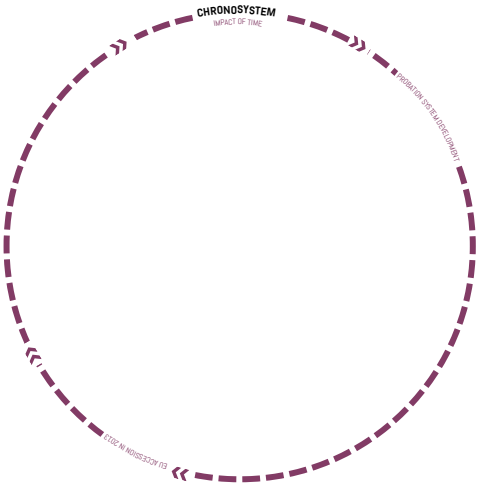
NIMBY attitudes

Communities frequently resist the establishment of transitional homes, community service programs, or social enterprises for former incarcerated individuals, fearing for safety or reputation. This “Not In My Backyard” (NIMBY) phenomenon limits the physical and social space available for reintegration efforts.

These attitudes create practical obstacles to community-based rehabilitation initiatives, forcing services to remain small-scale or hidden, often depending on NGO advocacy to proceed.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Probation system development in 2009 1The establishment of the probation system marked a major shift toward non-custodial measures in line with European standards.	This reform expanded community-based supervision options but has yet to result in fully integrated reintegration planning.
EU accession in 2013 EU membership brought legal harmonization and access to funding for justice reforms, including prison modernization and training.	It facilitated pilot projects in reintegration and alternative sanctions, but there is limited institutionalization of successful practices.

COVID-19 pandemic

The pandemic exposed digital, infrastructural, and human resource gaps in the prison system. Restrictions had a lasting effect on incarcerated individuals' well-being and service delivery.

While some digital innovations (e.g. video calls) were introduced, most support programs were suspended or scaled down, revealing a lack of systemic resilience.

Short-term EU funded projects

Programs like ISKORAK III, Pokretači promjene, and Terra's transitional housing project demonstrate cross-sector potential.

Despite their success, they remain isolated efforts without national-level follow-up or replication mechanisms.

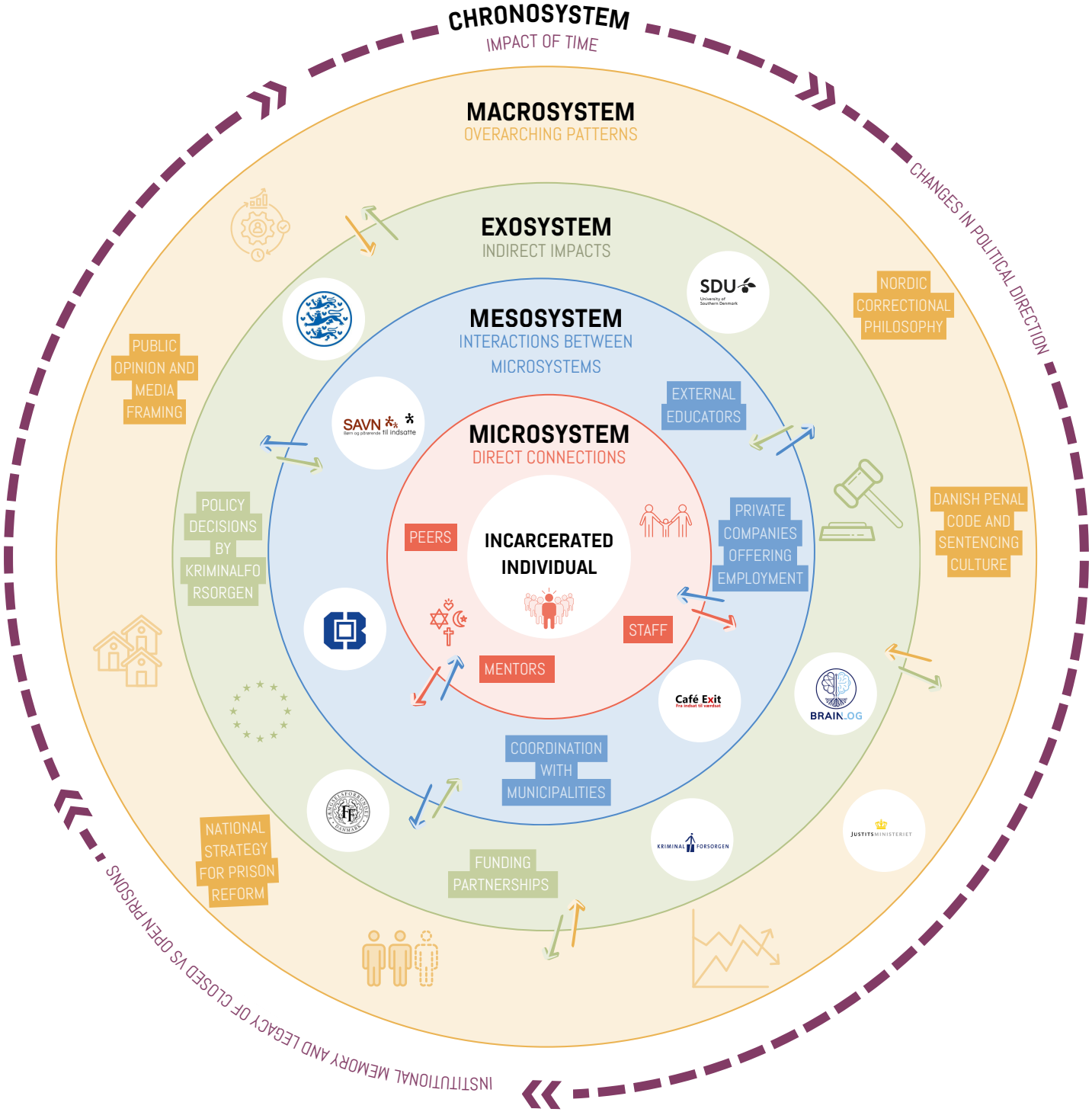
Social and demographic change

Over the past two decades, Croatia has experienced significant emigration, population aging, and urban-rural disparities. These demographic shifts affect both the profile of incarcerated individuals and the availability of support networks upon release, particularly in depopulated rural areas.

Reduced family networks, fewer local services, and community fragmentation make reintegration more difficult, especially outside urban centers.

RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

DENMARK



MICROSYSTEM

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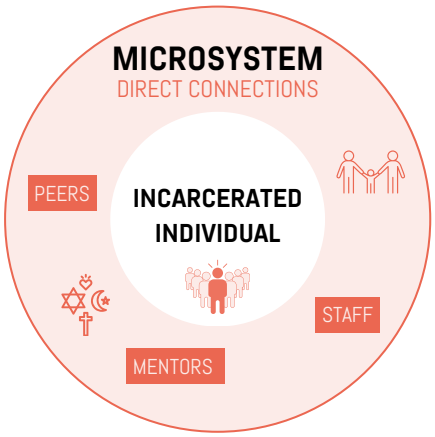


FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Staff in detention facilities Prison officers are central actors. They complete a three-year professional education at Kriminalforsorgens Education Center, where dynamic security is a cornerstone. This means maintaining order not through force but through respectful daily relationships and conflict prevention. Other staff, social workers, foremen, educators, and healthcare providers, all contribute to reintegration and security.	Staff embody the penal philosophy on the ground. Their effectiveness depends on national staffing policies, budgets. When staff shortages occur, programs are cut back, and incarcerated people will spend more extended periods locked in cells, undermining the very principles staff are trained to uphold.
Family and children Family contact is protected under the Sentence Enforcement Act (Straffuldbyrdelsesloven), which guarantees regular visits. Special "family visiting rooms" and mother–child units allow children to stay with their mothers until age three. Initiatives like bedtime story recordings underline Denmark's recognition that detention affects the whole family.	This focus on family ties reflects the Nordic principle of normalization. It depends on Kriminalforsorgen's guidelines, but is supported in practice by municipalities, who provide follow-up social services, and by NGOs like SAVN, which advocates for children of prisoners. Political crises (e.g., COVID-19) showed how fragile family contact can be when visits are suspended.

Health professionals

Incarcerated people have a right to the same healthcare as the general population under Danish law. Doctors, dentists, psychologists, and psychiatrists provide services, and telepsychiatry has expanded access in recent years. Mental health challenges are significant: surveys show a higher prevalence of psychiatric disorders among incarcerated people compared to society at large.

Healthcare in prisons depends on partnerships with regional health authorities, but NGOs like DIGNITY also monitor conditions and lobby for improvements. When services fall short, the Ombudsman and CPT inspections put pressure on the state to comply with international standards.

Religious/ spiritual support

Freedom of religion is guaranteed in Danish prisons. Chaplains, imams, rabbis, and other faith leaders provide spiritual care, often as external partners.

Faith services not only support incarcerated people but also provide a bridge to external communities and volunteers, reinforcing social networks that matter after release.

Educators

The Danish Penal Code emphasizes rehabilitation, and Kriminalforsorgen must offer opportunities for education and work. In practice, educators and foremen (værkmestre) provide literacy, vocational training, and prison labor opportunities, giving incarcerated people skills for reentry. Social workers and prison officers complement this by developing rehabilitation plans.

These opportunities depend on agreements with schools, vocational colleges, and employers, and often draw support from EU funding. They also require municipalities to help translate prison-acquired skills into actual jobs upon release.

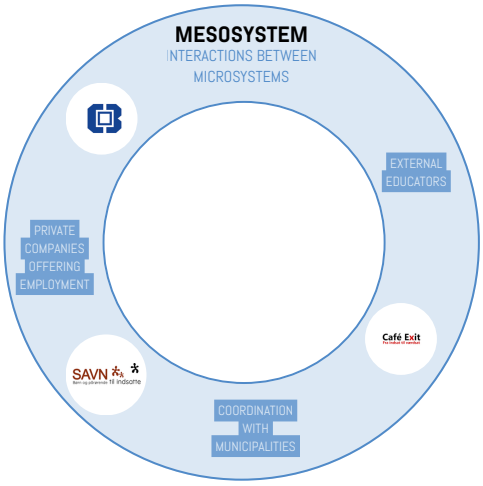
Volunteers

Volunteers play an important role in Danish prisons. They run mentoring schemes, organize activities, and sometimes provide informal education or social support. Their presence helps reduce isolation, especially for those who have few family contacts. Volunteer engagement reflects the Nordic emphasis on normalization, where everyday social relations are seen as part of rehabilitation.

Volunteers often work through NGOs like SAVN (support for children of prisoners), church organizations, or local associations. Their efforts depend on Kriminalforsorgen's willingness to open facilities to civil society and on municipal or national funding to sustain projects. Volunteers also act as bridges between incarcerated people and communities, helping reduce stigma and prepare the ground for reintegration.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Municipalities Municipalities have a legal duty under the Act on Social Services to provide housing, health care, and social benefits after release. Reintegration plans are therefore created jointly between Kriminalforsorgen and municipalities. Transition houses are an example of this cooperation: municipal caseworkers, probation officers, and social workers work side by side to prepare residents for everyday life.	When municipalities are well-resourced, reintegration can be smooth, with housing secured and health services transferred quickly. But in areas facing housing shortages or strained budgets, incarcerated people risk release into homelessness or unemployment. This unevenness creates pressure for national reforms.
Probation services Probation services are the glue between prisons and communities. Officers help with planning before release and continue supervision afterwards. Their role is a blend of control (ensuring conditions are met) and support (connecting people to services).	They rely on information from courts, prison officers, and municipalities, meaning their effectiveness is shaped by cooperation across the system. Political reforms that toughen sentencing or expand probation conditions directly increase their caseloads.
NGO's and social enterprises Civil society is deeply embedded in Denmark's correctional system. SAVN works with children of imprisoned parents, DIGNITY monitors conditions and promotes rehabilitation, and social enterprises create real job opportunities for incarcerated people. These actors address needs the state alone cannot meet, especially around family support and stigma reduction.	NGOs and social enterprises depend on state funding and political goodwill to sustain their projects. Their success or decline affects how well families, children, and former incarcerated people are supported outside prison.

Cultural and sports programs

Cultural and sports activities inside prisons (art workshops, theater, football leagues, yoga, etc.) create opportunities for expression, health, and social interaction beyond daily routines. They strengthen identity, build resilience, and reduce stress.

These programs connect prisons to local cultural institutions, municipalities, and volunteers, fostering normalization. They also prepare individuals for reintegration by building transferable social and teamwork skills, bridging the microsystem (incarcerated individuals and staff) with community actors.

Private companies offering prison-based employment

Companies partner with prisons to provide real work opportunities inside correctional facilities, often in manufacturing, services, or logistics. This gives incarcerated people relevant skills, a sense of responsibility, and potential post-release job contacts.

Such initiatives illustrate cooperation between the justice system and private sector. They link the microsystem (educators, foremen, incarcerated people) with external labor markets and the broader economy, shaping reintegration outcomes. The sustainability of these partnerships depends on exosystem-level funding and national labor policies.

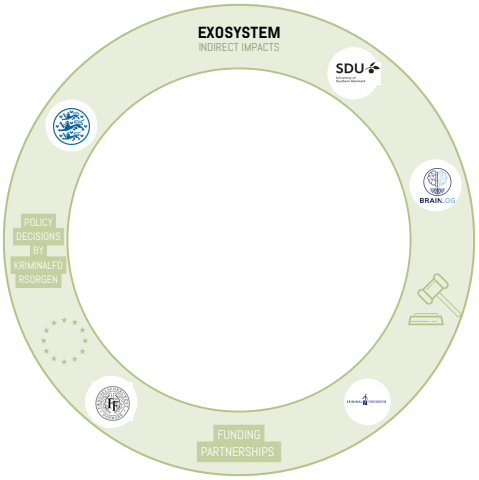
Digital and IT training initiatives

With the digital economy expanding, IT and digital literacy programs inside prisons offer incarcerated people vital competencies for the modern labor market. These can include coding courses, online safety training, and digital literacy basics.

Digital training connects prisons with vocational schools, NGOs, and tech companies. It demonstrates how innovation and labor-market demands at the macro level filter down to rehabilitation practices. It also requires strong mesosystem coordination, since municipalities and employers must recognize and translate these skills into real opportunities after release.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Kriminalforsorgen (Danish Prison and Probation service) Kriminalforsorgen is the central authority under the Ministry of Justice. It runs all prisons, probation, and transition houses, employing staff and implementing the Sentence Enforcement Act (Straffuldbyrdelsesloven). It sets rules for family visits, education access, and healthcare provision, while also recruiting and training officers through its own education centers.	Kriminalforsorgen is the link between national penal policy and the microsystem of prisons. When budgets are cut or staffing falls short, its capacity to deliver on "normalization" weakens, shaping conditions for incarcerated people, staff, and families.
Funding and partnerships External funding and institutional partnerships provide the resources needed to implement reintegration programs, staff training, and innovation in prisons.	Funding links European and national strategies (macro) with everyday prison practices (micro). For example, Erasmus+ projects create opportunities for civil society and staff exchanges, while the Ministry of Justice allocates core budgets that directly affect prison staffing and quality of programs.

Oversight and complaint boards

Independent oversight mechanisms, such as the Ombudsman or complaint boards, ensure that prison conditions comply with human rights standards and allow incarcerated people to raise grievances.

These bodies operate at the exosystem level by monitoring Kriminalforsorgen and prisons. Their recommendations ripple through all layers: protecting incarcerated people at the micro level, shaping cooperation at the meso level, and pushing systemic reforms at the macro level.

Trade Unions (e.g. Faengselfforbundet)

The prison officers' union, Fængselsforbundet, negotiates pay and working conditions and warns of safety risks. It has been vocal about understaffing and its impact on both staff and rehabilitation.

Union advocacy affects national budgets and recruitment drives. Outcomes here filter down to cell-door level, shaping whether programs can run, or incarcerated people spend most of their time locked up.

Academic/ research institutions studying correctional outcomes

Universities and research institutes study correctional practices, outcomes, and policies, providing evidence for reforms and public debate.

Research findings connect the exosystem to the macrosystem by influencing political agendas, public opinion, and long-term strategies. At the same time, they inform micro-level practices by assessing what works in rehabilitation, supporting NGOs and staff in their daily interventions.

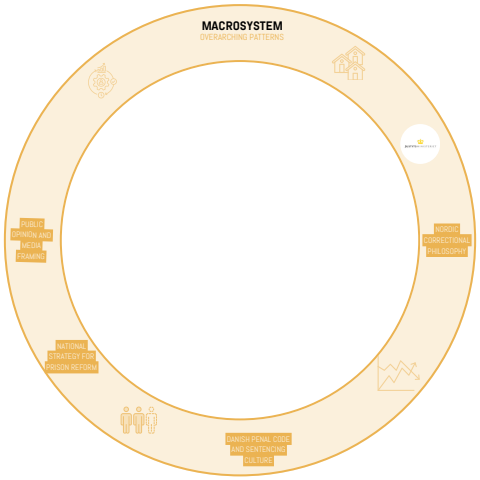
Courts and legal system

Courts apply the Penal Code and sentencing guidelines. They decide not only prison terms but also access to alternatives like community service, electronic monitoring, or placement in halfway houses. Their rulings shape who enters the system, for how long, and under what conditions.

Court decisions set the flow of individuals entering the correctional system. They influence microsystem realities (length and type of incarceration), meso-level workload (probation, municipalities), and exosystem priorities (Kriminalforsorgen's staffing and resources). Over time, cumulative sentencing practices shape macro-level perceptions of justice and rehabilitation culture.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Public opinion and media framing of incarceration How the media portrays crime and punishment strongly influences public attitudes and political responses. Media narratives can either stigmatize incarcerated people or highlight rehabilitation and success stories.	This factor shapes the macro-level legitimacy of reforms. Political leaders and funding decisions often respond to public pressure, which in turn affects prison budgets, staffing, and reintegration opportunities.
Nordic correctional philosphy Denmark's penal system is deeply rooted in the Nordic philosophy of normalization, dignity, and rehabilitation. This principle holds that prison life should resemble life outside as closely as possible, reinforcing the idea that incarceration is a temporary restriction of liberty, not a denial of humanity. Over time, this philosophy has guided how facilities are designed, how staff are trained, and how incarcerated people are supported through education, work, and family connections. It represents a cultural commitment that transcends individual reforms, anchoring the system in a long-standing vision of humane justice.	This philosophy radiates through the broader ecosystem, serving as a unifying principle for legislation, staff practices, and collaborations with municipalities, NGOs, and private employers. It legitimizes the presence of volunteers, family-friendly policies, and rehabilitation programs, while also shaping Denmark's reputation internationally as a model of humane incarceration. Even when political pressures or resource constraints challenge its implementation, the philosophy continues to function as a touchstone, ensuring that the direction of prison reform remains tied to broader cultural values of social trust and equality.

National strategy for prison and reforms and mental health

Denmark develops national strategies to address key challenges in its correctional system, such as overcrowding, staff shortages, and the growing complexity of needs among incarcerated individuals. These strategies set long-term goals for modernization while reaffirming the Nordic principles of normalization and dignity, ensuring that reforms are not just reactive but guided by a broader vision of humane justice.

By aligning resources and institutions around shared priorities, these strategies shape how education, healthcare, and reintegration services are delivered. They provide direction for collaboration between state agencies, municipalities, and civil society, ensuring that the correctional system evolves in step with wider societal changes while maintaining a clear focus on rehabilitation and reintegration.

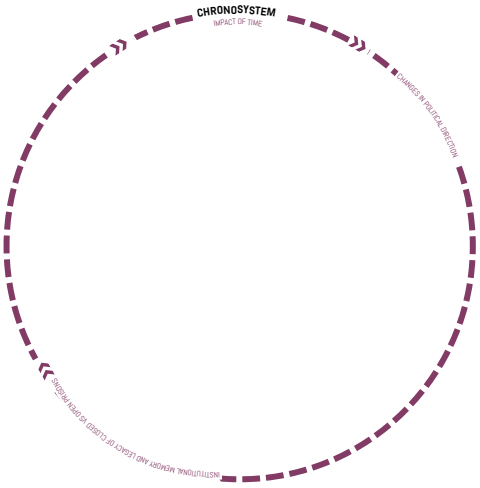
Danish Penal Code and sentencing culture

The Danish Penal Code establishes the legal framework for punishment, rehabilitation, and alternatives to incarceration. Beyond the letter of the law, sentencing culture reflects broader social values and political priorities, influencing who goes to prison, for how long, and under what conditions. Over time, debates about proportionality, community-based alternatives, and the balance between deterrence and rehabilitation have shaped how the code is applied. This evolving sentencing culture reflects Denmark's commitment to both justice and social reintegration, while also revealing tensions between punitive and rehabilitative impulses.

The impact of sentencing culture extends across the entire ecosystem. Sentences determine not only the flow of people into prisons but also the demand placed on probation services, municipalities, and reintegration programs. When sentences are shorter and alternatives are prioritized, resources can be redirected toward rehabilitation and support. When sentences lengthen or options narrow, prisons face overcrowding and staff shortages, straining the system. Over time, the Penal Code and its interpretation establish the rhythm of correctional practice in Denmark, linking legal frameworks to lived experiences inside and outside prison walls.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Changes in political direction (e.g. shifts in Ministry leadership) Shifts in political leadership or government priorities can rapidly change prison policy, funding levels, and the balance between security and rehabilitation.	Political changes at the macro level influence exosystem institutions like Kriminalforsorgen and the courts, which then cascade into meso-level partnerships (municipalities, NGOs) and micro-level realities (staffing levels, family contact, program availability). These shifts also affect long-term strategies, altering the direction of reforms and shaping the environment for incarcerated individuals.

Institutional memory and legacy of closed vs open prisons

Denmark has a strong tradition of open prisons, emphasizing trust and reintegration, but political and security concerns have pushed toward more closed regimes.

This historical shift shapes current macro-level debates about justice philosophy and directly influences exosystem institutions (Kriminalforsorgen staffing and security measures). At the micro level, it determines daily experiences of freedom, family contact, and rehabilitation opportunities. The chronosystem here reminds us how past policy choices constrain or enable today's reforms.

Technological Evolution in Justice Systems

Over the past decades, Denmark's correctional system has increasingly integrated digital tools and technological solutions, from electronic monitoring and telepsychiatry to online education programs and digital literacy training for incarcerated people. These developments reflect broader societal trends toward digitization and the modernization of public services. While they open new opportunities for rehabilitation and skill development, they also raise questions of accessibility, privacy, and equity for those serving sentences.

These technological shifts ripple across the justice ecosystem in Denmark by reshaping how prisons cooperate with municipalities, schools, employers, and healthcare providers. Partnerships with tech companies and vocational institutions expand the range of training available to incarcerated individuals, while digital platforms make family contact and reintegration planning more flexible. Over time, each wave of technological change leaves lasting imprints on prison culture, inmate opportunities, and the balance between security and rehabilitation.

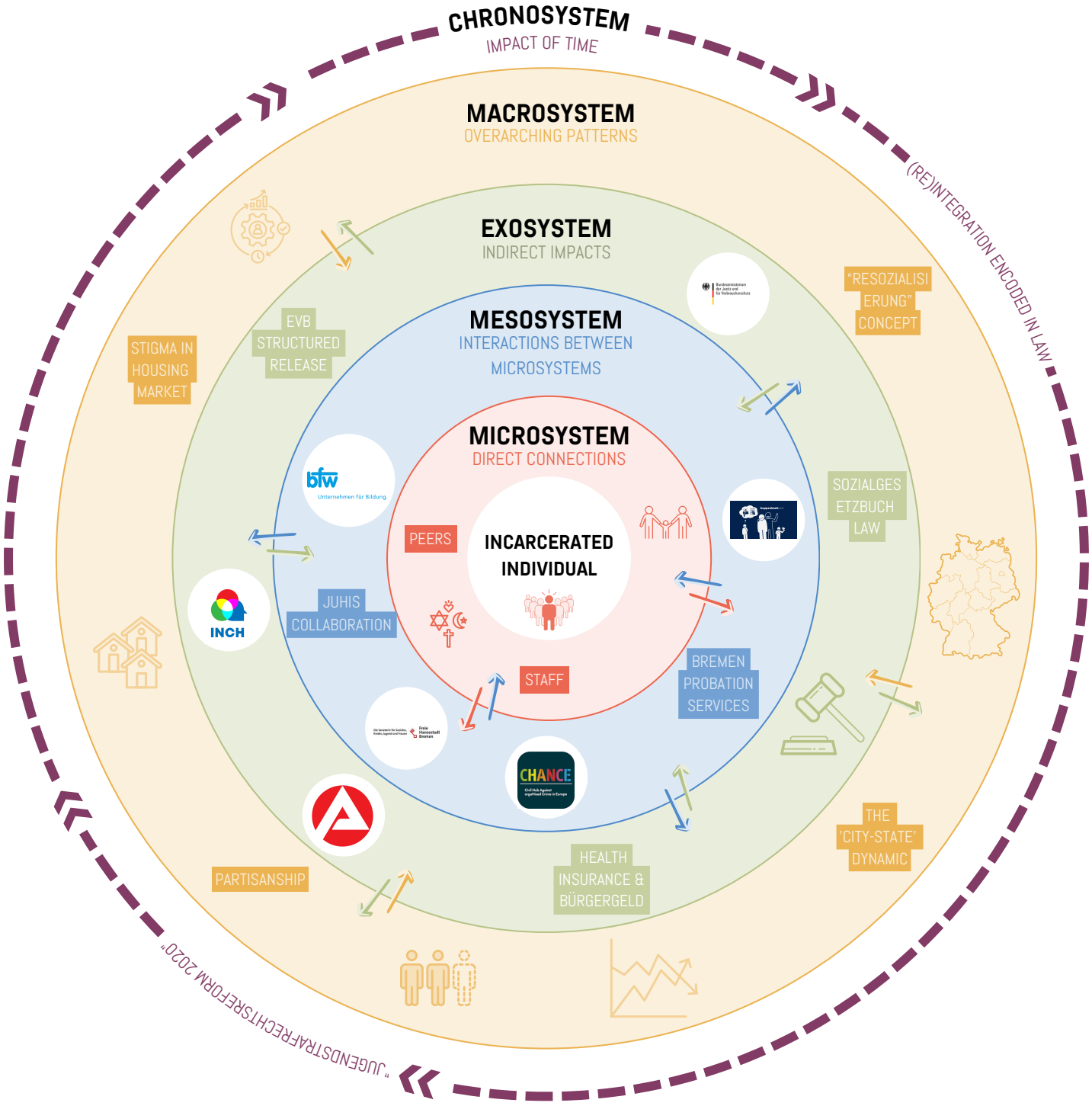
Demographic and Social Change

Denmark's correctional system has been shaped over time by wider demographic and social shifts, including migration patterns, changing family structures, and evolving labor market demands. The prison population has become more diverse, with a growing share of foreign nationals and individuals with complex social and mental health needs. At the same time, broader societal transformations, such as aging populations and changing norms around drug use or gender roles, influence both who enters the system and how rehabilitation strategies are designed.

These demographic changes ripple across the justice ecosystem by requiring new approaches to education, healthcare, and reintegration programs. Prisons and municipalities must adapt by offering language support, culturally sensitive services, and targeted vocational training that reflects current labor market realities. Over time, these social transformations challenge institutions to remain flexible and responsive, ensuring that correctional practices in Denmark continue to align with broader developments in society.

GERMANY

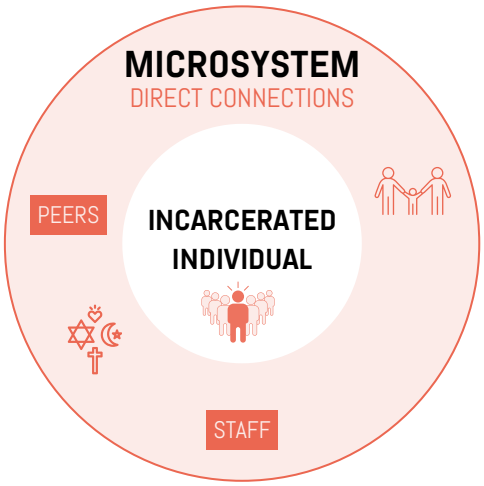
FEDERAL STATE OF BREMEN



Disclaimer: The factors and practices described here apply specifically to the Federal State of Bremen. Germany's justice system is federal, meaning that laws, policies, and programs differ significantly across the 16 states (Länder). These findings should therefore not be generalized to the whole of Germany.

MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family and children of incarcerated individuals Various initiatives are supported on the long and short term between actors in detention facilities and on probation to support and grow family connections. "I'll read to you: Bedtime stories from Prison" and 'Game with Mum and Dad' are both Hoppenbank e.V. initatives and futher initaives come from other stakeholders	These community run programs in detention facilities open the doors and support family participation in (re)integration activities, and run in parallel to staff training offers that broaden knowledge on the rights of the child and difficulties familes have when one parent is incarcerated.
Religious and pastoral services The SCHURA Muslim Religious Community and Kristen im Knast Christian voluntary group are both proactively involved in everyday proceedings in detention.	All religious groups practicing in detention facilities do so according to a code that ensures all participants actively work towards the detainees successful reintegration post release.
VBS debt counseling This program provides assistance to people inside and outside detention facilities who are threatened with or already in excessive debt. Services are designed to secure livelihoods and help those seeking advice to gain an overview of their debt situation. They discuss options for settling debts and, if necessary, arrange deferrals, installment payments or settlement payments. It is also possible to initiate insolvency proceedings.	This connection service provides essential debt links between individuals referred from the Job Centre or the Social Services Office, as well as those receiving unemployment benefit and, upon request, those in employment.

Bremen Pädagogische Dienst

The Educational Service is the school within detention facilities, and offers a wide range of educational programs for young people and adults in custody. They teach up to 70 incarcerated individuals. Their goal is to help as many students as possible obtain a school leaving certificate that will enable them to enter the job market or vocational training after their release, thereby contributing to their (re)integration into society.

In addition to school courses, teachers supervise the incarcerated individuals' newspaper Diskus70 and offer leisure activities for individuals in detention (table tennis, chess, art groups, discussion group 'Prisoners help young people'). They are also involved in the vocational training of security officers at Bremen Prison and organise further training for all staff.

Produktionsbetriebe (Factory Area)

This program employs as many incarcerated individuals as possible in order to prepare them for working life after release by helping them to obtain or find vocational qualifications.

Extensive production facilities are available in the greater Bremen and Bremerhaven area. They have their own transport service and work with reliable freight companies and employers. Cooperation with two correctional facilities offers entrepreneurs an alternative to relocating production abroad.

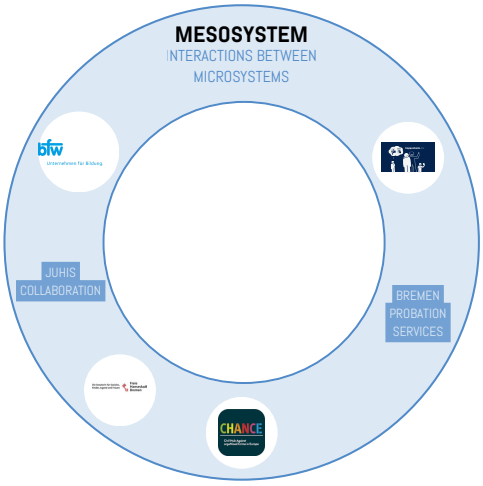
TIP – Test, Inform, Try

This program gives young incarcerated individuals the opportunity to test and/or develop their interests, skills and knowledge in simple work processes.

Many young individuals in detention are not used to a regular daily routine or are unable to structure their day. This program offers them the chance to give their day some structure. Going to work regularly and on time, working through the day, taking breaks, learning to work with others – in other words, acquiring, practicing and applying social skills so that they can successfully (re)integrate into society.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Bremen Probation Services/ Soziale Dienste der Justiz im Lande Bremen This is the subordinate agency of the Ministry of Justice and Constitution. Prior to 2010, social services were organizationally integrated into the Bremen Regional Court. In 2011 a new agency was established within the Justice System in the State of Bremen. The reorganization process was accompanied by the start of a further development towards integrated work with people in detention, to establish transition management system to various institutions working with incarcerated individuals in order to optimize both the services offered to clients and the work processes.	Better coordination within the justice system, between detention facilities, social services, probation services and (re)integration measures is crucial for avoiding duplicate structures and establishing uniform standards in detention facilities (e.g. for therapy programs or security measures).
CHANCE Network of community actors in prison and probation The The task of the CHANCE network is the systematic reintegration of detainees and former detainees out of crime (and specifically detention) and into stable living conditions with prospects for professional (re)integration. The core elements of all support approaches are needs tailored – support, care, counseling, education, training and employment for the target group.	The CHANCE network exists to promote exchange and training and implementation connections between the many actors involved in helping incarcerated individuals, including the Senator for Justice and Constitution, the Bremen Prison, the Hoppenbank e.V. association, the Bremen Offender Support Association (VBS), the Society for Integrative Social Counselling and Support (GISBU), the Vocational Training Centre (bfw), bras e.V., Mauern öffnen e.V. and many more.

Centralized Volunteer Coordination Program

This centrally coordinated, European Social Fund funded position runs out of the Ministry of Justice with the direct aspiration to reduce recidivism rates and facilitate (re)integration into society. It is based around the goal and belief that communities need compassion, solidarity and a willingness to give people a second chance.

Volunteering plays a particularly important role in Bremen's justice system with 111 active citizens. Working on the German concept of "resozialisierung" (resocialization), volunteering relies on the idea that reform in the justice system cannot be the sole responsibility of professionals. Volunteers, with their diverse perspective, varied skills, and capacities for care, are an indispensable help in bringing the idea of rehabilitation to life. And, as a side effect, volunteering in incarcerated individual support also gives volunteers themselves new experiences and insight into an area that most people have little contact with in their 'normal' lives.

Centralized family and children of incarcerated individuals' provisions

The counseling service for relatives is aimed at the families of men and women in detention facilities. Topics include best practices for contacting the incarcerated individual, securing a livelihood and covering living costs, reorganizing living arrangements, and providing relief through conversation. The counseling is provided in the Ministry of Social Affairs by VBS (a local probation service provier) and can also be provided in Turkish.

Connections are encouraged by VBS's offer for individual needs of families and children of incarcerated individuals.

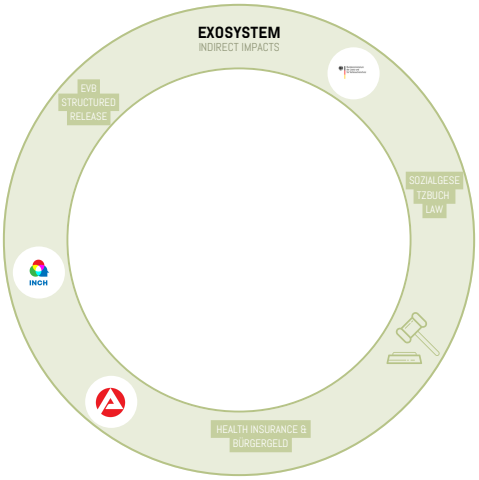
Diagnosis, Profiling and Assessment (DPA) Project

Systematic support for people in detention facilities with the aim of (re)integrating them into society in Bremen and Bremerhaven

This project is supported by expert psychologists within the prison and the CHANCE network actors outside. It allows participants to move from a 3-month employment initiative to more substantial training, inside and outside of detention.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Social code (Sozialgesetzbuch) The Sozialgesetzbuch is a comprehensive codification of all social law in Germany. It ensures the right to social protection, as enshrined in Article 20 and 28 of the German Basic Law (Grundgesetz), and legally facilitates many of the (re)integration measures in place post release. The SGB is divided into 12 books (SGB I–XII), each covering a specific area of the welfare state.	The SGB provides a legal provision for (re)integration cooperation. For example sections 67/68 of SGBXII provide the basis for the Haus Fedelhören stationary residential project in Bremen, run by social provider Hoppenbank e.V.
Healthcare provision Healthcare for people in detention facilities and after their release is governed by a combination of state responsibilities, constitutional rights, and social insurance laws. The core principle is that everyone — including incarcerated people — has the right to medical care, but the delivery system changes between imprisonment and freedom.	On release most former detainees are eligible for Statutory Health Insurance (Gesetzliche Krankenversicherung - GKV): If they were insured before imprisonment, they can reactivate their insurance. If uninsured, they may apply for Bürgergeld, which includes automatic health coverage under SGB II. Individuals almost always require support from social systems to navigate healthcare, and there is a growing call for etter medical case management in release support and planning

Bremen's structured prepartion for release

During the Entlassungsvorbereitung or EVB, men and women in detention facilities can plan their release. The EVB pool provides support in finding assisted or supervised accommodation, long-term and (re)integration measures, or in applying for addiction therapy. The EVB contact people to help establish contact with institutions that can help serve their individual needs and provide support in applying for cost coverage. The EVB's services are voluntary and usually start six months before the release date.

The EVB is run in a formal agreement between Bremen Prison, Bremen Ministry of Justice and two community service providers: VBS and Hoppenbank. Further services and community offers are accessed through these connections.

Contact Partner System

Within this system, established 20 years ago in the Bremen Prison, every contact or security officer is responsible for 6 to 8 incarcerated individuals and prepares their personalized reports while in detention (i.e. reports to Court, sentence plan, dismissal plan, development assessments, etc.). This system allows the incarcerated individual to have a steady contact of reference and to build a good level of trust, which is key for dynamic security purposes. In this framework, the contact officer is best positioned to monitor changes in behavior, even minor ones. For this reason, she/he is invited to participate in risk assessment meetings.

Connections with external organizations and even individual family members are fostered by this very purposeful and embedded procedure, allowing these individuals to optimize outcomes and resources within the four 'Ps' of prison, probation, police and prosecution.

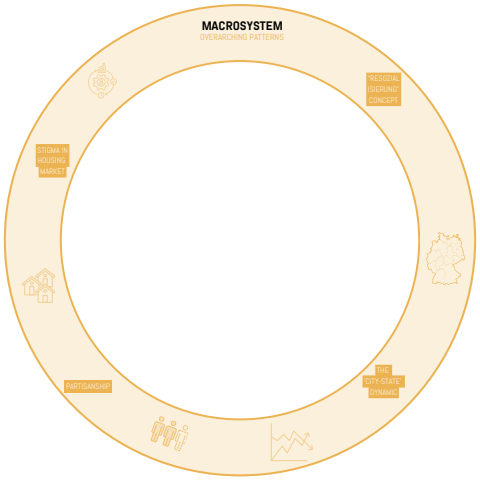
Bremen Prison Advisory Board

The Anstaltsbeirat or advisory board consists of volunteer representatives from the public. It receives requests, suggestions, complaints and objections from incarcerated individuals and organizations (NGOs, lobbyists, etc.) to find ways to improve conditions in consultation with the detention facility management. The advisory board sees itself as an important bridge to life outside the prison walls. Staff members can also contact the advisory board with complaints or requests.

The Advisory Board is a diverse collection of representative volunteers, themselves deeply rooted in local ecosystems, who facilitate connections and work with the system for improvement.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
The smallest state dynamic The Federal State of Bremen is the smallest of the 16 German Länder/ federal states. Most detention systems are represented in this state (violent/ sex offenders treatment; female incarcerated people; juvenile detention wings; open prisons) but it is sometimes more challenging and expensive to gain representation in Bremen. For example certain types of serious offenses will require individuals to be detained in another federal state, far from their home location, and for juveniles under 18 sentenced in Bremen, it is likely we would request for them to be detained in Hamlyn Juvenile Detention Facility in Lower Saxony.	It's necessary for Bremen's ministries and prisons to build and maintain strong connections with neighboring and northern Federal states, in order for our small justice system to fully function.
The 'city-state' dynamic The federal states of Bremen, Hamburg and Berlin share major inflencing factors in their comparatively high detention rates: pre-trial detention rates are higher since suspects with no social ties in the state of Bremen are considered a flight risk and therefore remanded in custody. Also there is a higher proportion of young men suspected of crime and involved in drug-related crime.	Strong ties have been built between public sector organizations and community organizations in city states. It is also a recognized factor in piloting new initiatives, for example the Kinder von Inhaftierten (KvI) network included on city state (Berlin and Hamburg) in its 7 pilots, so that the right lessons can be transferred to other similar settings.

Stigma and prejudice in the housing marjet

3In Bremen as well as Germany-wide, a criminal record plus lack of funds for a deposit are most persistent and systemic barriers to accessing housing post release from detention.

For those most at risk of reoffending due to lack of accommodation and shelter, the Ministry collaborates with three key local service providers in the community to offer limited places to live under specific circumstances.

Conflicting societal and political discourse

As reflected in the legislative support for (re)integration, public and political discourse over the last decade has tended to reflect an awareness of the social roots of crime (poverty, trauma, addiction, mental illness). Mainstream parties (SPD, CDU, Greens) largely balance security concerns with resocialization goals. However there is some growing political pressure (especially from right-wing parties) that calls for harsher penalties for terrorism, hate crimes, or sexual violence. They also want stricter deportation and treatment for foreign offenders.

These ecosystem connections show that incarceration or imprisonment is no longer viewed as a standalone issue or solution to public crime, but part of a broader social network of support, prevention, and (re)integration. The more strain that is put on social networks by other factors including migration, the more fragile the public and political ground becomes.

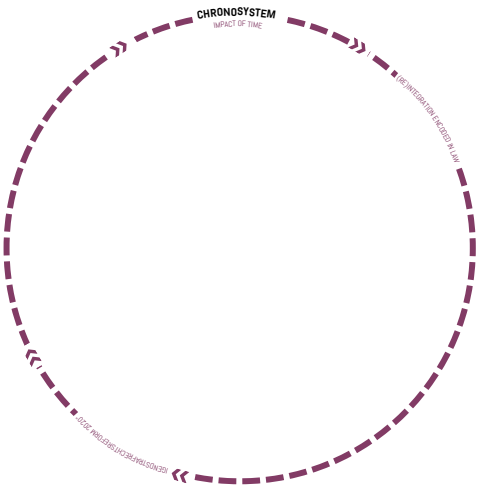
Media and local reporting

Bremen Prison and local media stations have worked increasingly together to shape a more humane and dignified view of people in detention in Bremen, particularly with the Jugendvollzug (Juvenile Detention), which was recognized in national awards for its work broadcasting with Bremen Next Radio from inside the prison.

The ministry of justice, other ministries and the prison staff work closely with local media companies like Butenunbinnen and newspapers such as the Weser Kurier.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
(Re)integration encoded in law The Federal German Criminal Code states that the primary goal of the German justice system is resozialisierung (resocialization or reintegration into society) ((Strafvollzugsgesetz – § 2)). The Federal Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht) has ruled that life-long exclusion from society is unconstitutional unless release is possible. Detention in prison-like facilities is seen as a last resort, not the default punishment.	Jurisprudence from one of the Länder court in this respect is frequently cited in other court cases, with respect to the difference in detention treatment between Länder and other regions.

Culture of transporting incarcerated individuals

Although each federal state has autonomy over their prison management, and some have very different approaches to imprisonment, still federal states regularly 'share' detention facility places, for specific types of offenses. There is also regular transport of incarcerated individuals between federal states for reasons of (re)integration or treatment plans.

Although there's no nationwide, shared detention system, neighboring states sometimes enter into formal agreements (Verwaltungsvereinbarungen) to: House certain categories of incarcerated individuals, cope with capacity shortages, or offer specialized facilities or treatment not available in every state.

Relatively short prison sentences

Overall, German courts maintain mild sentencing levels, however there is a difference in how short sentencing is used between the 16 Länder. In 2022, 82.3 percent of all convicted adult offenders were sentenced to a fine. 12.2 percent received a suspended prison sentence, only 5.5 percent an unsuspended prison sentence.

For many offenses, traditional incarceration is avoided entirely, especially for first-time or non-violent individuals. Fines (Geldstrafe), suspended sentences (Bewährung), community service, therapy or diversion programs are all alternatives to imprisonment. It is necessary to create a system where the courts can rely on non-custodial sentence delivery.

"Jugendstrafrechtsreform 2020"

2020 Juvenile Justice Reform was implemented to comply with EU Directive (EU) 2016/800 on procedural safeguards for children who are suspects or accused persons in criminal proceedings. Strengthening the legal rights of young people had direct and indirect effects that are still felt on police, courts, detention and probation in relation to youth justice.

Whilst this reform brings German law in line with European standards and aims for more legal security, protection, and transparency, it also increases workload particularly for the police and courts, and puts a financial and resources strain on the justice system.

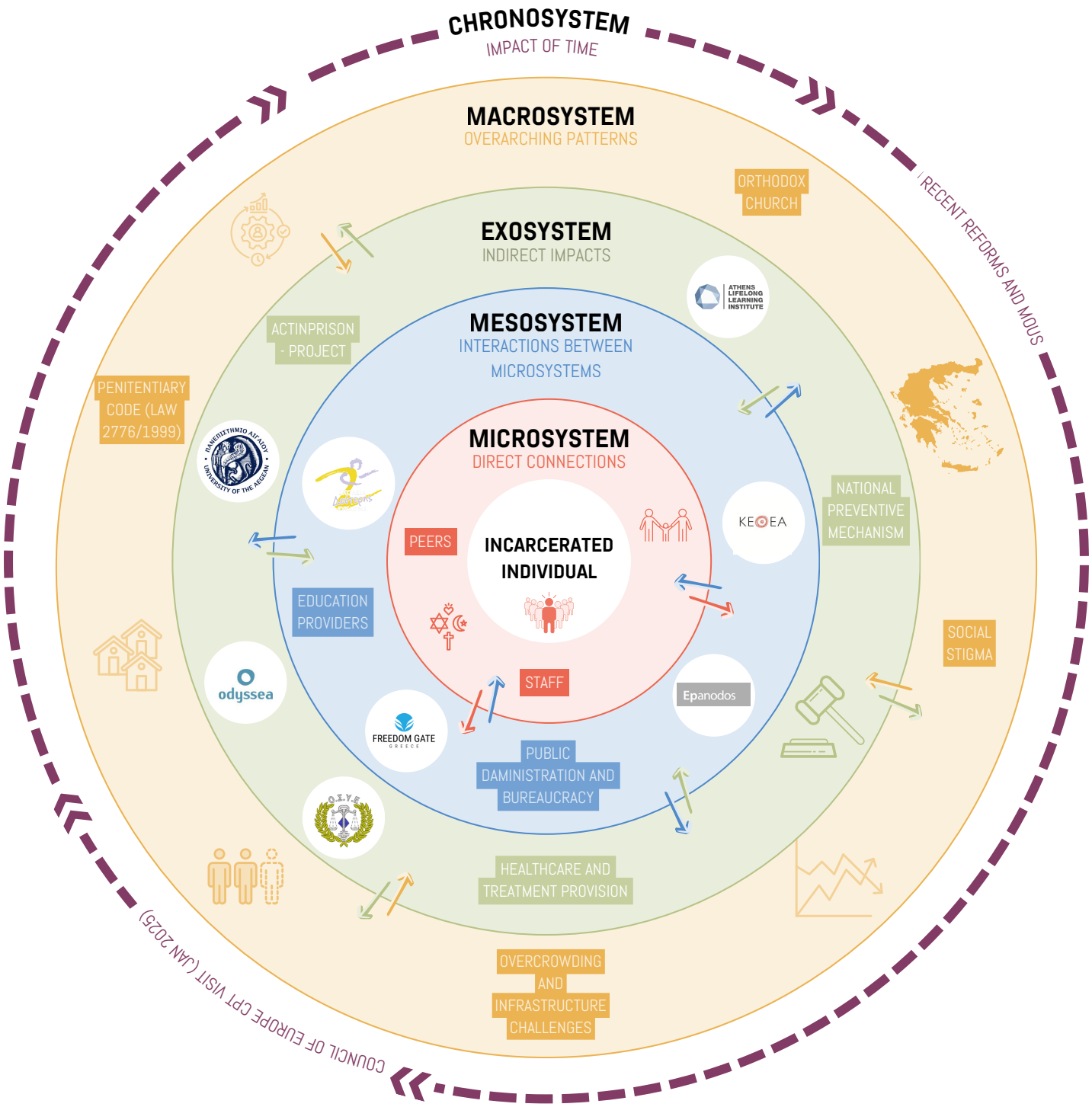
Alternatives to tradition incarceration

A significant federal-level change to the so-called "Ersatzfreiheitstrafe" or imprisonment as a substitute for non-payment of fines was agreed in the German Bundestag in 2023. On 22 June 2023, the Bundestag approved a draft bill by the Federal Government on the revision of sanctions law (20/5913) in the version amended by the Legal Affairs Committee (20/7026).

This resulted in the shortening of substitute prison sentences, often in half, fines for social welfare recipients should be reduced, and 'gender-specific' and 'anti-sexual orientation' motives will be taken into account. Each factor of this nature necessitates closer collaboration in sentencing with other ministries and community service providers.

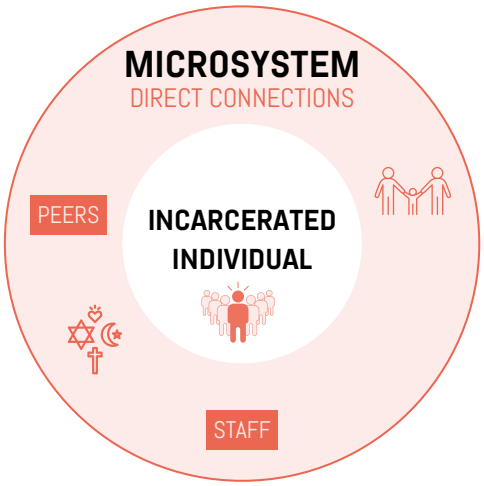
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

GREECE



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Daily staff (e.g. prison officers, administrative staff etc.) Staff in Greek detention facilities often face shortages, leading to heavier workloads, higher burnout, and strained interpersonal interactions. These conditions limit their ability to encourage a constructive environment or provide individualized reintegration support.	Staff capacity and training are shaped by broader justice and public administration policies, including budget allocations and recruitment frameworks. Shortages not only worsen overcrowding pressures but also weaken collaboration with healthcare providers, probation officers, and NGOs, while civil society actors and oversight bodies push for systemic improvements.
Family connections Maintaining family ties is a crucial element for the well-being and the successful reintegration of people deprived of their liberty. Family visits are formally allowed under the Greek Penal Code, but implementation varies across facility types and locations. Most detention facilities are located far from urban centers, making visits difficult for families. Visiting hours are restricted, and child-friendly spaces are scarce, depending on the capacity and willingness of individual administrations. Children are not permitted to live with their parents in detention (with very few ad hoc exceptions).	Because many prisons are far from cities, and there is little official support or national policy, families usually have to take on most of the responsibility for staying in touch with their loved ones inside. Only a few NGOs step in to help, mainly through family mediation and support programs that make visits and communication easier. When these connections are maintained, they not only support emotional well-being but also act as a bridge between the immediate family environment and wider community services, strengthening social ties and improving chances of successful reintegration after release.

Judicial system actors

Access to judicial actors is a fundamental right for incarcerated people in Greece. However, consistent access remains limited. Judges and prosecutors are not based inside detention facilities, and visits are often delayed due to administrative barriers or geographic isolation, especially in rural or island prisons.

The limited presence of judicial actors weakens links between detention facilities and external accountability systems, restricting coordination with prison staff, probation officers, and NGOs at the mesosystem level. It reflects broader exosystem challenges such as fragmented responsibilities and delays in parole decisions, while also echoing macrosystem issues of low public trust in the judiciary and punitive societal attitudes.

Physical healthcare

In Greek detention facilities, healthcare is primarily delivered by in-house medical staff or visiting external providers. However, the quality and consistency of care varies widely. Many prisons face understaffing, insufficient resources, and lack of specialized services, while access to external hospitals is often delayed. The system largely follows a self-contained healthcare model within facilities, yet it is expected to comply with general national healthcare standards. Reports consistently highlight gaps in medical coverage, long waiting times, and insufficient coordination with community health services, particularly affecting individuals with chronic illnesses or complex medical needs.

Weak healthcare provision reflects systemic shortcomings across levels: at the mesosystem level, limited partnerships with NGOs and regional healthcare providers restrict continuity of care; at the exosystem level, resource constraints and underfunded policies impede investment in medical infrastructure; at the macrosystem level, healthcare inequalities mirror broader societal underfunding and stigma toward incarcerated populations. Over time, this chronosystem pattern reinforces a cycle of neglect, where longstanding infrastructure decay and repeated CPT criticisms fail to translate into sustainable reforms.

Social workers and psychologists

Greek law requires every detention facility to employ social workers and psychologists, yet in practice there are major shortages and uneven coverage. Where staff are present, their workloads are often overwhelming, leaving little room for individualized care or reintegration planning.

This shortage of psychosocial professionals reflects a systemic gap where state-provided services are insufficient, and coverage is unevenly supplemented by NGOs. Because these programs rely on temporary funding rather than structural support, access to psychosocial care becomes fragmented and uncertain, creating a patchwork system rather than a coordinated reintegration pathway.

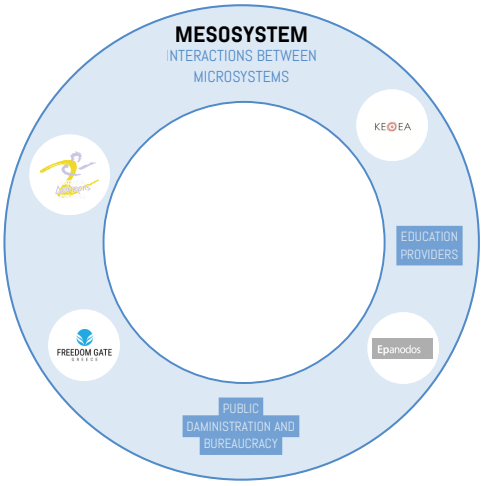
Personal faith

Personal faith is an important element influencing the mental state and moral development of people deprived of their liberty. In most detention facilities in Greece, access to religious services is provided, with the Church of Greece playing a central role by offering pastoral care and ceremonies. Facilities are also legally obliged to respect the practices of other religions, including dietary requirements, though the consistency of this support varies.

The extent to which personal faith can be meaningfully supported depends on the facility's internal resources and its links to external religious communities. Where such connections are strong, diverse faith needs are more likely to be accommodated; where they are weak, the right to practice one's religion may remain only partially fulfilled.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Education and Second chance schools Second Chance Schools (SCS) operate in 11 prisons across Greece, providing incarcerated people with opportunities to complete basic education. These schools are formally part of the public education system, overseen by the Ministry of Education, and often involve external teachers who specialize in adult learning. Collaborations with universities, such as the University of Thessaly's ACTinPRISON project and the Hellenic Open University, further strengthen the educational dimension of detention. Participation in cultural and arts programs also complements formal schooling by encouraging creativity and self-expression.	Education interacts directly with family support, employment prospects, and cultural identity. Learning opportunities help incarcerated people maintain dignity and develop skills for reintegration. The involvement of external teachers and universities strengthens the link between prisons and the wider society, reducing isolation.
Healthcare and addiction services Healthcare inside Greek prisons involves both internal staff (where available) and external specialists who visit facilities. In addition to general medical care, addiction treatment is a major component, coordinated largely by KETHEA (Therapy Center for Dependent Individuals). KETHEA offers counseling, therapy, and reintegration planning for people struggling with substance use, often in collaboration with prison educators and social workers. Mental health care is also provided by psychiatrists and psychologists, though availability is uneven across facilities.	Healthcare and addiction services intersect with family life, education, and reintegration efforts. Access to treatment supports stability and readiness for vocational training or study. Cooperation between medical staff, social workers, and NGOs makes rehabilitation more comprehensive, though systemic gaps continue to hinder consistent outcomes.

Public administration and bureaucracy

The effectiveness of detention facilities in Greece is strongly shaped by their interactions with different levels of public administration, including municipal authorities, regional services, and the national correctional system. Bureaucratic procedures are often slow and fragmented, with the absence of streamlined processes creating delays in decision-making and service delivery. These inefficiencies directly affect the operational capacity of facilities and the timely support available to people deprived of their liberty.

Bureaucratic obstacles weaken the mesosystem by limiting coordination between facilities and external actors such as municipalities or welfare services. They also reflect exosystem shortcomings, as overlapping responsibilities and slow procedures prevent the correctional system from building reliable pathways to housing, healthcare, or employment support.

Employment training and reintegration programs

Employment training is delivered through collaborations between EPANODOS, OAED (public employment service), and various NGOs. Programs include vocational training courses, entrepreneurship counseling, and links to employers in selected sectors. In-prison work opportunities are limited, but external actors provide skills training in areas such as construction, agriculture, and logistics. Social enterprises, such as FreedomGate Greece, also play a role by offering job training and vocational education opportunities, as well as psychological support.

Employment programs connect detention with both education and reintegration support. By working with families, employers, and civil society, they increase the likelihood that incarcerated people will find stability after release. These initiatives also highlight the importance of multi-actor collaboration, as state agencies alone cannot overcome entrenched barriers.

Family communication and social services

Greek law guarantees the right of incarcerated people to communicate with their families through phone calls, letters, and visits. Social services, such as those provided by Caritas Hellas, help families maintain stability during a relative's incarceration by offering financial, psychological, or material support. EPANODOS and the Support Network for Imprisoned and Ex-Imprisoned Women also provide transitional housing and emergency assistance for people leaving prison, reducing the burden on families. These connections help preserve family bonds despite physical separation.

Family communication interacts with education, healthcare, and employment prospects, as family stability is crucial to successful reintegration. Social services strengthen this link by ensuring that families are not left unsupported. The interaction between prisons, NGOs, and families helps create a more cohesive network of support.

NGOs and volunteer support

NGOs and volunteers play a significant role in supplementing state services within prisons, Caritas Hellas, EPANODOS, KMOP, FreedomGate Greece, the Athens Lifelong Learning Institute, and the Support Network for Imprisoned and Ex-Imprisoned Women provide social, educational and reintegration services. Volunteer groups support basic skills, literacy, numeracy and ICT education programs, provide arts and theater activities, and offer counseling. These contributions help offset systemic underfunding and ensure that incarcerated people have access to a broader range of opportunities.

NGO and volunteer work intersects with education, healthcare, family support, and employment initiatives. Their involvement strengthens the link between prisons and the community, offering incarcerated people more diverse support systems. They also push for reform and innovation in ways that the state system often cannot.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Strategic frameworks (Law 4763/2020) Law 4763/2020 requires the establishment of educational units within detention facilities and promotes formal cooperation between the Ministry of Citizen Protection and the Ministry of Education. It builds on the expansion of "Second Chance Schools," which now operate in 11 prisons across Greece, and creates space for partnerships with universities and vocational training institutes. This framework recognizes education as both a rehabilitative tool and a legal right. In practice, universities such as the University of Thessaly and the Hellenic Open University have collaborated with prisons through projects like ACTinPRISON, which bring professors and researchers inside facilities. Despite these initiatives, implementation varies widely, and many facilities face shortages of qualified teachers and infrastructure.	Education and vocational training provide incarcerated people with essential tools for employment and social participation after release. The legal framework gives legitimacy and continuity to these initiatives, encouraging long-term investment. However, disparities between prisons mean that some people benefit far more than others. Collaboration with civil society and academic institutions is therefore crucial to bridge gaps in state provision.
Judicial oversight Judicial supervision of detention facilities in Greece is primarily carried out by prosecutors. In the four largest prisons (Athens/Korydallos, Thessaloniki, Patras, Larissa), deputy prosecutors from the Court of Appeal or their substitutes visit daily, while in smaller facilities, local magistrate prosecutors typically visit twice per week. These visits allow for the investigation of complaints and oversight of compliance with the Penitentiary Code. International organizations such as the Council of Europe's CPT also play a role by conducting periodic inspections, most recently in January 2025, when they visited nine prison establishments and several police stations.	Judicial oversight creates an important accountability mechanism, ensuring that the rights of incarcerated people are respected inside facilities. Daily or weekly visits give them the opportunity to raise concerns, although overcrowding and understaffing mean many issues remain unresolved. The addition of international monitoring brings external pressure for reforms, but the overall effectiveness depends heavily on Greece's willingness and capacity to implement recommendations.

Healthcare policy

Healthcare in Greek prisons is formally the responsibility of the Ministry of Health, but facilities often lack permanent medical staff. Many prisons rely on external doctors, dentists, and physiotherapists from public hospitals or private practice, brought in to cover gaps. Some volunteer organizations also contribute, such as Global Brigades providing dental care or GMTP offering rehabilitation services. A key policy direction in recent years has been the gradual integration of prison healthcare into the national public health system, aiming to ensure equivalence of care with the general population. Reports from the FRA and the CPT, however, underline that this transition remains incomplete, with many facilities still dependent on ad hoc arrangements.

Stronger integration with the public health system could reduce health inequalities between incarcerated people and the wider population. Access to external specialists and public hospitals is vital, especially for chronic conditions and mental health care. However, reliance on external actors without sufficient structural support creates inconsistencies between facilities. This makes cooperation with local health services and NGOs essential but also highlights systemic underinvestment.

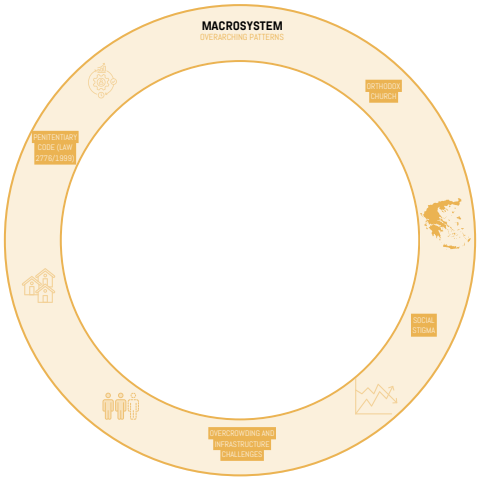
National Preventive Mechanism recommendations

The National Preventive Mechanism (NPM) monitors detention conditions in Greece and issues recommendations to improve human rights compliance. Recent reports have emphasized the need for prisons to build stronger partnerships with external organizations, expand vocational and cultural programs, and provide more structured support for reintegration. The NPM has highlighted that detention in Greece is still overly custodial, with insufficient emphasis on rehabilitation and reintegration. Its recommendations are based on international human rights standards as well as domestic law.

By pushing facilities to cooperate with NGOs, universities, and local services, the NPM encourages a more holistic approach to detention. This creates opportunities for innovation in education, work training, and psychosocial support. However, the impact of these recommendations depends heavily on state follow-through, and implementation has historically been slow. The ecosystem therefore relies on both external pressure and grassroots partnerships to make change tangible.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Penitentiary Code (Law 2776/1999) The Penitentiary Code forms the central legal framework for detention in Greece, defining the rights and responsibilities of incarcerated people. It establishes standards for healthcare, education, communication with family, and conditions of confinement, aligning national practice with constitutional and international obligations. Articles such as 27 and 53 guarantee access to medical care and family contact. While the Code is progressive on paper, systemic problems like overcrowding and underfunding have hindered its implementation. Enforcement often depends on judicial oversight, complaints mechanisms, or external monitoring.	The Code is the backbone of detention policy, shaping daily life for incarcerated people and providing the legal basis for advocacy. However, gaps between law and lived experience erode confidence in the system. Its potential to protect rights depends on consistent enforcement and investment in infrastructure and staffing.
Policy gaps in communication technology Communication between incarcerated people and their families is legally protected, but practice remains outdated. Phone calls and letters are widely available, yet mobile phones are prohibited, and video calls are not standardized across facilities. This creates inequalities, as some prisons have pilot video systems while others have none. The cost of phone calls is an added burden, particularly for people without family financial support. These limitations weaken the ability of families to remain actively involved during detention.	Digital exclusion deepens isolation and harms family relationships, which are crucial for reintegration. Better communication technology could reduce emotional strain, especially for children and partners of incarcerated people. Investment in video visitation would align Greece with European standards, but political will and funding are still lacking.

Societal stigma and labor market barriers

People leaving prison in Greece often face discrimination in the labor market, where employers are reluctant to hire individuals with criminal records. This stigma is reinforced by broader social attitudes that associate incarceration with shame and marginalization. The difficulty of accessing stable work is compounded by already high unemployment rates in Greece, particularly among young people. Programs run by EPANODOS, OAED, and NGOs provide vocational training and entrepreneurship support, but these initiatives cannot fully counteract deep-rooted stigma.

Social stigma not only restricts employment opportunities but also weakens community reintegration, increasing the risk of recidivism. Support from NGOs and social enterprises helps create pathways into the labor market, but without broader cultural change, progress is limited. Addressing stigma requires both legal reforms and awareness campaigns targeting employers and the public.

Cultural norms and Orthodox Church

The Orthodox Church plays a longstanding and visible role in the Greek prison system, offering religious services, counseling, and community support. Priests regularly visit facilities, and Orthodox holidays and rituals form part of prison life. Other religious communities, including Muslims and Catholics, are allowed limited access, though not to the same extent. For many incarcerated people, faith provides not only spiritual guidance but also emotional resilience and a sense of belonging. This reflects the broader place of religion in Greek culture and identity.

Religious practice offers a stabilizing influence during detention and can extend into reintegration support after release. Faith-based organizations also bridge connections with families and communities. However, reliance on the Orthodox Church risks leaving minority faiths and secular approaches underrepresented, which can create inequality of access.

Overcrowding and infrastructure challenges

Chronic overcrowding has long been one of the defining features of the Greek prison system. Facilities often house significantly more people than their intended capacity, creating pressure on healthcare, hygiene, and staff-to-resident ratios. Infrastructures are aging, with many prisons lacking adequate living spaces, ventilation, and modernized security systems. Overcrowding exacerbates tensions, undermines rehabilitation programs, and worsens health outcomes for incarcerated people. Reports from both domestic and international bodies regularly cite this as one of Greece's most urgent detention challenges.

Overcrowding shapes the environment in which all other services—healthcare, education, reintegration—operate. It limits staff capacity, reduces access to programs, and strains resources. Addressing overcrowding would require systemic changes in sentencing policy, alternatives to incarceration, and investment in infrastructure.

Economic austerity and resource limitations

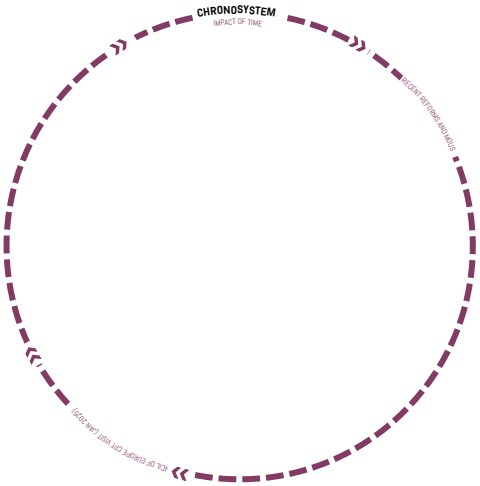
The economic crisis of the past decade continues to impact public services in Greece, including the prison system. Budget restrictions limit hiring of staff, maintenance of facilities, and expansion of rehabilitation programs. NGOs and volunteer groups often step in to cover gaps, but dependence on civil society cannot replace structural underfunding. The state's limited resources also affect reintegration support, leaving many incarcerated people with little guidance or financial help upon release.

Austerity measures have deepened inequalities in detention, making outcomes for incarcerated people more dependent on external actors. Economic constraints restrict innovation and hinder the long-term sustainability of reforms. Greater investment in reintegration and prison conditions is essential to break cycles of marginalization.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:

Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Recent reforms and MoUs (2023–2024) In recent years, Greece has signed a series of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) to strengthen reintegration support. EPANODOS, the national reintegration center, has partnered with OAED (the public employment service) to deliver vocational training and entrepreneurship counseling to incarcerated people. Other MoUs with KMOP (Center for Social Action and Innovation) and the Road Safety Institute focus on youth employment, social skills, and public awareness campaigns. These collaborations reflect a gradual move toward multi-stakeholder involvement in rehabilitation. They also show that political recognition of reintegration as a social issue has been increasing.	The MoUs link detention to employment, education, and community resources, broadening opportunities for incarcerated people during and after release. They indicate a shift in priorities from purely custodial approaches toward rehabilitation. However, their long-term effect depends on sustained political commitment, consistent funding, and proper evaluation to avoid short-lived projects.

Council of Europe CPT visit (Jan 2025)

From January 20–31, 2025, a delegation from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) visited Greece to evaluate detention conditions. The team inspected nine prisons, including facilities for women, and several police detention centers, interviewing incarcerated people, staff, and authorities. Preliminary findings highlighted severe overcrowding, inadequate healthcare, and staff shortages, echoing past concerns. The CPT's final report is expected to include recommendations to bring Greek detention practices closer to European human rights standards.

International monitoring provides external pressure on Greece to improve detention conditions. CPT findings reinforce the voices of domestic organizations and can shape national debates. Yet Greece has often been slow in acting on recommendations, so the real impact depends on continued monitoring and accountability.

Shifts over time in detention practice

Since the 1990s, Greece has struggled with overcrowding, poor infrastructure, and insufficient staffing in its prisons. Reforms have been introduced, but political and economic instability has made progress uneven. More recently, NGOs, universities, and volunteers have taken on a larger role, offering education, cultural activities, psychosocial services, and reintegration programs inside facilities. This shows a gradual move away from a purely custodial model, though conditions and opportunities still vary widely between prisons. Civil society involvement has grown, but systemic change has been slow.

Over time, detention in Greece has become more dependent on external organizations to cover gaps in state provision. This has created important new opportunities for incarcerated people, but also increased inequality across facilities. Without structural reforms to address chronic problems, these positive contributions remain fragile.

Impact of COVID-19 pandemic (2020–2022)

The COVID-19 pandemic had a major effect on detention facilities in Greece. Health restrictions limited family visits, reduced access for external volunteers, and suspended many group activities. These restrictions deepened isolation for incarcerated people, especially for those whose families lived far away. At the same time, the pandemic exposed severe weaknesses in prison healthcare, including staff shortages and lack of protective equipment. While NGOs provided emergency supplies and support, conditions in many facilities worsened during this period.

The pandemic revealed the importance of communication technology and healthcare capacity inside detention. It also showed how quickly incarcerated people can become vulnerable when systemic gaps are exposed. Lessons from COVID-19 continue to influence calls for better healthcare integration and more accessible digital communication in prisons.

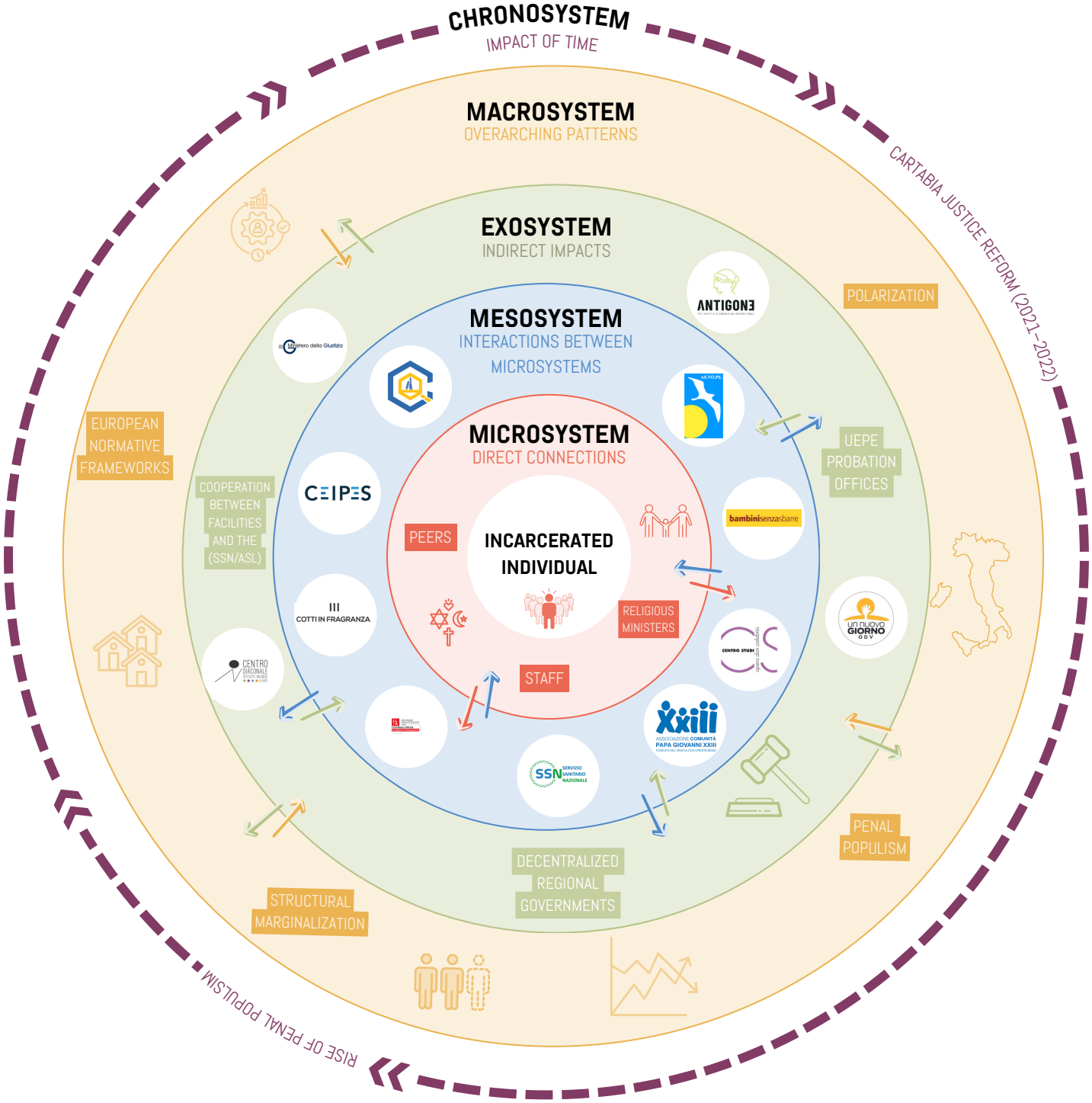
Evolution of sentencing and penal policy (1980s–2020s)

Over the last four decades, sentencing practices in Greece have relied heavily on custodial sentences, even for short-term and non-violent offenses. This reliance contributes to chronic overcrowding and a high turnover of people entering and leaving prisons. Alternatives such as probation, community service, or restorative justice have been underused, despite repeated recommendations from European bodies. Recently, debates around penal reform have gained momentum, and pilot initiatives have tested alternatives for specific groups, such as young people or those convicted of minor crimes.

Sentencing policy directly shapes the size and pressures of the prison system. Heavy reliance on incarceration limits the space for rehabilitation and worsens overcrowding. Expanding alternatives to detention would ease pressure on facilities and make rehabilitation more achievable, but this requires legal reform and cultural change within the justice system.

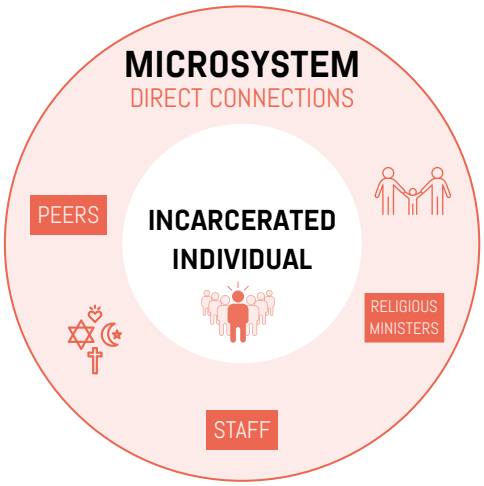
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

ITALY



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family ties These bonds are a fundamental element for the well-being and rehabilitation of people in detention facilities. The ICAMs (Institutes for the Attenuation of Custody for Detained Mothers) allow mothers with young children (under the age of 6) to live together in a more family-like and less restrictive environment, located in cities such as Turin, Milan, Venice and Lauro. Residential communities for minors offer the possibility of visits, contact with family members, and personalised educational pathways, even in the absence of an adequate home environment, and to a greater extent than in facilities for adults and in the Juvenile Detention Institutes (IPM).	Traditional facilities face challenges and shortcomings in providing emotional support and continuity. In residential communities for minors and women, greater emphasis is placed on allowing women or adolescents to maintain stable relationships with their loved ones. For adults, the ways in which personal relationships are maintained are governed by the Penitentiary Act.
Judicial and Penitentiary staff Direct contacts with Supervisory Judges (Magistrati di Sorveglianza) and lawyers are properly regulated, but they do not always take place promptly, especially in overcrowded contexts that characterise most traditional institutions.	In Juvenile Penal Institutions, the application of measures for the external execution of sentences is more common, although the recent "Caivano" Decree-Law is based on more punitive rather than resocialising approaches. In general, when it comes to minors, the facilities show greater attention to individual needs.
Psychosocial Services Law 354/75 and related legislation mandate the presence of social workers, psychologists, and educators in both the juvenile system and the adult system.	Communities for minors provide a personalised educational plan (IEP – Individualized Educational Plan) developed by staff (social workers, educators, psychologists) for and with the young people. The quality of support is affected by limited funding and high staff turnover.

Physical and Mental Healthcare

These services are guaranteed by the National Health Service (SSN). The Italian Ministry of Health is responsible for physical and mental healthcare in detention facilities. As for alternative structures such as ICATT (for people with dependency issues), they integrate physical and psychological treatment in close cooperation with the Local Health Authority (ASL).

Access to specialist care is often difficult in traditional facilities due to overcrowding and staff shortages, but it is better in ICAMs, ICATTs, and community-based facilities, where it is easier to establish links with local healthcare providers. REMS residences, which address the mental health needs of detained persons, were introduced about 10 years ago, replacing the previous system of forensic psychiatric hospitals (OPG). Currently, they are limited nationwide and places remain insufficient.

School Education and Work Inclusion

Access to school and university, as well as to vocational training pathways, is guaranteed by law. For minors, the law requires continuity in the educational and training pathways designed for young people who would otherwise be attending school. However, in practice, the numbers relating to access are inconsistent and not as they should ideally be.

Initiatives such as Cotti in Fragranza (Juvenile Penal Institute Malaspina – Palermo) offer entrepreneurial and professional training with a positive impact on social and work reintegration. In general, what is lacking is a real connection with external and local resources. There are educational and cultural initiatives with local organisations, but they lack governmental or national coordination and often remain pilot projects without continuity.

Faith and Spirituality

Access to religious figures and different faith communities is guaranteed by law and is often organised by the facility's chaplain, as well as by volunteers and associations that collaborate with the penitentiary institution.

In practice, the integration of spiritual practices varies depending on the facility.

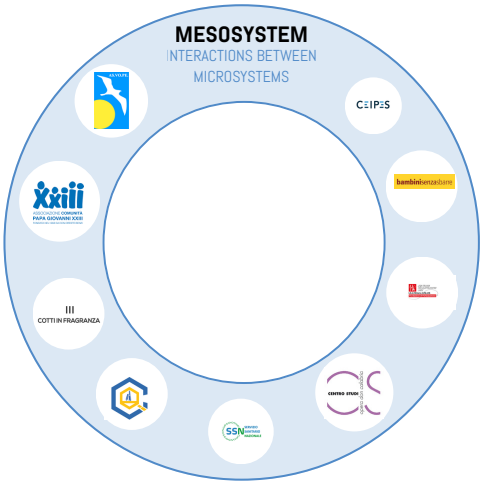
Staff

In more innovative settings for young people and occasionally for women the main approach adopted is relational and educational (for example, in ICAMs and youth communities).

In traditional settings, interactions between staff and residents continue to follow custodial and control-oriented models, offering few opportunities for individual approaches and dialogue (also due to a lack of training, overcrowding issues, and staff shortages).

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Residential Communities for Minors These specialised facilities act as contact points between families, social services, juvenile courts, and local schools.	There are currently 628 residential communities available to host minors or young adults within the juvenile justice system. Only 3 of them are public, managed by the Department of Juvenile and Community Justice (DGMC). The remaining 625 are private communities accredited by the Ministry to carry out this work. They develop personalised programmes and individual (re)integration plans in close collaboration with the relevant local services and judicial authorities.
Interactions between educational systems and detention facilities Some facilities offer personalised and individualised pathways based on the educational and psychological profile of the population. For example, young people frequently have access to more in-depth education during their stay in detention centres.	Several juvenile penal institutions, such as the Malaspina facility in Palermo, have established specific collaborations with local schools and universities, ensuring educational continuity during detention. Within adult penitentiary institutions (IIPP), all levels of education are available. In many cases, memoranda of understanding exist between penitentiary institutions and universities.

Interactions Between the Healthcare System and Penitentiary Institutions

There is a synergistic collaboration between facilities and the SSN/ASL; under the Ministry of Health, they are the main bodies responsible for ensuring access to physical and mental healthcare.

A positive example of cooperation is represented by the REMS (residential facilities for security measures) and the judicial system, which provide effective and personalised therapeutic custody measures for specialised populations requiring additional support.

Employment Opportunities

Detention facilities and the interactions between different labour sectors, as well as the creation of networks among multiple microsystems, represent a continuous commitment in Italy. These include interactions between the judicial system, the education system, civil society, and individuals directly involved in the labour market.

There are various organisations that constitute good practices in this field and represent a positive example of successful networking and partnership between penitentiary institutions, social cooperatives, and local businesses, which work together to promote genuine engagement in social and work (re)integration.

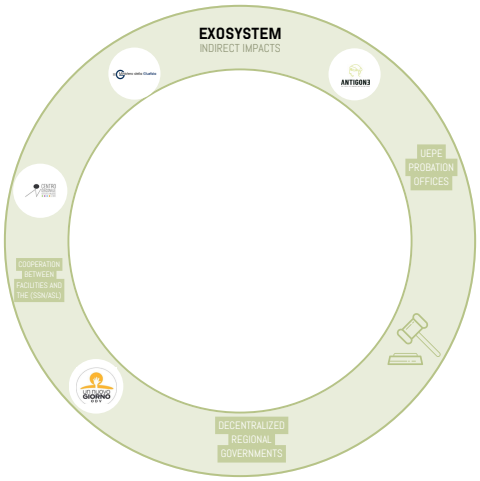
Interactions of the Legal System

Alternative measures prove effective mainly when there is strong collaboration with social services and access to a well-structured network that includes courts, community facilities, and qualified professionals engaged in educational and (re)integration pathways.

This type of network-building is significantly more robust and systemic in the juvenile sector and less effective in the adult system.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Penitentiary Law (Law 354 of 1975 and subsequent reforms) This legislation represents the essential legal framework governing the rights of detained persons. These rights include access to healthcare, education, the labour market, family visits, and alternative measures to detention.	Although progressive in principle and rehabilitative in intent, the implementation of these fundamental laws varies considerably depending on the region and the type of facility (e.g., IIPP, ICAM, ICATT, REMS). They should form the basis of the entire ecosystem, but large-scale implementation requires active enforcement and effective legal interpretation.
Ministry of Justice – DAP and DGMC The Department of Penitentiary Administration (DAP) and the Department of Juvenile and Community Justice (DGMC) formulate and implement detention and resocialisation policies at the national level for all types of facilities within the justice system.	The Ministry of Justice and its associated bodies are responsible for protocols with local authorities, funding frameworks, staffing, and the coordination of alternative measures. However, discrepancies between policy and practice frequently arise due to limited resources or regional inequalities.
Probation and External Criminal Execution Offices (UEPE) These offices handle non-custodial measures and resocialisation plans for individuals in all types of facilities.	The UEPE acts as an intermediary between detention facilities (primarily traditional IIPP), social services, and the community. UEPE offices face challenges such as staff shortages and uneven collaboration with regional actors. Their ability to support detained persons during transitional periods is crucial but remains vulnerable. For minors, this role is carried out by the Juvenile Social Services Offices (USSM).

Regional and Municipal Governments

Italian regional and local authorities are responsible for healthcare, housing, employment services, and social assistance for people who have completed a period of detention.

The decentralised nature of the Italian system generates significant territorial disparities. In regions where cooperation with penitentiary institutions is active, such as Emilia-Romagna and Tuscany, reintegration is more effective. In other areas, a lack of coordination or funding undermines continuity of support.

National Healthcare System (SSN)

Since 2008, penitentiary healthcare has been officially integrated into the public healthcare system (SSN).

Regional disparities persist regarding the quality of and access to care, particularly with respect to mental health services and addiction treatment. Continuity of care after release is often fragmented, and (re)integration into the general healthcare system is not systematically ensured.

Interactions Between Non-Governmental Organisations and the Third Sector

NGOs and cooperatives, such as Ceipes, Centro Studi Opera Don Calabria, CNVG, and Caritas, play a crucial role in providing reintegration services, housing, training, and psychosocial support.

These actors operate within public–private partnerships but are constrained by project-based funding, which sometimes undermines their sustainability and long-term planning. Networking and synergistic collaboration between the public and private sectors are essential for a positive and holistic (re)integration process for individuals who were previously detained.

National and European Union Funding Mechanisms (PNRR, Justice Fund, ESF+)

Access to structural funds and national reintegration programmes, such as the PNRR and the European Social Fund (ESF+), facilitates the implementation of innovative projects for reintegration and training.

Bureaucratic complexity, limited timeframes, and low scalability reduce their impact on the broader system. However, these funding sources are essential for testing and piloting community-based reintegration models.

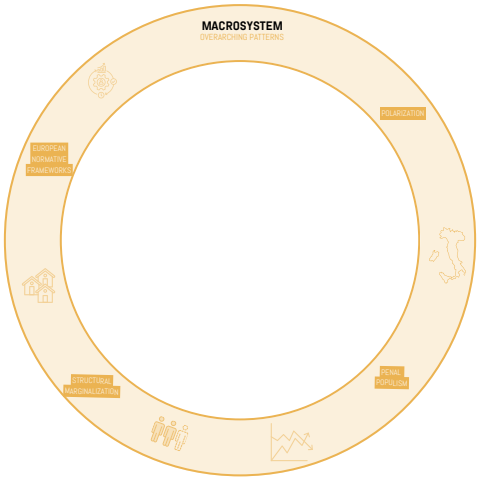
Supervisory Courts and Judges

Judges play a fundamental role in approving alternative sanctions, granting early release, and monitoring the legality of detention conditions. Their decisions influence detained persons' access to external opportunities and to alternatives to detention.

Their collaboration with penitentiary institutions (IIPP), UEPE offices, NGOs, and local services is essential, but not always adequately organised.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
"Punitive" Cultural Attitude Italian society often displays a punitive attitude, reinforced by public and media narratives surrounding "security" and "justice."	This cultural inclination limits public support for alternatives to detention, even when evidence demonstrates their effectiveness. It also fuels political reluctance to expand community-based models such as small-scale detention centres.
Stigmatisation and Social Exclusion of Formerly Detained Persons Individuals with criminal records face significant social stigma, which affects their access to employment, housing, education, and social networks.	Reintegration efforts are frequently hindered by public distrust, which limits the willingness of employers and property owners to engage. Initiatives by NGOs such as Don Calabria help reduce stigma at the local level, but lack systemic reinforcement.
Disparities in Civic Culture and Trust in Institutions In Italy, levels of civic participation and trust in the judicial system differ across regions.	In areas characterised by lower institutional trust, there is greater scepticism toward resocialisation policies. This phenomenon affects the quality and public acceptance of reintegration services, and it also impacts collaboration with local governments and judicial authorities.

Catholic and Humanistic Ethical Foundations

Italian justice culture is strongly influenced by Catholic and humanistic values, which emphasise forgiveness, dignity, and redemption.

These ideals form the legal and moral foundation of Article 27 of the Constitution ("Punishment must aim at rehabilitation"). However, the practical application of these principles remains inconsistent.

Political Polarisation and Penal Populism

The political landscape shapes the formulation of justice policies. This is becoming an increasingly significant issue with the rise of right-wing politics at the national level.

The rhetoric of "toughness on crime" dominates political debate, particularly concerning immigration, recidivism, and urban security. This obstructs structural reforms and reduces the feasibility of restorative or community-based justice strategies.

European Influence and Reference Norms

Italy is subject to EU directives and international human rights treaties (e.g., the ECHR, recommendations of the CPT – European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment), which promote rehabilitation, dignified conditions, and alternatives to detention.

Although Italy formally adheres to these guidelines, implementation at the national level is often reactive (for example, following ECtHR sanctions) rather than proactive. This can hinder reform efforts.

Economic Inequality and Structural Marginzalisation

The most pronounced social inequalities linked to poverty, education, and regional divides are reflected in the detained population.

Individuals from marginalised backgrounds are overrepresented in penitentiary facilities (IIPP) and face significant obstacles upon release. The justice system mirrors these systemic imbalances, perpetuating cycles of exclusion.

Public Narratives and Media Influence

The media indirectly shape political decisions, public opinion, and the acceptance of resocialisation models.

In Italy, a punitive media narrative often limits political willingness to implement reforms, whereas awareness campaigns can promote progressive models (such as small-scale detention and restorative justice).

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:

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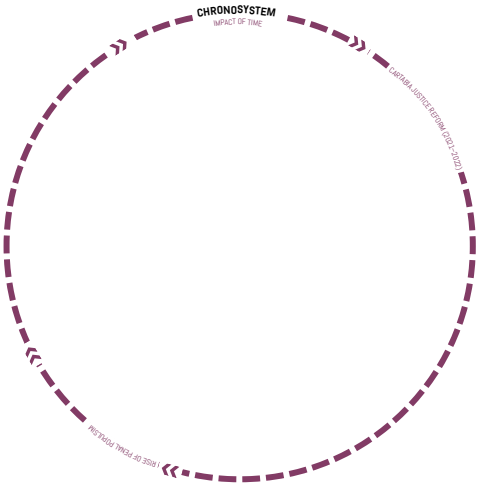


FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Penitentiary Reform of 1975 (Law 354/1975) This reform marked a turning point, establishing rehabilitation as the primary objective of detention (Article 27 of the Constitution).	It introduced measures such as early release, education, and work as fundamental rights. However, the system has struggled to fully implement these ideals, often reverting to punitive norms.
Juvenile Criminal Procedure Code (D.P.R. 448/1988) This decree regulates criminal proceedings involving juvenile defendants in Italy. It is based on principles that prioritise the minor's personality and educational needs.	It distinguishes the criminal system from the social welfare system by providing specific protections for minors. It introduces the suspension of the trial with probation (messa alla prova) and entrusts the young person to social services for a probation period aimed at repairing the harm caused and supporting reintegration. If the outcome is positive, the offence is extinguished. Detention is considered a last resort.

The 1990s: "Tangentopoli" and the Era of Organised Crime

The wave of arrests during the crackdown on corruption and the mafia in the early 1990s led to a significant increase in the detained population.

Emergency laws and harsher penalties were implemented, shifting the political debate toward repression and security. This legacy continues to influence the rigidity of the current judicial system.

2006 Pardon (Law 241/2006)

The law significantly reduced the prison population by more than 20,000 people within a few months, highlighting the extent of prior over-incarceration.

The absence of related reintegration plans led to high recidivism rates and a negative public reaction, which hindered future large-scale alternatives to detention.

2013 Torreggiani v. Italy (ECtHR Judgment)

The European Court of Human Rights condemned Italy for inhuman prison conditions and systemic overcrowding.

This led to legal and administrative reforms that encouraged alternative sanctions (e.g., house arrest, semi-liberty), improved detention conditions, and strengthened the shift toward non-custodial measures.

COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2021)

The circumstances arising from the pandemic led to the adoption of extraordinary measures, including temporary releases, extensions of house arrest, and digital solutions for education and family communication.

The crisis highlighted systemic weaknesses (e.g., limited access to healthcare, overcrowding) but also prompted reflection on alternative detention models and on the role of technology in prison life.

Cartabia Justice Reform (2021–2022)

This reform redefined the criminal and procedural systems to promote community sanctions, restorative justice, and personalised pathways.

It introduced new alternatives to detention and expanded access to restorative measures. Still in the implementation phase, it represents a significant legal reorientation toward a restorative approach.

Growth of the Third Sector in Justice (2000s–present)

NGOs, cooperatives, and foundations have become key actors in providing reintegration support, vocational training, and housing solutions.

Their growing presence reflects a shift toward community-based models, although structural funding and political support remain limited.

Rise of Penal Populism in the Last Fifteen Years

In Italy, politics has increasingly focused on fear, crime control, and "zero tolerance," reinforcing punitive tendencies.

This has resulted in delays and a weakening of the implementation of rehabilitative reforms, despite pressure from civil society and international bodies.

Caivano Decree (D.L. 123/2023, Law 159/2023)

This decree expanded coercive measures for minors, lowered the threshold for pre-trial detention in prison, and introduced sanctions related to parental responsibility. Although it was designed as a response to youth crime and social degradation, in practice it has not been implemented in that way.

In essence, it represents a shift toward repressive strategies, particularly within the juvenile justice system. It may undermine the rehabilitative framework established by the 1988 Juvenile Justice Reform (D.P.R. 448). Its implementation could lead to a widening of the net and the institutionalisation of vulnerable minors, in contrast with international standards on proportionality and differentiation.

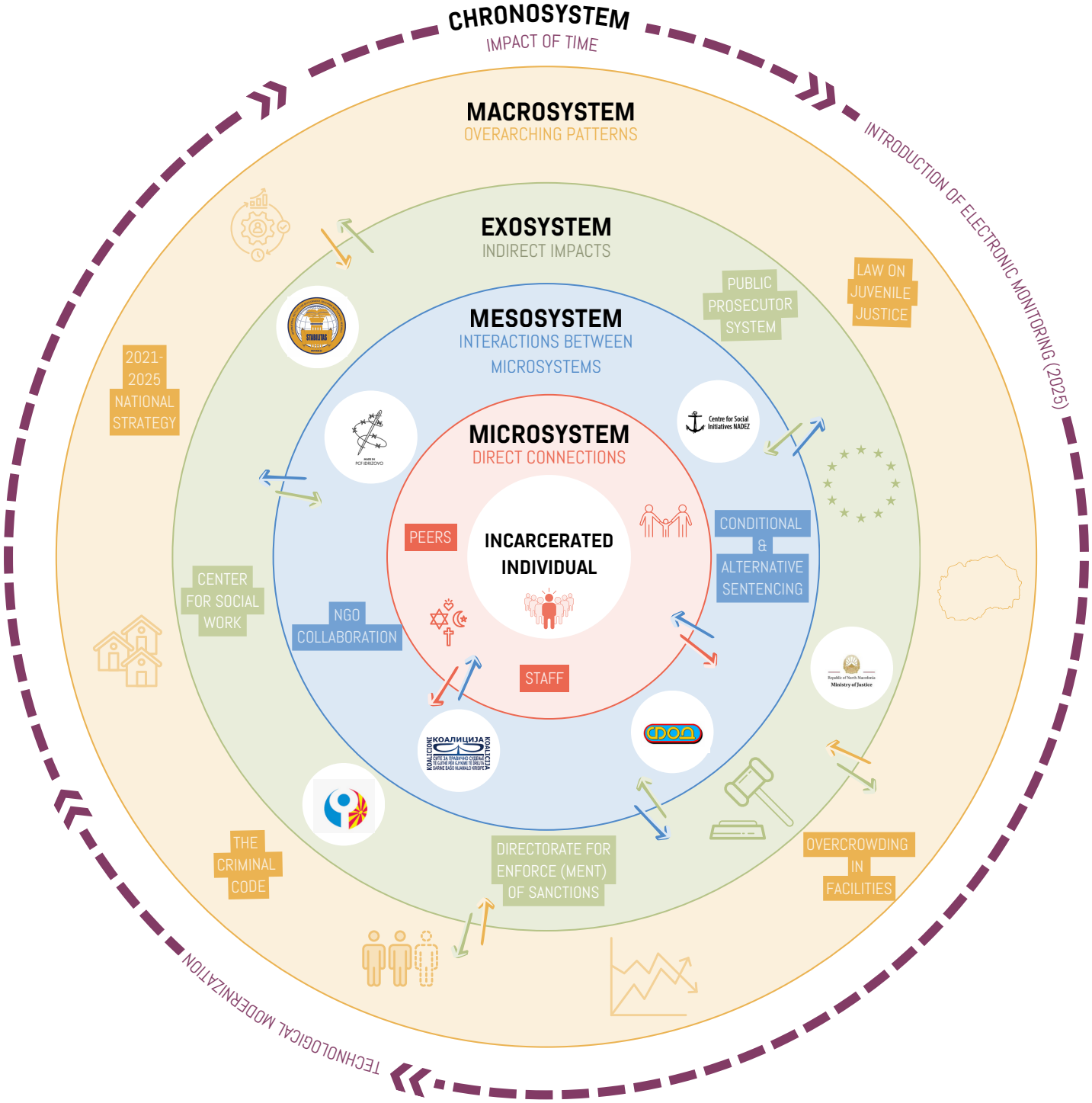
Digital Transformation and Innovation in the Justice Sector

The last decade has seen increased digitalization of prison education, healthcare access, and case management.

Although still uneven, this evolution is reshaping the dynamics of detention, making digital skills essential for reintegration and challenging the analogue nature of traditional imprisonment.

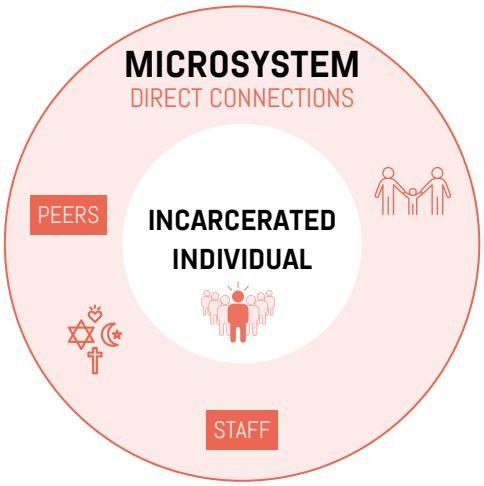
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

NORTH MACEDONIA



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family In North Macedonia, maintaining family bonds during incarceration is considered a crucial stabilizing factor for the mental health and resocialization of incarcerated persons. A specialized family visitation program has been introduced which enabled the adaptation of child-friendly visiting rooms in three facilities. These spaces reduce trauma for children and encourage a more natural form of parent-child contact, while additional facilities allow unsupervised visits with spouses or common-law partners. The Law on the Execution of Sanctions, particularly articles 195–203, outlines the rights of incarcerated persons to visits, written communication, and monitored phone calls, with extended provisions for minors and emerging adults (who are entitled to unlimited visits and phone calls).	These rules of conduct, rights, obligations, and mutual contacts of incarcerated individuals and their families are regulated by the Law on the Execution of Sanctions of the Republic of North Macedonia and by internal Rulebooks for the Use of Benefits (adopted by the institution, in accordance with legal regulations and the conditions within the institution).

Psychosocial support

Psychologists, social workers, and pedagogues are formally employed in facilities (though their numbers remain limited — e.g., 7 psychologists and 9 social workers across the system). Services include psychological evaluations, counseling, and group treatment. However, coverage is uneven due to staffing shortages, underfunding, and weak cooperation between detention facilities and external providers. Project-based support supplements these gaps, for example, through a partnership between Prilep Correctional Institution and NGO CCI (2021–2025), which provides regular visits from a psychiatrist (monthly) and a psychologist (weekly).

This factor reveals the dependence of facilities on collaboration with external healthcare and NGO partners. It also highlights systemic weaknesses: the lack of sufficient trained personnel and formalized inter-institutional cooperation. These shortcomings increase the risk of untreated disorders, recidivism, and in-facility conflicts, showing how failures at the micro-level ripple outward to impact the justice system's broader effectiveness.

Healthcare

All facilities have on-site infirmaries, intended for primary care, though most are under-equipped and rely on outdated or non-functional equipment. Staffing levels vary: some prisons provide 24-hour medical coverage, while others only organize visits through local health centers or in emergencies. For instance, PHI Strumica sends doctors and health teams weekly, while prisons like Prilep contract external specialists under agreements with the Ministry of Health. Detained individuals must undergo a medical examination upon admission and release, with minors receiving annual exams. Nevertheless, underfunding, limited medications, and overcrowding severely restrict healthcare quality, and continuity of care after release is often absent.

With donations and support from international institutions, activities are being carried out to improve healthcare in detention facilities. These activities include training for healthcare workers, the development of standard operating procedures, and improving coordination among relevant institutions. Although significant efforts are being made to improve healthcare, it still faces serious challenges in Macedonian detention facilities that require urgent attention and resolution. Overcrowding in detention facilities further complicates the provision of adequate healthcare.

Education

Although primary education is legally mandatory for all, for years there was no way to implement this within detention facilities. Legal reforms through the Law on Primary Education (2023 amendments) have now removed barriers, with the first organized prison schooling expected to begin in 2025/26. In preparation, the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions completed an analysis of incarcerated persons' educational status and requested approval from the Ministry of Education to formalize programs. In addition, incarcerated individuals may pursue external education at their own expense if it does not disrupt institutional order.

This development illustrates direct interconnection between the justice and education systems, with long-term impacts for social reintegration. Once implemented, schools inside facilities will provide a channel to equalize opportunities, reduce recidivism, and strengthen community ties — linking correctional settings with broader national education and labor systems.

Staff and dynamic security

Detention staff in North Macedonia cover a wide range of categories: educators, psychologists, social workers, legal advisors, and over 690 prison police. Employment is under the Ministry of Justice and the Directorate for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions. Staff training has begun to integrate the principle of dynamic security, emphasizing trust-based relationships and active engagement with incarcerated persons rather than reliance only on physical barriers. A working group is preparing a national Manual on Dynamic Security, with training provided in collaboration with the Council of Europe. Still, staff turnover is high, especially among prison police, due to poor conditions and resignations.

Staff professionalism is at the core of the detention ecosystem, linking individual rehabilitation outcomes to institutional and national strategies. International donors and NGOs serve as capacity-building partners, but systemic understaffing and poor morale weaken the sustainability of reforms, showing how fragile this ecosystem connection remains.

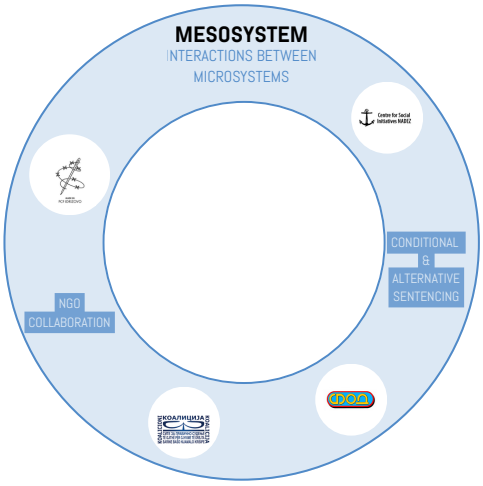
Religion

Facilities allow incarcerated persons to practice their religion in designated rooms, as guaranteed by Article 194 of the Law on the Execution of Sanctions. However, there are no formalized programs with religious representatives, and support varies by institution.

Religion provides incarcerated persons with spiritual resilience and a link to broader community traditions. Yet the absence of structured engagement with religious communities reflects a missed opportunity for deeper psychosocial support.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Collaboration with the local community Formal and informal partnerships link detention facilities with community institutions. Examples include fashion designer Irina Tosheva's sewing workshops for women in Idrizovo Prison, agricultural programs in Bitola and Prilep prisons, and cultural initiatives like stand-up comedy (Idrizovo, May 2025) and chess tournaments. Semi-open facilities like Kumanovo include sports fields, though organized programs are rare.	These collaborations bring correctional facilities into the social, cultural, and economic life of the community. They encourage skills development, socialization, and visibility for incarcerated persons, but their irregular and project-based nature highlights the dependence on external goodwill rather than systematic policy.
Probation Probation offers significant benefits for incarcerated individuals, as it allows for the execution of a sentence within the community under supervision, rather than in a detention facility (alternative measures). It motivates individuals to behave responsibly and avoid re-offending. The court may impose the following alternative measures: - Conditional sentence with protective supervision - Community service - House arrest - Execution of conditional release	This service supervises convicted individuals and offers them support during the execution of alternative measures, in accordance with court decisions. Probation officers carry out their duties in line with the Law on Probation. The Probation Service faces challenges such as a shortage of adequately trained probation officers and insufficient coordination and information exchange between probation officers and other institutions. These shortcomings affect its effectiveness and efficiency.

Non-governmental organizations

NGOs in North Macedonia are increasingly influencing the improvement of the justice system, especially regarding human rights and (re)integration. They implement educational, psychosocial, and cultural programs within detention facilities to reduce the risk of recidivism and facilitate the integration of incarcerated individuals into society.

The cultural and recreational activities organized by NGOs significantly improve the mental state and interpersonal relationships among incarcerated individuals, which is of great importance for their (re)integration. By monitoring and reacting to potential abuses or inhumane conditions, they protect human rights within detention facilities. Additionally, they provide free legal advice and support for appeals, conditional releases, and other legal matters.

Volunteer programs

While not highly structured, volunteer engagement has occurred in detention facilities through small-scale cultural and humanitarian activities. For example, local organizations have organized theater plays, workshops, and more recently, a stand-up comedy performance (Idrizovo, 2025) as humanitarian outreach. Volunteers also occasionally contribute to recreational activities such as chess tournaments.

Volunteer work represents grassroots involvement from civil society, extending community solidarity into correctional spaces. Though sporadic, these initiatives strengthen bridges between incarcerated individuals and society, countering stigma by fostering direct community interaction.

Education and vocational training partnerships

Beyond the legal introduction of primary education in prisons (planned for 2025/26), vocational training programs have been introduced through collaborations. Examples include sewing workshops with private designers, horticultural projects in Prilep, and work programs through agreements with local factories (e.g., FOD DOOEL Novaci, AD ESM Skopje). These programs prepare incarcerated persons for the labor market.

These collaborations connect detention facilities with the economy and labor sector, making resocialization relevant to community needs. They also demonstrate how public-private partnerships can support rehabilitation while addressing skill shortages in the broader economy.

Employment programs (during and after release)

Several memorandums of cooperation allow incarcerated individuals to work outside facilities. For example, Strumica Prison collaborates with the Museum of Cultural Monuments, and Shtip Prison works with the local public utility company ISAR. These programs provide real work experience and help maintain integration during the sentence.

By involving municipal institutions and employers, these collaborations ensure that incarceration does not completely sever ties to the labor market, creating continuity that is crucial for post-release reintegration.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Directorate for the Enforcement of Sanctions (DES) The Directorate, under the Ministry of Justice, is the central body managing correctional facilities, overseeing the admission, classification, and placement of incarcerated individuals. It is responsible for the implementation of sanctions, maintaining security, protecting rights, and ensuring resocialization programs are carried out. DES also supervises alternative sanctions, develops partnerships with external institutions, and prepares strategic reforms such as the 2021–2025 National Strategy.	DES connects micro-level facility operations with macro-level law and strategy, serving as the operational hub of the justice system. Its decisions and policies directly influence daily conditions inside facilities and the degree to which international human rights obligations are upheld.
Judges and public prosecutors The judiciary has a decisive influence on prison populations through sentencing practices, the application (or neglect) of alternatives, and conditional release decisions. Judges and prosecutors also visit detention facilities when case procedures require interviews or hearings with incarcerated persons. Their approach determines whether incarceration remains the default sanction or whether community-based alternatives gain traction.	Judicial practice creates a strong feedback loop: strict sentencing inflates overcrowding, while progressive application of alternatives relieves systemic pressure. Their role illustrates how decisions at the court level cascade into prison conditions and impact reintegration chances.

Ombudsman and the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)

Established in 1997, the Ombudsman is an independent institution mandated to protect citizens' rights against state abuses. As the designated NPM under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT), it conducts unannounced visits, interviews with incarcerated individuals, and facility inspections, and issues recommendations to prevent ill-treatment. The Ombudsman collaborates with NGOs in monitoring detention and can initiate investigations independently.

The Ombudsman acts as the external watchdog linking detention facilities with international human rights standards. Its authority ensures that systemic shortcomings, such as overcrowding, medical neglect, or staff misconduct, are subject to external oversight and public accountability.

Centers for social work

The Center for Social Work has a legal and professional role in processes involving minors before, during, and after their stay in educational-detention facilities. It acts as a bridge between the court, family, and institutions. In collaboration with educational-correctional facilities, the Center for Social Work contributes to the development of individual rehabilitation plans, including education, socialization, and life skills training, with the aim of improving the effectiveness of the measures undertaken.

The Center for Social Work plays a crucial role in the early identification of risk factors in minors, such as family dysfunction, poverty, or neglect. This enables timely intervention and referral to appropriate support. The Center for Social Work is part of the team that makes decisions regarding the minor's stay in the educational-detention facility. It also facilitates the minor's (re)integration after the educational measure is completed, providing continuous support, monitoring, and motivation for positive change and an active role in the community.

Probation Service (Exo Linkage)

The probation service is a distinct organizational unit at the sector level within the Directorate for Enforcement of Sanctions. The central service acts as a strategic and supervisory body, creating standards, providing training, monitoring, and coordinating. Local offices implement probation on the ground, working directly with individuals and conducting supervision.

Through probation, the state reduces the necessity of institutional punishment and activates societal mechanisms for education, rehabilitation, and (re)integration, without excluding the individual from the community. In order to properly fulfill its function and support the integration of offenders in the community, the probation service must collaborate with a wide range of institutions and non-governmental organizations.

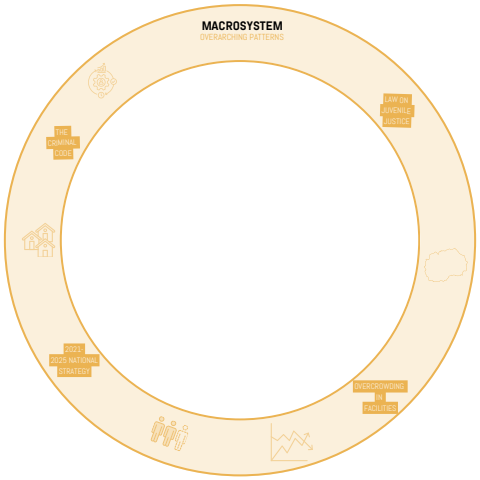
EU and International projects

Projects funded by the European Union, Council of Europe, OSCE, and UNDP have had significant impact. They provide staff training, promote dynamic security, strengthen healthcare and education, and support the development of alternative sanctions. For instance, EU-funded programs have modernized probation, promoted electronic monitoring, and aligned Macedonian practices with European standards.

International donors and organizations embed transnational human rights standards and modern practices into the national justice system. Their involvement creates vertical links from global frameworks down to micro-level practices inside detention facilities.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Law on the Execution of Sanctions This law forms the backbone of the penitentiary system, regulating how sentences are executed, outlining the rights and obligations of incarcerated persons, and defining institutional responsibilities. It guarantees human dignity, humane treatment, and preparation for reintegration as central principles. The law also codifies visits, communication, healthcare, education, and work opportunities inside facilities.	As a structural framework, this law links correctional practice with constitutional protections and international human rights commitments. It ensures that every level of the detention ecosystem — from staff practices to NGO access — operates within a consistent legal framework aligned with European standards.
Criminal Code The Criminal Code defines criminal acts and penalties, including prison sentences and alternatives. Recent reforms have expanded community-based measures such as conditional sentences, probation, and electronic monitoring. However, in practice, courts still tend to favor custodial sentences, which contributes to overcrowding.	The Code sets the legal parameters for sentencing and thus directly shapes the size and composition of the incarcerated population. By emphasizing alternatives, it could rebalance the justice ecosystem, but its underuse reveals the gap between legal frameworks and judicial practice.

Law on Juvenile Justice

The goals of this law and its application are to prioritize the best interests and protection of children from crime, violence, and any form of threat to their freedoms and rights, as well as their proper development. It also aims to protect incarcerated juveniles from re-offending, facilitate their socialization, education, and education, and provide assistance and care. Furthermore, it ensures the protection of their freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and other international agreements ratified in accordance with the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia concerning the status of children.

The Law on Juvenile Justice ensures specialized protection and treatment for minors in educational-detention institutions, aiming for their (re)integration into society. It guarantees the respect for children's rights, including education, healthcare, and psychosocial support. In the application of this law, priority is given to preventative measures and personal development, while the use of punitive measures is minimized.

National Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System (2021–2025)

The strategy provides a long-term vision for reform, focusing on modernizing infrastructure, strengthening staff training, expanding healthcare and education, and aligning detention practices with EU integration requirements. It also promotes inter-institutional cooperation and reduction of recidivism.

The strategy serves as a roadmap, connecting national institutions with international donors, NGOs, and community actors in a coordinated effort to transform the detention system. Its success depends on political will, funding, and cross-sectoral implementation.

Overcrowding

Overcrowding in detention facilities in North Macedonia is a serious and long-standing problem, particularly pronounced in the Idrizovo Penitentiary. Traditional prisons often exceed their capacity, resulting in poor hygiene conditions, limited access to healthcare, and increased security risks.

The main causes of overcrowding in detention facilities are lengthy court proceedings, infrequent application of alternative measures, and outdated detention facility infrastructure. The consequences include human rights violations and hindered (re)integration of incarcerated individuals.

Public Attitudes and Stigma

At the societal level, public opinion in North Macedonia tends to favor punitive approaches and views incarceration as the primary form of justice. Stigma toward incarcerated individuals complicates reintegration, as employers, schools, and communities are often reluctant to accept them post-release.

Public attitudes influence judicial decision-making, political priorities, and the willingness of employers or communities to collaborate on rehabilitation. They create an overarching cultural climate that either supports or undermines reintegration efforts, making stigma reduction a critical macrosystem challenge.

Economic system

n North Macedonia, facilities primarily depend on the state budget, meaning their financial stability relies on the country's economic situation. A strong and functional economic system is a prerequisite for a humane, efficient, and reform-oriented justice system.

An efficient economic system would entail investments in continuous training and professional development of staff, ensuring adequate and humane living conditions in detention facilities, as well as the development of (re)integration and post-penal support programs: something that still presents a challenge for the system in North Macedonia.

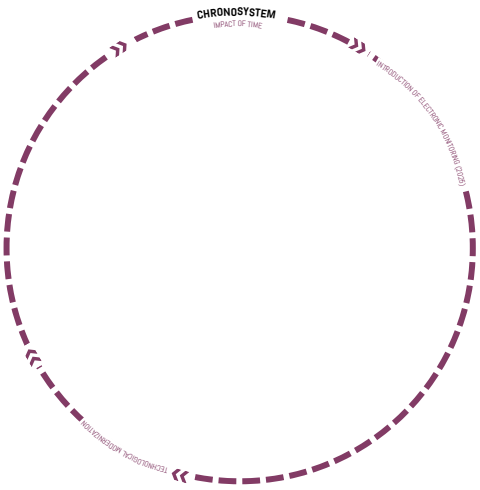
International Human Rights and EU Integration

North Macedonia's justice system is shaped by international frameworks, including the European Convention on Human Rights, UN standards, and obligations under the EU accession process. The Council of Europe's CPT reports, UNDP projects, and EU-funded reforms all embed external norms into national practice.

International obligations act as a vertical layer of influence, requiring alignment of laws, strategies, and facility practices with European and global human rights standards. This creates accountability beyond the national level and ties domestic reform to North Macedonia's broader geopolitical trajectory.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
EU Accession and International Integration North Macedonia's EU accession process and membership in the Council of Europe have provided strong, long-term pressure for reforms in the penitentiary and justice system. Reports from the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), compliance with UN standards, and EU-funded projects have consistently pushed for improved conditions, expansion of alternatives to detention, and the introduction of modern concepts such as dynamic security.	From a chronosystem perspective, EU accession and related international commitments act as recurring external triggers for reform. Time-bound obligations — such as EU accession chapters, periodic CPT inspections, and UN treaty reviews — require constant adaptation and prevent stagnation. This sustained external pressure pushes the detention ecosystem to evolve beyond domestic inertia, embedding international standards into national structures and daily practice.

Ministry of Labor and Social Policy – Juvenile Small Group Homes

In 2019, small group homes (organizational units) were established for the institutional care of juveniles (aged 14 to 18) with educational-social problems and behavioral disorders, based on a previously issued court order from the locally competent court due to conflict with the law. The purpose of these homes is the protection, rehabilitation, and (re)integration of children. These homes provide an organized stay in a family-like environment, with expert support from educators and social workers.

The Ministry is responsible for creating and implementing policies that regulate the functioning of small group homes for juveniles. It provides oversight, resources, and expert support for these institutions, setting the framework for safety, education, and educational standards within the small group homes. Despite significant efforts, in practice, there is a shortage of qualified staff, a lack of continuous employee training, insufficient financial resources, and inadequate inter-institutional cooperation. This process marked the transformation from large institutional capacities to smaller, more integrated facilities that provide better support juveniles.

Institutional modernization and technological infrastructure

Since 2019, the justice and penitentiary system in North Macedonia has undergone important steps toward institutional and technological modernization. Investments have included the installation of video surveillance systems to strengthen accountability and transparency inside facilities, as well as the opening of digital courtrooms, which streamline judicial processes and reduce delays by enabling remote participation. These initiatives are reinforced by the National Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System (2021–2025), which prioritizes modernization of detention infrastructure, continuous staff training, and the expansion of healthcare and education services within facilities.

Technological modernization represents a gradual but significant shift from a purely punitive system toward a more rehabilitative and rights-based approach. By embedding digital tools, surveillance, and modern infrastructure into daily practice, macro-level strategies are translated into concrete facility-level improvements. These reforms are made possible through the interaction of national authorities (Ministry of Justice, Directorate for the Enforcement of Sanctions), international donors (EU, Council of Europe, UNDP), and facility-level staff, showing how systemic change cascades across the ecosystem — from law and policy down to the lived experience of incarcerated persons.

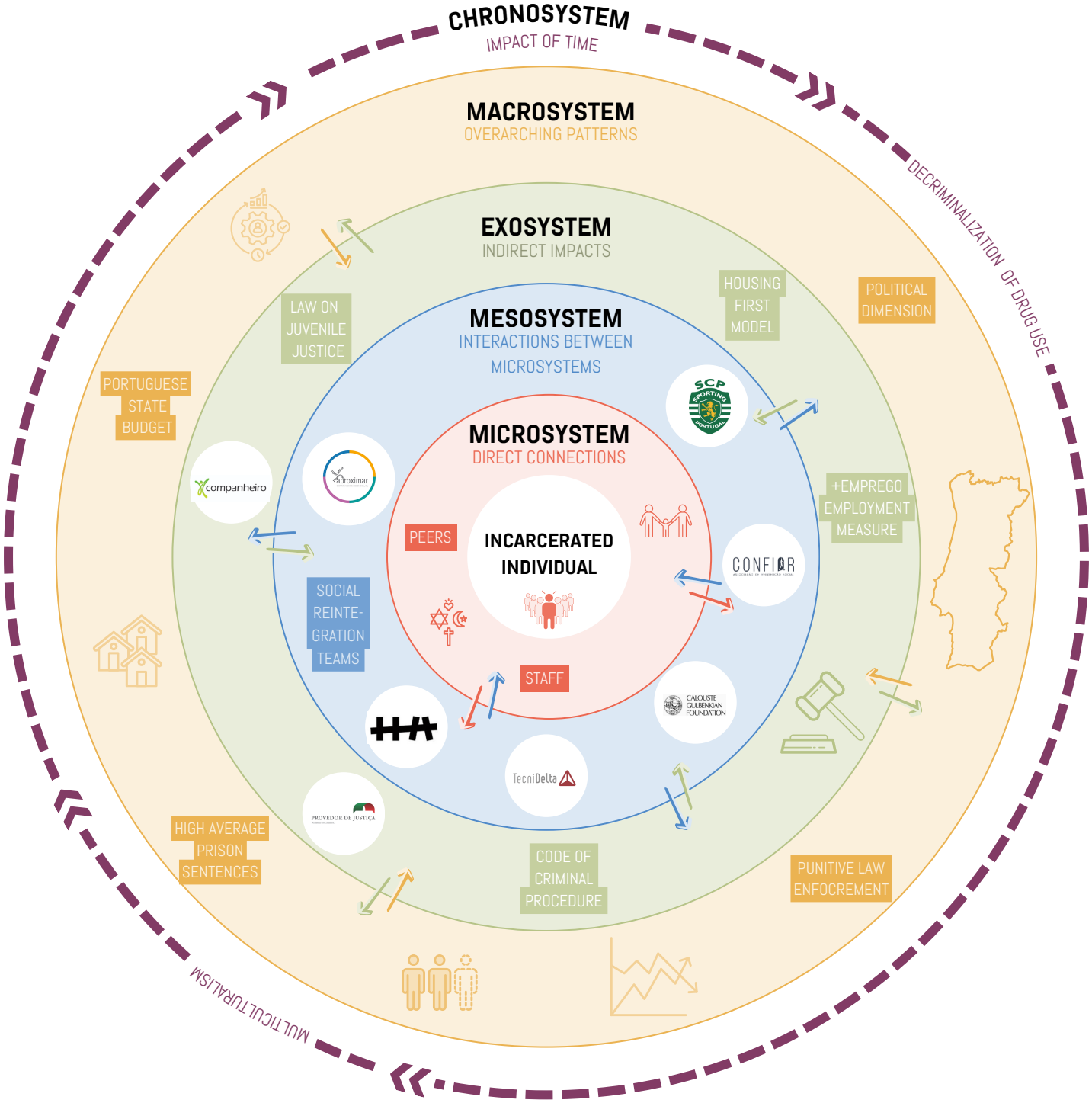
Legal and Policy reforms (2025)

Reform of the legal framework has been gradual but steady. The Law on the Execution of Sanctions, Criminal Code, and Law on Juvenile Justice have all been revised in the past decade to better align with European standards. Most recently, the 2025 amendments introduced electronic monitoring, strengthening probation as an alternative to incarceration. The Law on Primary Education was also amended to finally allow formal schooling inside prisons, set to start in 2025/26.

These reforms highlight how the system evolves in phases, responding to external pressures (EU integration, CPT recommendations) and internal crises (overcrowding, staff shortages). The chronosystem reveals that change is incremental, often dependent on political momentum and donor support.

RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

PORTUGAL



MICROSYSTEM

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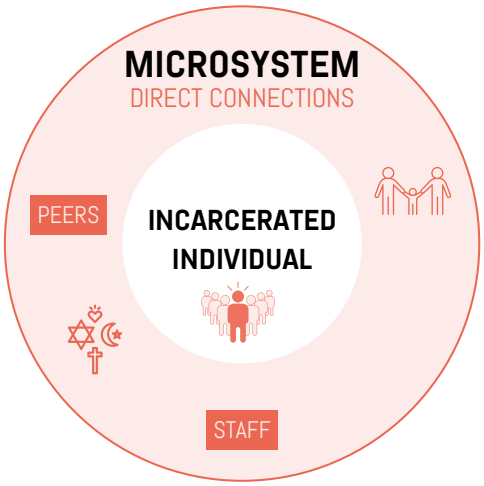


FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family contact Portuguese prison law protects family relationships through specific regulations. Article 112 of the General Regulations for Prisons allows extended visits for birthdays, religious holidays, or other significant dates. Family rooms are furnished to encourage interaction between incarcerated parents and their children. Article 117 further enables videoconference visits when geographical distance makes in-person contact difficult. These measures acknowledge the central role of family bonds in well-being.	Family visits strengthen emotional resilience and reduce the risks of isolation and depression. They maintain crucial ties that support smoother reintegration into society. Family-friendly spaces and digital connections demonstrate how prisons can act as bridges to the outside world rather than barriers, reinforcing the integration of justice, family, and community systems.
Staff Prison guards ensure order and security, but their role extends to supervising activities and contributing to re-socialisation. Social reintegration technicians develop individualized reintegration plans, addressing education, addiction, and social needs. Daily interactions with peers also shape incarcerated individuals' experiences, both positively, through mutual support, and negatively, if tensions or conflicts arise.	The quality of peer and staff interactions defines the social climate inside prisons. Supportive, trust-based relationships promote stability and motivation for change. They also mirror broader social norms and prepare individuals for reintegration by encouraging constructive behaviour and responsibility.

Psychosocial workers

Psychological support is a key element in promoting the individual's social (re)integration, but this support is compromised by the small number of professionals working in this area. On the other hand, technical support on issues of a different nature such as housing or documentation (especially in the case of immigrant citizens) are important in promoting a more effective process of (re)integration into society.

The International Association of Correctional and Forensic Psychology (2010) suggests that prisons should have 1 psychologist for every 150/160 incarcerated individuals. In Portugal, the ratio is 1 psychologist for every 380 incarcerated individuals (2022), which is far from the recommended ratio and severely compromises intervention at this level. Recognizing the need to reinforce intervention at this level, in 2023 the adaptation of a building began, adopting the name "Yellow House", with a view to installing a therapeutic unit in the area of mental health for young people in contact with the justice system. The Portuguese Psychologists' Association has made efforts to raise awareness of the need for intervention by psychologists at criminal justice.

Healthcare workers

Healthcare is provided through in-prison health units, infirmaries, and the São João de Deus Prison Hospital. In urgent or specialized cases, detainees are referred to the National Health Service (SNS). Ongoing reforms are integrating prison healthcare fully under the Ministry of Health, aligning it with the local SNS units that serve the prison's territory. This ensures that physical and mental health are treated as public health issues, not isolated prison matters.

By linking detention facilities with the national healthcare network, incarcerated individuals are embedded in the same continuum of care as the general population. This connection reduces health inequalities, ensures continuity of treatment after release, and acknowledges that rehabilitation depends on addressing physical and mental well-being.

Configuration of the detention facility

The Report of the National Prevention Mechanism presented to Parliament (2023) points to the material conditions of prisons (outdated official capacity, occupancy and infrastructure) as a risk factor in this sector. In 2023, the condemnations of the Portuguese state by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) regarding lawsuits brought by incarcerated individuals were based on the inadequate material conditions of the prison stock.

According to the Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2023: Key Findings of the SPACE I survey, Portugal has a high Prison density per 100 places (the score is between 5.1% and 25% higher than the European median value). On the other hand, according to the same report, Portugal has a ratio of incarcerated individuals to staff of 1.9, which is considered a high value (the score is more than 25% higher than the European median value). The physical conditions of the space as the intervention of staff members are circumstances that have implications for the process of re-socializing individuals.

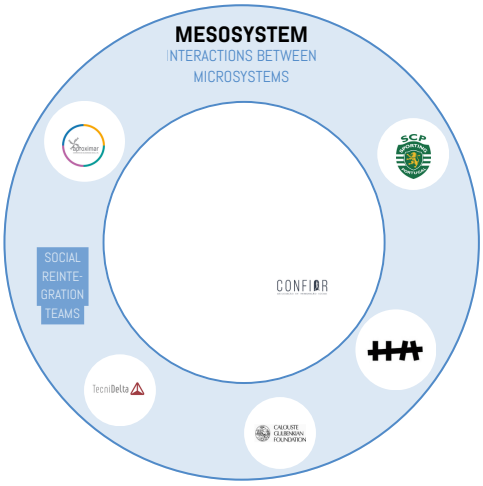
Judicial System Actors

In general, but with particular emphasis on custodial circumstances, the relationship established with the different judicial system actors (lawyer, judge, police, scientific investigation team, others), and the quality of that relationship, can have a decisive effect on the resocializing goals associated with criminal justice. In Portugal, the risk factors highlighted in the Report of the National Prevention Mechanism presented to the Portuguese Parliament (2023) are legal proceedings (disciplinary proceedings and investigation proceedings for the use of coercive means or for assault by an official on a incarcerated individual), the existence and processing of allegations, signs or evidence of ill-treatment (including when incarcerated individuals are admitted) and the means of complaint. Raising awareness and training Judicial System Actors at this level is relevant to practices with increased resocializing potential.

The DGRSP's Training Division is, among other goals, responsible for identifying training and professional development needs. In turn, the Centre for Judicial Studies, aimed at Judges of the courts, Judges of the administrative and tax courts, Public Prosecutors, Lawyers, Solicitors and Agents from other sectors of justice, developed annual continuous training plan. In the 2024-2025 plan were included areas like Psychology of decision making; judicial Integrity and Codes of Conduct; and stress management and socio-emotional skills. Additionally, is included in the Report of the National Prevention Mechanism (MNP) presented to the Portuguese Parliament (2023) regarding training activities promoted by the MNP in prisons, involving professionals from different areas (e.g. management, prison guards, psychologists, lawyers) on: preventing abuse, the Bangkok Rules - Prison Treatment of Women Deprived of their Liberty. As a strategy for overcoming the risk associated with ill-treatment in the context of deprivation of liberty, it has been proposed to strengthen training for members of the prison guard corps regarding techniques for the use of coercive means and respect for the principles of proportionality, and officials, in their respective areas of activity, on procedures for preventing and reporting ill-treatment (namely in the areas of surveillance).

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Volunteer Programs The Prison Volunteer Management Programme formalizes the role of volunteers in Portuguese prisons. Community-based organisations (CBOs) are responsible for recruiting, training, and supervising volunteers. Activities range from education, sports, and arts to legal assistance, spiritual support, and post-release accompaniment. Religious assistance is regulated and only accredited ministers are allowed to provide spiritual care.	Volunteers connect prisons with civil society. Their presence brings external perspectives into closed environments, reducing isolation and stigma. By supporting personal development and transition to freedom, volunteers act as mediators between the correctional system and communities, enhancing social reintegration.
Cultural and Sports Initiatives Partnerships with cultural institutions have introduced arts programs such as Opera in Prison (Gulbenkian Foundation), Mala Mágica (Chapito circus), and artist residencies. Sports initiatives include collaborations with Sporting CP, the Portuguese Handball Federation, and Rugby com Partilha. These projects offer structured routines, creativity, teamwork, and self-expression.	Cultural and sporting activities bridge prison life and community culture. They reinforce identity beyond the inmate label, encouraging positive role models, and build transferable skills. They also connect prisons with the artistic and sporting sectors of Portuguese society, normalizing inclusion.

Social Enterprises and Labour Market Links

Employment initiatives such as Delta Cafés–Tecnidelta workshops train prisoners in equipment repair. ReIncorpora Programme, RESHAPE Ceramics and other enterprises contributes to integrate incarcerated people into productive labour. The Prison Work Exchange (BTP) coordinates requests from external organisations for prison labour. In 2022, 19.7% of working prisoners were employed by outside organisations.

These programs link detention facilities to the economy and labour market, giving incarcerated individuals real work experience and employability skills. They reduce recidivism by addressing one of the most critical reintegration barriers: unemployment. The partnerships ensure prisons are not closed silos but part of the wider economic ecosystem.

Social reintegration teams

The social reintegration teams intervene locally and play an important role in providing technical advice to the courts and public prosecution services, promoting proximity justice. Order no. 12063/2024, of October 14, updates the creation of national social reintegration teams, indicating the respective geographical areas and contexts in which they operate.

The intervention of the technicians of the social reintegration teams can provide relevant support with regard to the operationalization of the pedagogical and re-socializing goals associated with judicial measures, providing technical advice to the courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office, and can extend its articulation with entities and social services in the territories in which they intervene.

Education

Expanding the level of schooling and developing professional skills are opportunities made available to individuals in contexts of deprivation of liberty. Improving the educational and professional qualifications of individuals deprived of their liberty is an important element in their process of resocialization and successful (re)integration into the community, particularly by increasing their opportunities for future professional integration.

Most of the incarcerated individuals' vocational training is provided by the Protocol Centre for Vocational Training in the Justice Sector, but agreements can also be made with other external bodies for the same purpose. At the DGRSP, the Prison Treatment Activities Coordination Division (DCATP) is responsible for developing vocational training projects in line with the needs of incarcerated individuals and the labour market, in conjunction with the relevant public and private bodies. School education/training for the prison population is provided in all prisons under the terms of Joint Order No. 451/1999, published in Portugal Official Gazette No. 127 of 1 June 1999

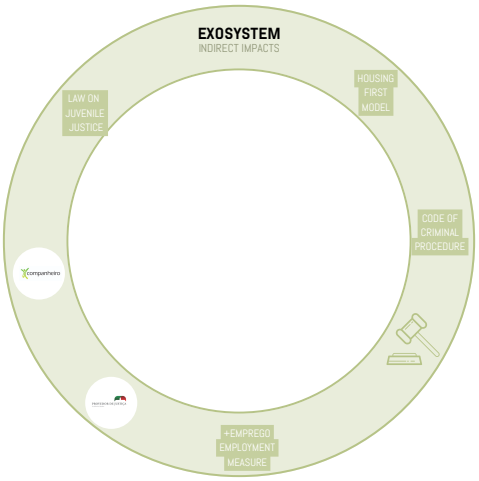
Collaboration with the community

In Portugal different stakeholders collaborate with detention facilities such as schools, companies, educational institutions, healthcare providers, mental health services, cultural and recreational organizations or religious organisations.

Initiatives carried out in the detention facility context or specifically aimed at promoting social reintegration are crucial in encouraging synergies between different sectors and interlocutors in designing a systemic approach to promoting successful integration into the community.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Law (Penal Code and Code of Criminal Procedure) Penal code - Articles 40 (The purpose of sentences and security measures), 41 (Length and counting of prison sentences) , 42 (Execution of the prison sentence), 70 (Criteria for choosing the penalty - If the offence is punishable by a custodial sentence or a non-custodial sentence, the court will give preference to the latter if it adequately and sufficiently fulfils the purpose of the punishment.). The Code of Criminal Procedure is the main procedural law that governs how and when a person can be detained, arrested, or held in preventive custody. Key Articles: Article 202 - Preventive detention; Article 255: Detention in flagrante delicto.	These dimensions influence the way individuals interact with the criminal justice system. This level has direct and indirect implications for the system as a whole, namely in terms of the length of custodial sentences or the capacity of detention facilities. These are dimensions that have a direct bearing on the criminal justice system's resocializing assumptions.
Oversight and Monitoring The Ombudsman, acting as the National Preventive Mechanism (NPM), conducts unannounced visits to detention facilities to prevent torture and ill-treatment. In 2023, 44 monitoring visits were carried out, covering prisons, youth centres, and police detention. Reports are public and include recommendations for reform.	Oversight mechanisms ensure transparency and accountability. They connect the prison system to human rights standards and international obligations, reminding society that incarceration does not suspend fundamental rights.

Labour Market and Reintegration

Reintegration into the labour market remains a major barrier. The stigma of a criminal record reduces opportunities, even for skilled individuals. Initiatives such as the Emprego Measure (IEFP – Employment and Vocational Training Institute) grant employers financial support to hire formerly incarcerated people.

Labour policy connects the penal system to the wider economy. Successful reintegration reduces recidivism, while unemployment reinforces cycles of crime. Programs like Delta Cafés demonstrate how private sector involvement can reduce stigma and create new opportunities. The prison system feeds back into labour debates by highlighting gaps in training, skill recognition, and employer willingness.

Juvenile Justice Framework

Juvenile delinquency (ages 12–16) is governed by the Educational Guardianship Law (Law 166/99, amended by Law 4/2015). Instead of punitive sentences, measures focus on education and reintegration. Reports indicate that juvenile delinquency has risen 12.5% since 2021.

These laws shape how minors are diverted from prison into educational and social services, indirectly impacting prison populations by reducing inflows. Rising delinquency rates create pressure on social, educational, and community systems, showing how prisons and youth facilities reflect broader social challenges. Failures in schools or social care often manifest as increased juvenile cases, requiring systemic responses.

Health Policy Integration

Order no. 13345/2024 established a working group for prison healthcare, promoting integration into the National Health Service (SNS). The São João de Deus Prison Hospital and local health units are already connected to regional SNS structures, ensuring access to specialized care.

By embedding prison healthcare into the SNS, Portugal ensures that incarcerated individuals receive the same standard of care as the general population. This reduces inequalities and strengthens continuity of treatment after release. The feedback loop works both ways: high rates of mental illness or addiction in prisons inform national health planning, while SNS integration ensures that community health services are prepared for reintegration needs.

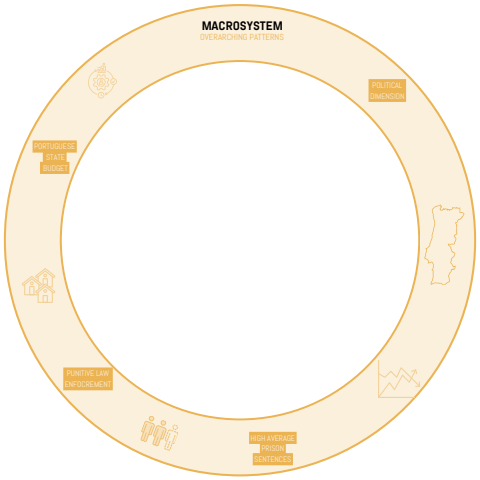
Housing and reintegration

Access to stable housing is one of the biggest challenges after release. Portugal lacks a dedicated national housing program for formerly incarcerated people, but NGOs like APAR and O Companheiro provide transitional housing solutions. Municipalities sometimes collaborate on reintegration housing projects, though availability is limited. The Housing First model has influenced some initiatives, but demand far outweighs supply.

Housing determines whether reintegration is feasible. Without a safe and stable address, individuals struggle to secure employment, access healthcare, or reconnect with family. This indirect factor deeply shapes prison outcomes: those released without housing face higher risks of reoffending, perpetuating the cycle of incarceration. At the system level, inadequate housing provisions put pressure on NGOs and local governments, while high recidivism feeds back into justice policies — highlighting the structural interdependence between social housing, reintegration, and public safety.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Political and Institutional Structures The Ministry of Justice oversees the Direção-Geral de Reinserção e Serviços Prisionais (DGRSP), responsible for prisons and probation. The Ministry of Health collaborates on healthcare, while the Ministry of Internal Administration supervises police forces (PSP, GNR). Policy-making is influenced by political priorities, which may lean toward security or social reintegration depending on the government.	At this level, incarceration reflects political will and institutional design. Political shifts ripple down to prison practices through budgets, staffing levels, and priorities in alternatives to incarceration.
Staff shortage Between 2009 and 2023, the number of prison guards fell by 9%, while the prison population rose by 10%. Staff shortages affect security, healthcare delivery, and rehabilitation efforts. DGRSP has responded with expanded training (over 39,000 hours of courses delivered in 2022), including the adoption of dynamic security principles that emphasise relationships and observation.	Staffing reflects broader labour market and budgetary realities. Shortages strain prisons, increasing risks of violence or neglect, and limiting reintegration work. This creates feedback loops: poor conditions generate public criticism, which influences political agendas, which in turn decide staffing budgets. Thus, workforce challenges sit at the intersection of justice, economics, and social policy.

Social Inequality and Stigma

Portuguese society, like many in Europe, struggles with inequalities in education, employment, and housing. Formerly incarcerated people face stigma, making reintegration harder. Community-based organisations (APAR, O Companheiro, Cruz Vermelha) step in to counteract these disadvantages, but social prejudice remains strong.

It is important to recognise the structural and multifaceted dimension associated with social exclusion, as well as the need to develop a holistic and integrated approach that actively contributes to fairer and more inclusive societies.

International and European Commitments

Portugal is bound by international frameworks such as the European Prison Rules, the Council of Europe's CPT recommendations, and the UN OPCAT treaty. EU funding has also supported justice reforms and digitalisation projects. These commitments set minimum human rights standards and encourage innovation in rehabilitation.

These external frameworks indirectly influence daily life in prisons by shaping national law, funding availability, and political accountability. International reports highlight shortcomings (e.g., overcrowding, healthcare gaps), which domestic actors must address. This links Portugal's prison system to a wider European and global context, making incarceration not only a national but an international concern.

Punitive law enforcement culture

According to the Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2023: Key Findings of the SPACE I survey, Portugal has the highest average prison sentence among the countries surveyed, at 30.2 months.

Empirical evidence from countries such as Portugal that have limited the use of short-term detention, especially if it is less than 6 months, suggests a backlash effect, leading to judges feeling forced to hand down longer sentences, especially when they consider detention to be effectively necessary, such as in the case of repeat offenders. This tends to lead to an increase in the prison population. The results also highlight the relevance of developing a culture more focused on rehabilitation and reintegration, counteracting the risk associated with the application of long-term detention measures (Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2023: Key Findings of the SPACE I survey).

Economy

Criminal justice operates under the umbrella of the Portuguese State Budget, so financial management at this level has implications, both direct and indirect, for the functioning of criminal justice.

The Portuguese State Budget for 2025 includes measures aimed at contributing to innovation, improvement and reform in the administration of justice, including reforms in terms of upgrading the physical structures of the justice system, including court buildings and the network of prisons and educational centers. The Justice Budget Program shows a consolidated total of 1994.6 million euros in income and expenditure.

Media and press system

The potential influence of the media on the criminalization process is recognized (Poiares, 2023), especially in more media-oriented criminal justice cases or areas. The media's role in advocating for harsher punishment can exert an adverse effect (Prisons and Prisoners in Europe 2023: Key Findings of the SPACE I survey).

Since the connection between the media and the process of criminalization is referred, it is important that efforts be made to mitigate this impact, which seems potentially detrimental to the development of more pedagogical and re-socializing approaches.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Multiculturalism Cultural dynamism has been boosted by globalization and is an important dimension to consider in fostering the process of inclusion and cohesion in contemporary societies.	A democratic society implies the inclusion of all its members in community life, regardless of their ethnicity and cultural identity (Martins, 2020). This is a dimension with systemic implications, of which criminal justice is no exception.
Technological developments Driven by the Recovery and Resilience Plan, Portugal has invested in a Justice Modernization Plan, focusing on initiatives specifically aimed at meeting the objectives of the "digital transition".	This is a dimension with possible links at different levels of the criminal justice system. On the one hand, technological developments could lead to the expansion of digital criminal opportunities. In terms of criminal investigation, it could bring added value, both in qualitative and quantitative terms, as well as in terms of crime prevention.

Electronic surveillance system

Law no. 33/2010, of September 2, regulates the use of technical means of remote control (electronic surveillance) and repeals Law no. 122/99, of August 20, which regulates the electronic surveillance provided for in article 201 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

The measure has a personalized character, and the execution of the prison sentence in a residential regime is guided by the principle of individualization and is based on an assessment of the incarcerated person's resocialization needs. In December 31, 2024, there were 2,810 sentences and measures being monitored using electronic surveillance throughout Portugal, representing an increase of 3.6%.

Decriminalization of drug use

In Portugal, drug consumption was decriminalized through Law 30/2000, which came into force in 2001, defining "the legal regime applicable to the consumption of narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances, as well as the health and social protection of people who consume such substances without a medical prescription."

This law represents a paradigm shift and reflects an approach to the phenomenon that prioritizes interventions developed by the health and social areas. According to this law, the consumption and possession of narcotics and psychotropic substances are still prohibited. Users may be subject to administrative sanctions applied by the Commissions for the Dissuasion of Drug Addiction (CDT).

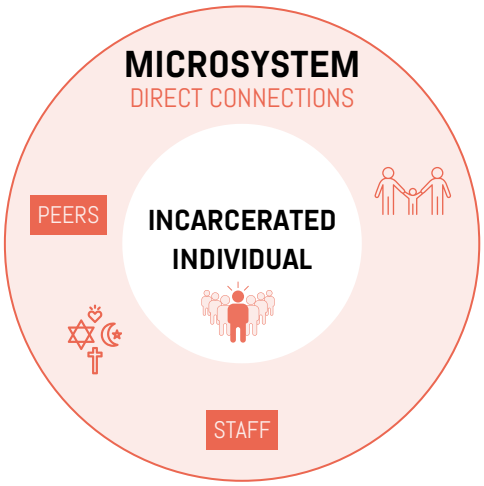
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

ROMANIA



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family Family remains the cornerstone of emotional support for prisoners in Romania. Law 254/2013 protects rights to visits, calls, and correspondence, with special arrangements for children and parents, such as play-equipped family rooms and the Târgșor mother-and-child unit. All prisons have quarterly activities under the name Family Workshop in which various activities are carried out at significant moments throughout the year.At the national level, depending on the needs, the program for developing parental skills can be implemented in each prison. These measures reflect Romania's attempt to balance incarceration with the preservation of family life. In many prisons, child-friendly spaces are set up in the visiting sector for visitors with children.	Family links inside prison are supported by NGOs running initiatives like "O zi cu tata" ("A Day with Dad"), which allows fathers to spend meaningful time with children. These practices connect prisons with civil society and reduce the risk of intergenerational disadvantage. They are also influenced by broader European legal standards that have pressured Romania to improve family contact of incarcerated people.
Staff Staff in Romanian prisons balance security responsibilities with rehabilitation work, often under difficult conditions of understaffing and high numbers of incarcerated individuals. Guards, case managers, psychologists, educators, social workers and teachers represent the face of the state in daily prison life. Their attitude and level of professionalism strongly influence whether detention feels punitive or rehabilitative.	Staff are central to making internal and external programs possible, coordinating with schools, employers, and NGOs to bring opportunities into prisons. At the same time, shortages in personnel limit the capacity for individualized attention, creating pressure points that affect both incarcerated people and external partners. How staff carry out their work shapes the effectiveness of family initiatives, education projects, and reintegration planning.

Peers

Incarcerated people in Romania spend most of their time with peers due to shared cells and frequent overcrowding. Peer groups often become substitutes for family, offering protection, support, or guidance in navigating prison life. At the same time, these groups can also reinforce negative behaviors, hierarchies, and criminal subcultures.

Structured peer-based activities like sports, cultural workshops, and rehabilitation programs attempt to channel peer dynamics positively. Projects such as The Prisoner's Journey use group reflection to encourage solidarity and personal growth. These interactions also shape how incarcerated people engage with staff, family, and community programs, making peers both a risk and a resource for reintegration.There are many programs on the three levels of social, psychological and educational intervention that aim to develop soft skills, manage emotions, self-knowledge, manage emotions, develop general culture, etc.

Physical and mental health care

Every prison in Romania has doctors, dentists, nurses and a psychiatrist in the penitentiaries that house the mental health staff to address the physical and mental health needs of incarcerated individuals. Psychologists work within the units, conducting assessments, group programs, individual counseling and crisis intervention, while nurses provide day-to-day care. Efforts are made to cover all needs, and what cannot be treated internally is sent with priority to the public health system.

The work of health professionals within the organization directly influences the ability of incarcerated people to participate in education, work and contact with their family. The social reintegration sector also collaborates with external social assistance services or NGOs to facilitate support, correlating internal care with external monitoring. Being a vulnerable category, the staff finds solutions for all cases during the period of detention.

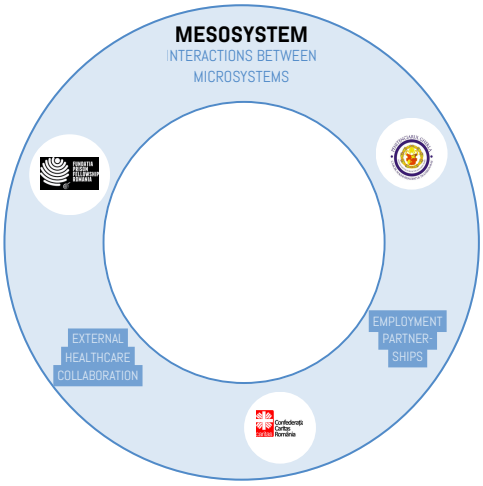
Religious/ spiritual counselors

Religious life is a prominent element of detention facilities in Romania, reflecting the country's Orthodox majority and strong faith traditions. Every facility has an Orthodox priest on staff, responsible not only for liturgical services but also for counseling and moral guidance. Incarcerated people also receive weekly visits from representatives of minority faiths, ensuring pluralism.

Religious staff collaborate with NGOs like Prison Fellowship or CEAS to expand spiritual and social support. Their activities often overlap with family and community initiatives, such as organizing holiday events or offering reintegration counseling. In this way, spiritual care bridges the prison environment with wider cultural and societal support systems.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
External healthcare collaboration Since the internal medical units in most prisons provide family medicine services, detention centers in Romania also depend on external medical institutions. Hospital penitentiaries (Rahova, Jilava, Dej, Targu Ocna) provide specialized treatments, while partnerships with local hospitals, private clinics and pharmacies cover the services that prisons cannot provide. In case of psychiatric crises, detainees are transferred to community psychiatric hospitals or to the Jilava or Rhova penitentiary. The only impediment is the lack of personnel to accompany detainees and the necessary vehicles, which are not sufficient.	These collaborations ensure that incarcerated people receive treatment in accordance with national healthcare standards, but delays and deficiencies in the healthcare system in general extend to life in prison. Limited access to timely care affects participation in education, work and family visits, linking health deficits to other pathways to reintegration. The ANP is working to strengthen external links in the field of healthcare, integrating healthcare in prisons into national and European agendas. The National Penitentiary Administration (ANP) announced that it has launched the project “Consolidation and innovation of healthcare systems in Romania”, a program aimed at improving healthcare services in the penitentiary system
Education partnerships The education of persons deprived of their liberty is regulated by law, it is carried out on the basis of a joint order between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Justice and a collaboration protocol. With the exception of hospital prisons, school training courses are organized in all prison units. The “Second Chance” program in 10 prisons allows incarcerated people to complete compulsory schooling, taught by teachers who enter facilities daily. Most of prisons also offer literacy classes and vocational training in partnership with educational institutions.	Education partnerships create a direct pathway between life inside detention and opportunities outside, by providing recognized diplomas and certifications. These qualifications improve employability and reduce barriers after release. At the same time, by tackling high rates of illiteracy and school dropout, prison education reflects and responds to broader inequalities in Romanian society.

Probation services

Probation offices are responsible for supervising conditional releases and preparing incarcerated people for reintegration. The role of probation in Romania aims at community safety, the social rehabilitation of offenders and the reduction of the risk of committing new crimes, offering an alternative to detention by supervising and supporting persons sentenced with non-custodial measures, such as postponing or suspending the sentence under supervision. Probation services carry out assessments, provide counselling and monitor compliance with court-imposed obligations, thus contributing to the reintegration of these persons into society and to the consolidation of social balance.

Probation services connect the prison environment with the community, ensuring continuity of care and supervision after release. Projects like "Reducing the Risk of Recidivism after Prison (RRR)" illustrate this link by preparing incarcerated people during detention and supporting them afterward. These connections directly influence whether reintegration is sustainable, tying prison outcomes to broader community safety and social cohesion.

Employment partnerships

Many people in detention work during their sentence, either inside workshops or in outside placements with local employers. Employment is most often in manual labor fields such as construction, agriculture, or landscaping. About half of the prison population participates in work daily, and some companies offer continued contracts after release.

These employment partnerships connect detention facilities with the local labor market, creating bridges to reintegration through income and job stability. The County Agency for Employment registers skills gained in detention, linking training to formal labor systems. However, labor market insecurity and stigma toward people with a record limit the long-term success of these efforts.

NGO and volunteer programs

Civil society plays a major role in supporting people deprived of liberty and their families in Romania. NGOs and volunteers provide services ranging from family support and counseling to cultural, sports, and religious activities. Programs like "A Day with the Father" (ABC NGO), "Good Lives" (couple visits), "The Angel Network" (holiday support), and "Something to Say" (disability awareness) illustrate the diversity of this involvement.

These initiatives connect people in detention with broader social networks and reduce isolation. They complement state services by addressing gaps in family support, education, or social inclusion. By building bridges between prisons, families, churches, and community organizations, NGOs make reintegration a shared social responsibility rather than just an individual challenge.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
The National Prison Administration (ANP) The National Prison Administration, under the Ministry of Justice, is the central authority managing Romania's detention system. It implements Law 254/2013, overseeing staff, infrastructure, and services such as education, healthcare, and family support, while contending with overcrowding and underfunding. In recent years, the ANP has shifted from a purely custodial role toward a rehabilitation-centered model, introducing the National Strategy for Social Reintegration (2015–2019, 2020–2024), standardizing regulations for educational, psychological, and social programs, and piloting behavior-based incentives like the Credit System. Supported by projects such as SECURE, it increasingly uses data-driven analysis to understand and address the causes of reoffending (Justice Trends Magazine).	The ANP connects national legislation, European human rights obligations, and local prison practices, translating policy into daily life for people deprived of liberty. Its strategic choices determine how prisons collaborate with probation services, NGOs, schools, employers, and healthcare providers. The ANP has done its best to align with EU and ECHR recommendations to improve conditions and expand reintegration opportunities, while domestic public opinion influences its political support and resources. As such, the ANP is not only an administrative authority but also a central node linking justice policy, social services, and European reform agendas.
Public health system Any treatment necessary for persons deprived of their liberty that cannot be provided within prisons is provided within the Romanian public health system if it cannot be ensured to optimal standards within prison hospitals or if it is an emergency. Often, prisoners have priority in the health system due to their status, being in the same health fund as the system's employees. Problems only sometimes arise when providing transportation and accompaniment to health facilities.	If there are health deficits in the wider system, they spill over into prison life, delaying care and undermining rehabilitation. Inadequate healthcare can limit participation in work, education and family programmes. EU monitoring links the quality of prison healthcare to national health reforms, promoting systemic improvements.

Labor market

Employment opportunities are essential for reintegration, but Romania's labor market is marked by instability and discrimination against people with a prison record. Many people in detention work while serving their sentence, but job opportunities after release remain limited. Partnerships with employers and vocational training programs attempt to bridge this gap.

Employment connects prison programs to community reintegration, as stable work reduces the risk of reoffending. Employers' willingness to cooperate is influenced by stigma and broader economic conditions. The role of the County Employment Agencies (AJOFM) helps formalize this link, but structural barriers in the labor market remain a major challenge.

Criminal justice legislation (sentencing, parole)

Criminal justice legislation in Romania defines the framework for sentencing, parole, and alternatives to detention, with judges responsible for applying these rules in individual cases. While custodial sentences remain common, legal provisions also allow for probation, conditional release, and non-custodial sanctions, though their use has historically been limited. The system has been repeatedly criticized for overreliance on pre-trial detention and lengthy sentences, which contribute to chronic overcrowding. In response to European Court of Human Rights rulings, Romania introduced compensatory appeal measures in 2017 to reduce overcrowding, granting early release to people held in inadequate conditions. More recently, parole and probation have been given greater weight, reflecting an effort to balance punishment with reintegration.

Sentencing and parole decisions directly shape the size and composition of the prison population, influencing overcrowding, staff workloads, and the capacity of facilities to deliver education, healthcare, and family programs. They also determine when and how people in detention transition into probation services and reintegration programs, linking courtrooms to community supervision. Judicial practices are strongly influenced by public opinion and media narratives: high-profile cases often lead to calls for harsher punishments, while EU monitoring encourages greater use of alternatives and conditional release. In this way, criminal justice legislation not only regulates legal outcomes but also connects Romania's detention system to broader political debates, European standards, and social attitudes about justice.

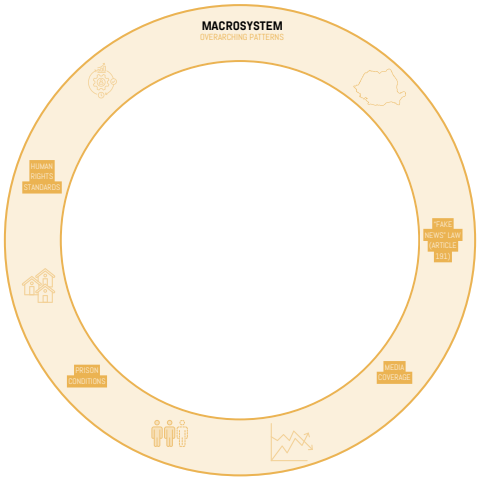
NGO programs funded by external bodies (EU, UN)

International organizations provide vital funding and support for reintegration projects in Romania. EU-funded programs, such as PROMOTE, are helping pilot small-scale Detention Houses in Timișoara as part of the RESCALED initiative. UN conventions and European human rights frameworks also shape the standards Romania must meet.

These programs connect local detention practices with international reform trends. By funding NGOs and supporting state institutions, international partners extend the reach of reintegration initiatives and provide expertise. Their involvement ties Romania's detention policies to broader European and global networks of justice reform.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Social views on punishment vs. reintegration In Romania, public opinion still leans toward punishment and strict discipline rather than rehabilitation. This attitude is shaped by historical legacies of authoritarian justice and reinforced by frequent media focus on crime and risk. At the same time, European integration and NGO advocacy are gradually introducing more acceptance of reintegration-focused approaches.	These cultural attitudes influence political priorities and shape how judges, prosecutors, and prison staff apply the law. They also affect employer willingness to hire people with a prison record, showing how stigma creates barriers across the reintegration process. Changing public views is therefore key to making rehabilitation policies effective.
Cultural attitudes towards incarcerated people In Romania, people who have been in detention face deep cultural stigma that makes reintegration difficult. Even after release, they are often seen as untrustworthy, which affects their ability to secure housing, employment, and social acceptance. At the same time, cultural and religious traditions of forgiveness and redemption, especially within the Orthodox Church, provide a counterbalance that frames change and reintegration as possible.	Stigmatization reduces access to jobs and housing, which increases the risk of people returning to criminal networks. Employers and landlords are often reluctant to trust people with a prison record, reinforcing exclusion and inequality. Religious organizations, NGOs, and community groups work to counteract these attitudes, but lasting change depends on broader social acceptance of reintegration as a shared responsibility.

Human rights standards (EU/ UN conventions)

Romania is bound by European and international human rights standards, which set expectations for detention conditions, treatment, and reintegration. Repeated condemnations from the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) for overcrowding and poor conditions have forced Romania to adopt reforms. These obligations make human rights an overarching influence on the justice system.

Human rights standards drive legislative and institutional changes, from compensatory appeal laws to the piloting of detention houses. They also empower NGOs and civil society actors to hold the state accountable. This connection ensures that detention policy is not only a domestic issue but also part of Romania's European and global commitments.

Political climate

Romanian politics heavily influence criminal justice policy, swinging between punitive populism and EU-aligned reform. Governments under public pressure often favor tougher sentencing and restrictions, while EU monitoring pushes toward rehabilitation and reintegration. This volatility makes long-term planning difficult.

Political priorities directly affect budgets for staff training, prison infrastructure, and reintegration programs. They also determine how much weight is given to international commitments versus domestic political gain. Political climate therefore acts as a filter through which cultural attitudes, public opinion, and European pressures are translated into practice.

Press coverage and public opinion

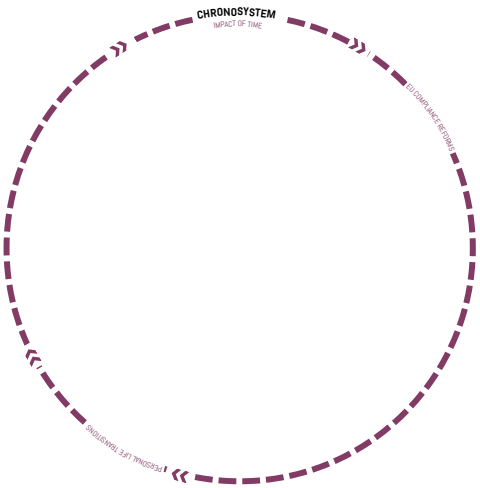
Romanian media often highlights crime stories and security risks, which reinforces punitive attitudes in society. Coverage of reintegration programs and family initiatives exists but receives less attention. As a result, public opinion is generally skeptical about rehabilitation, particularly after high-profile crimes.

Media narratives shape political agendas and judicial practices, pushing for harsher sentencing or limiting reforms when the public mood is punitive. Conversely, when NGOs or cultural projects receive positive coverage, they can improve public understanding and reduce stigma. Press and public opinion therefore connect the experiences of people deprived of liberty with the broader cultural climate.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:

Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Historical evolution of prison reform Romania's prison system has shifted significantly since the 1990s, when severe overcrowding, poor conditions, and punitive approaches dominated. Repeated condemnations by the European Court of Human Rights forced the state to introduce reforms, including compensatory appeal laws and improved access to family contact. These changes mark a gradual movement away from punishment-only practices toward a more rights-based and rehabilitative framework.	Historical legacies continue to shape how detention is experienced today: overcrowding and resource shortages remain, limiting the impact of reforms. At the same time, the pressure of European monitoring has created a strong link between Romania's prison policies and international human rights standards. This ongoing process influences how families, staff, NGOs, and community partners engage with detention and reintegration.

Policy shifts (compensatory appeal, EU compliance reforms)

In the last decade, Romania has made multiple policy changes to comply with European standards. Compensatory appeal measures reduced overcrowding, while the COVID-19 pandemic normalized video visits, which were later made permanent. Current EU-funded initiatives, such as PROMOTE and the introduction of Detention Houses, reflect a broader shift toward smaller-scale, community-integrated models of detention.

Each reform directly alters the experience of people deprived of liberty, from how they stay connected with families to how they prepare for release. These policy shifts also reshape the roles of staff, probation, and NGOs, who must adapt programs to new realities. Over time, EU compliance has become a driving force connecting national detention practices with broader European reform agendas.

Generational shifts in the prison population

The profile of people in detention in Romania is changing, with more young people, many from disadvantaged backgrounds with low levels of education. There is also a notable presence of repeat offenders and, increasingly, individuals with migration backgrounds. These shifts bring new challenges in literacy, mental health, and social reintegration.

Younger people require different rehabilitation strategies, such as stronger focus on education, vocational training, and mental health support. Generational shifts also affect peer dynamics inside facilities, influencing the work of staff and psychologists. These changes link directly to broader social inequalities in Romania, highlighting how detention reflects evolving social realities.

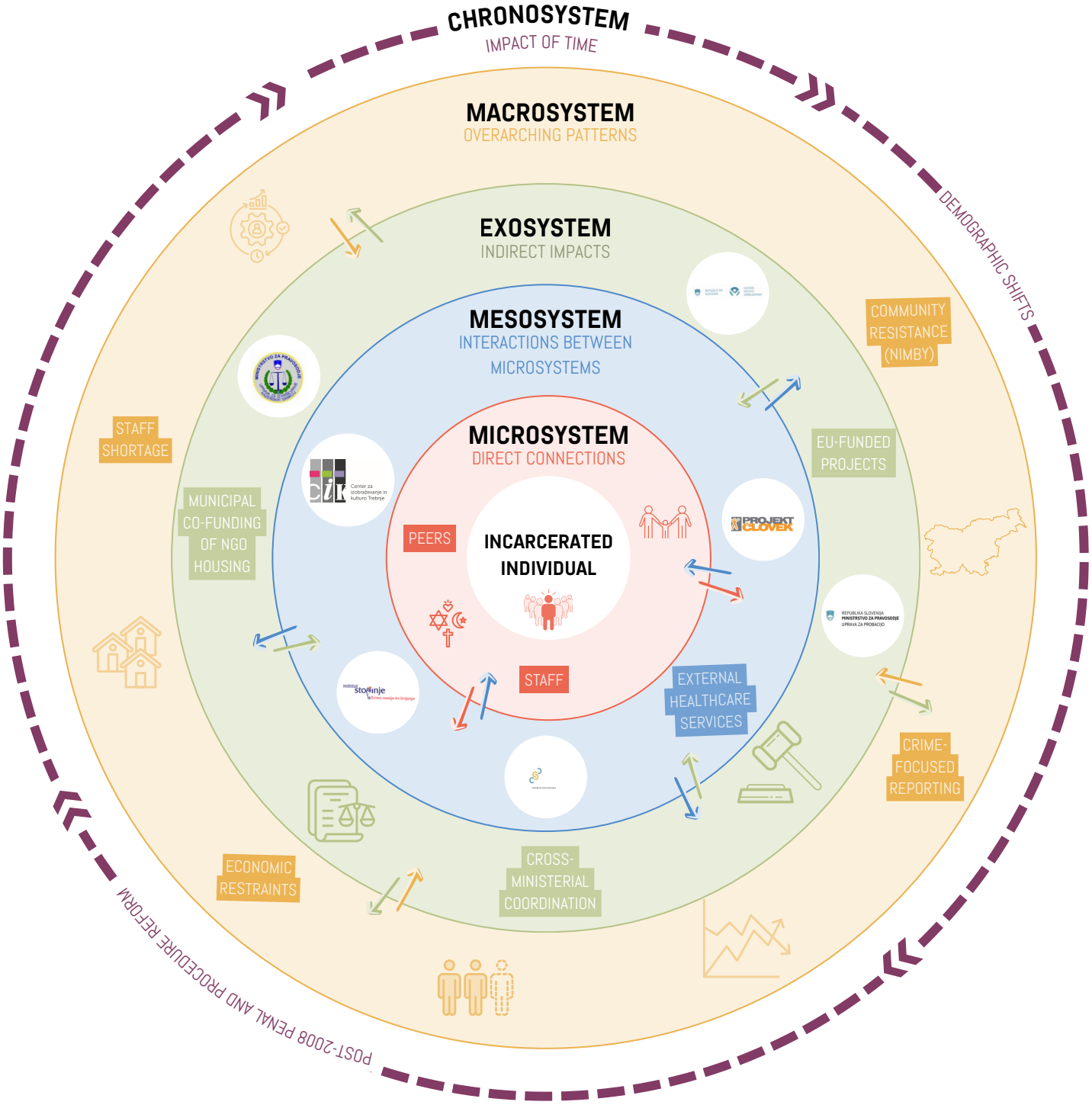
Personal life transitions

People deprived of liberty often experience significant life transitions during detention, such as entering adulthood, becoming parents, or coping with serious illness. These transitions can either deepen vulnerability or serve as turning points for change. Detention policies that acknowledge these personal milestones play a key role in reducing harm and supporting reintegration.

Programs like “O zi cu tata” allow fathers to maintain bonds with their children, while mother-and-child units at Târgșor support women during early parenthood. Other programs, such as family workshops and outings to the community to participate in events or visit institutions, allow for anchoring in external reality and family life. Healthcare staff and reitegration officers also adjust support to meet changing needs at different life stages. By addressing personal transitions, the system links prison life to family, health, and community, making reintegration more sustainable.

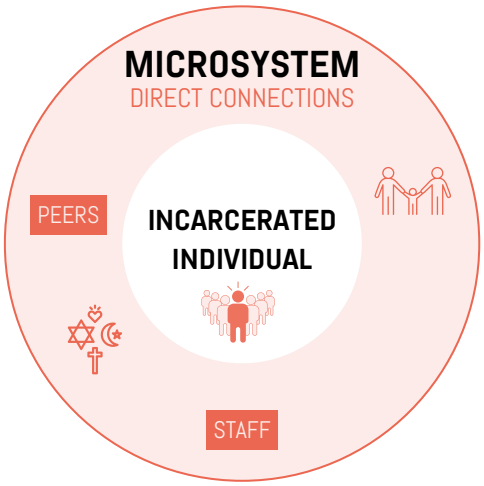
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

SLOVENIA



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Security staff in detention facilities Security staff shape the prison climate through daily contact with incarcerated people. A Training Academy provides modules on communication, human rights, and stress management, but implementation is still limited. Officers often remain focused on control, with little role in rehabilitation or reintegration planning. Staff are also rarely part of multidisciplinary teams.	In Slovenia, reforms have begun to emphasize "dynamic security," where officers build trust and communicate constructively rather than only enforcing control. This shift reflects recognition that officers can support reintegration, not just custody. In addition, overcrowding plus staff shortages hinder their ability to form supportive, trust-based relationships.
Family connections Family ties are one of the strongest stabilizing factors during and after incarceration, reducing recidivism and improving reintegration. In Slovenia, ZIKS-1 recognizes this by guaranteeing regular contact, highlighting the official importance of families in detention facilities. However, the actual accessibility and quality of family connections depend heavily on the facility. Phone/video calls, introduced during COVID-19, remain inconsistent. There is no standardized framework for maintaining child–parent bonds, leading to fragmented support and weak post-release family stability.	Visits are legally guaranteed, but practice varies. Ig Prison has a "family apartment" for extended visits (especially for mothers), but most facilities lack child-friendly spaces. Structured family reunification is rare and NGO-led.

Psychosocial staff

Psychologists and social workers are central to reintegration, providing assessments, therapy, crisis support, and reintegration planning. In Slovenia, their role is recognized but constrained by numbers, about 10 psychologists and 18 social workers for over 1,500 incarcerated individuals. This makes psychosocial support overstretched and limits its depth.

Staff manage assessments and crisis intervention but cannot provide sustained therapy or structured group work. External cooperation (addiction, mental health, housing services) usually happens only pre-release. No formal framework exists for ongoing coordination with social services, probation, or health institutions, leaving psychosocial work poorly integrated into the broader support system.

Peers

Peer influence can either support reintegration or reinforce negative behavior. Structured peer programs, when properly designed, have proven benefits internationally. In Slovenia, peer relationships are present but unstructured, showing that this resource remains underdeveloped.

There are no formal peer mentoring/support programs in Slovenian prisons. Informal relationships with incarcerated individuals may provide emotional or practical help, but they are inconsistent and sometimes harmful. Without training or oversight, Slovenia has not yet tapped into the rehabilitative potential of peer influence.

Judicial actors (judges and prosecutors)

Judges and prosecutors influence reintegration through sentencing decisions and by promoting alternatives to incarceration. In Slovenia, they determine eligibility for suspended sentences or community service, but their involvement usually ends after sentencing. This limits their potential to shape long-term reintegration outcomes.

Judicial actors rarely visit prisons or engage in multidisciplinary collaboration with correctional staff. There is no platform for structured dialogue between courts and prisons. This creates a disconnection between sentencing decisions and the lived realities of incarceration, limiting accountability and weakening system-wide reintegration planning.

Educators

Education equips incarerated people with skills, qualifications, and self-confidence, directly improving reintegration prospects. In Slovenia, external educators provide literacy and vocational programs, reflecting recognition of education's value. However, without a national strategy, access and continuity remain uneven.

Most education is offered through local schools or adult education centers, often relying on EU-funded projects. The absence of a coordinated national framework undermines consistency. Opportunities for accredited qualifications, university distance learning, or vocational certificates formally recognized post-release are limited, restricting long-term benefits.

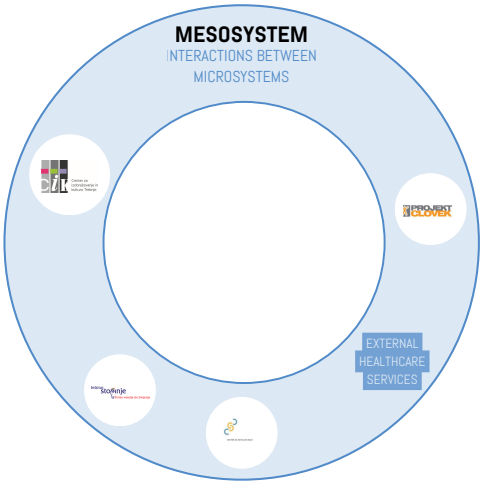
Faith and spirituality

In Slovenia, spiritual care is formally recognized and coordinated through agreements with Catholic, Islamic, and Orthodox communities, and prisons are required to enable access to worship and pastoral support. A central coordinator within the Prison Administration oversees spiritual care, reflecting its institutional importance.

In practice, the extent and consistency of spiritual care varies across facilities. Minority faiths are legally entitled to access care, though practical challenges remain in arranging visits. Chaplains are usually not part of multidisciplinary teams, which means their contribution is underutilized despite the established legal framework.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Social welfare services Centers for Social Work (CSWs) are mandated to support vulnerable populations, including those leaving prison. However, cooperation with prison services is irregular and often begins only late in the incarceration process. No national agreements exist between CSWs and the Prison Administration.	CSWs are meant to connect prisons (microsystem) with community services (meso/exosystem), ensuring access to housing, income support, and family assistance. The absence of standardized coordination creates gaps, leaving released individuals without stable links to the wider welfare system and weakening interinstitutional cooperation.
Family support initiatives Family-oriented support, such as parenting programs, supervised visits, and counseling, is offered by NGOs and chaplaincy services. Some women's facilities, like Ig Prison, have more structured initiatives, but overall provision is sporadic and lacks national policy backing.	Family support links incarcerated parents and children (microsystem) with social services, schools, and communities (meso/exosystem). In Slovenia, the absence of a national reunification framework or dedicated staff prevents these connections from functioning systematically, leaving families dependent on fragmented NGO efforts.

External healthcare services

Healthcare in prisons is overseen by the Ministry of Health. External providers such as psychiatrists, dentists, and addiction specialists are contracted, but integration with community healthcare providers is weak. Planning rarely addresses continuity of care after release.

Healthcare should link correctional institutions (microsystem) with community health networks (meso/exosystem). In Slovenia, this connection is underdeveloped, leaving people with chronic or mental health conditions vulnerable during the transition. The lack of formalized integration reduces systemic cooperation across levels.

Education and employment

Prisons offer educational and vocational programs through adult education centers, craft schools, and NGOs. Despite recognition of their importance, there is no national strategy to ensure certification or sustainable pathways to employment. Job preparation is also fragmented and varies by prison.

Education and employment should link incarcerated individuals (microsystem) to schools, training providers, and labor markets (mesosystem/exosystem). In Slovenia, weak connections to national employment offices and accredited institutions undermine continuity, leaving reintegration heavily dependent on local or ad hoc initiatives instead of systemic collaboration.

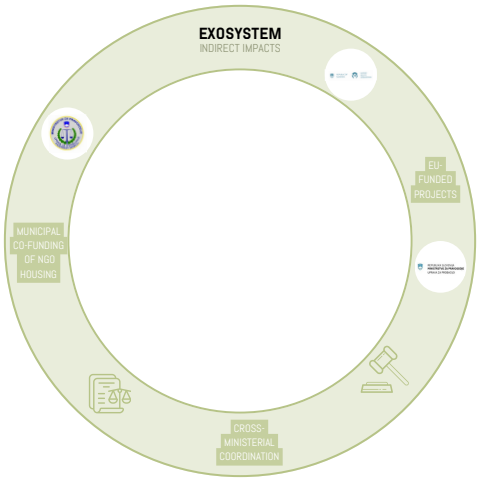
NGOs (eductional, cultural and psychosocial)

NGOs provide addiction counseling, education, cultural activities, and reintegration support in prisons. Their role is significant but relies mainly on project-based or EU funding, making services inconsistent and unsustainable. Institutional embedding is minimal.

NGOs can serve as connectors between prisons (microsystem), communities (mesosystem), and policy frameworks (exosystem). In Slovenia, weak institutional integration limits their bridging role. Successful NGO programs exist, but without mechanisms for expansion, they remain isolated instead of being scaled into broader systemic collaboration.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Ministry of Justice & Prison Administration (URSIKS) The Prison Administration of Slovenia (URSIKS) operates under the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for running prisons, enforcing ZIKS-1 (Enforcement of Criminal Sanctions Act), and overseeing probation. Policies around visits, rehabilitation, and staffing all flow through URSIKS.	URSIKS decisions impact everything from staff ratios to access to education and visits, and in turn depend on parliamentary budgets and political priorities. Coordination with municipalities and social services remains a challenge, creating gaps during reintegration.
Probation service The Probation Administration (established in 2018) supervises alternatives to imprisonment like community service, house arrest, and conditional release. It also manages reintegration measures.	Probation bridges courts, municipalities, and prisons, but integration is still uneven. Weak cooperation with housing and employment services reduces the impact of these alternatives.
Courts and Sentencing Practices Courts apply the Penal Code (KZ-1) and Criminal Procedure Act (ZKP), deciding between imprisonment, probation, fines, or alternatives. Sentences strongly shape prison populations.	The predominance of suspended sentences (over 70% of prison sentences) means judges play a huge role in limiting overcrowding. Yet reliance on short prison terms still strains facilities.
Legal and Policy Frameworks Slovenia's execution of Enforcement of Criminal Sanctions Act (ZIKS-1) and the Probation Act allow for alternatives such as probation, conditional release, and community service. However, there is no national policy that systematizes post-release reintegration across housing, healthcare, and employment. Most reforms in recent years have been limited to procedural safeguards or infrastructure.	Because no cross-sectoral reintegration strategy exists, courts and prisons discharge people into fragmented welfare systems, leaving municipalities and NGOs to pick up the gaps.

Transitional Housing and Community-Based Alternatives

Slovenia lacks a nationwide network of halfway houses or transitional facilities. NGOs and some municipalities provide ad hoc accommodation, but access is tied to general social welfare criteria rather than tailored to ex-prisoners.

The absence of formal transitional housing makes reentry highly precarious, increasing the risk of homelessness and relapse into crime.

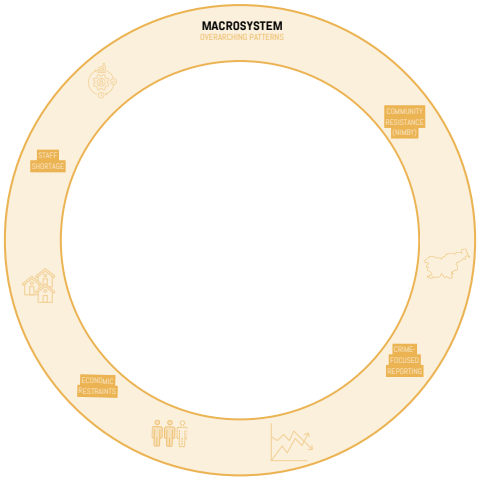
Cross-ministerial coordination and systemic innovation

In Slovenia, responsibility for reintegration is spread across several ministries, Justice, Health, Education, and Social Affairs, but there is no overarching strategy that connects their work. While individual working groups have been launched on issues like dynamic security or mental health in prisons, these remain isolated efforts.

Because ministries work in silos, reintegration depends on ad hoc cooperation at the local level rather than on a shared national plan. This fragmentation weakens continuity between prisons, healthcare, education, and social services, leaving NGOs and municipalities to fill the gaps. Without joint ownership, promising initiatives on mental health or dynamic security remain isolated projects instead of systemic reforms.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Public attitudes and stigma Public discourse around incarcerated people in Slovenia remains cautious, with narratives often centered on public safety and criminal responsibility. Formerly incarcerated individuals face stigma when seeking jobs or housing, and this limits their ability to rebuild their lives.	Stigma reduces the impact of reintegration programs and hinders municipalities, NGOs, and probation services in their work. Without public support, initiatives like halfway houses or employment schemes struggle to gain traction.
Penal culture and political commitment Penal culture in Slovenia still reflects a traditional custodial approach. Political will tends to prioritize legal compliance and security over rehabilitation or systemic reintegration planning. Many initiatives depend on EU funding or small pilot projects rather than long-term national strategies.	This culture influences sentencing, prison management, and budgets. It narrows the space for community-based alternatives and leaves NGOs and local actors carrying much of the innovation burden.
Media representation of incarceration Media coverage in Slovenia often focuses on crime incidents, escapes, or high-profile trials, while successful reintegration stories receive little attention. This shapes public imagination and reinforces punitive narratives.	By underrepresenting reintegration, the media reduces public empathy and political support for alternatives. Balanced reporting could instead foster understanding and enable policies that prioritize rehabilitation.

Economic constraints and justice sector investment

While EU funding supports targeted projects in education, employment, or probation, national budgets remain limited. This restricts the scaling of programs and the improvement of infrastructure. Reintegration initiatives are often underfunded or time-limited.

Economic constraints create instability across the ecosystem: prisons lack staff, NGOs depend on short-term grants, and municipalities struggle to provide housing. Limited investment blocks the long-term institutionalization of promising practices.

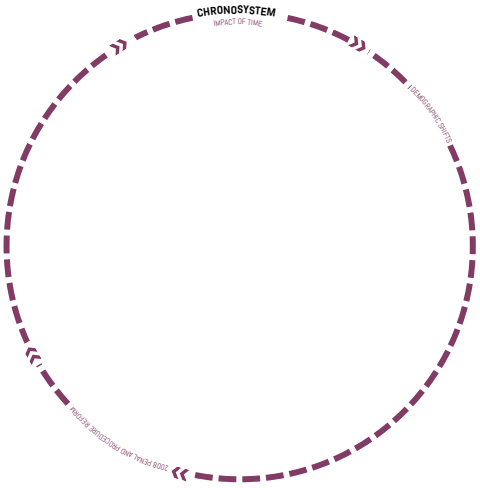
Community resistance and spatial barriers (NIMBY effect)

Public opposition often arises when reintegration facilities, halfway houses, or work-release programs are proposed in residential areas. Safety concerns and negative perceptions fuel “Not in My Backyard” (NIMBY) resistance, which restricts the expansion of semi-open or community-based programs.

Community resistance limits where new services can be located. This forces reintegration efforts to remain small-scale and uneven, leaving NGOs and probation services with fewer options to support transitions from prison to community.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:



Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.

FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Historical transition and EU membership (2004) Since gaining independence, Slovenia's justice system has undergone a gradual process of modernization. EU membership and Council of Europe monitoring, including CPT inspections, have shaped reforms such as the creation of probation services, and stronger guarantees of human rights in detention. These reforms have been important in aligning Slovenia with broader European norms.	External monitoring and EU alignment exert a steady influence on national policy, but domestic implementation often lags behind. While Slovenia has introduced modern alternatives to imprisonment, the lack of consistent follow-through means many reforms remain only partially embedded in daily practice. This creates a gap between international expectations and the lived reality of prisoners and staff.

COVID-19 Pandemic

Unexpected crises have exposed both fragilities and adaptive capacities in the Slovenian justice system. The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted family visits, educational programs, and rehabilitation activities. At the same time, it accelerated the introduction of digital solutions, such as video calls and remote consultations, which continue to be used today.

Crises act as stress tests on the system, revealing weak points such as staff shortages, overcrowding, and limited healthcare capacity. Yet they also drive innovation by forcing rapid adjustments. The longer-term challenge lies in sustaining positive changes once the immediate crisis has passed, and ensuring they become part of normal practice rather than emergency exceptions.

Penal code reforms (especially 2008 onwards)

Amendments to the Penal Code and the Criminal Procedure Act have adjusted sentencing practices and clarified safeguards, reflecting evolving ideas of proportionality and reintegration. Yet these reforms have not led to major shifts in the purpose of detention, with systemic innovation still occurring mostly in isolated practices.

Reform cycles show that legal adjustments alone are not enough. Without broader cultural and institutional change, their impact on everyday detention and reintegration remains limited.

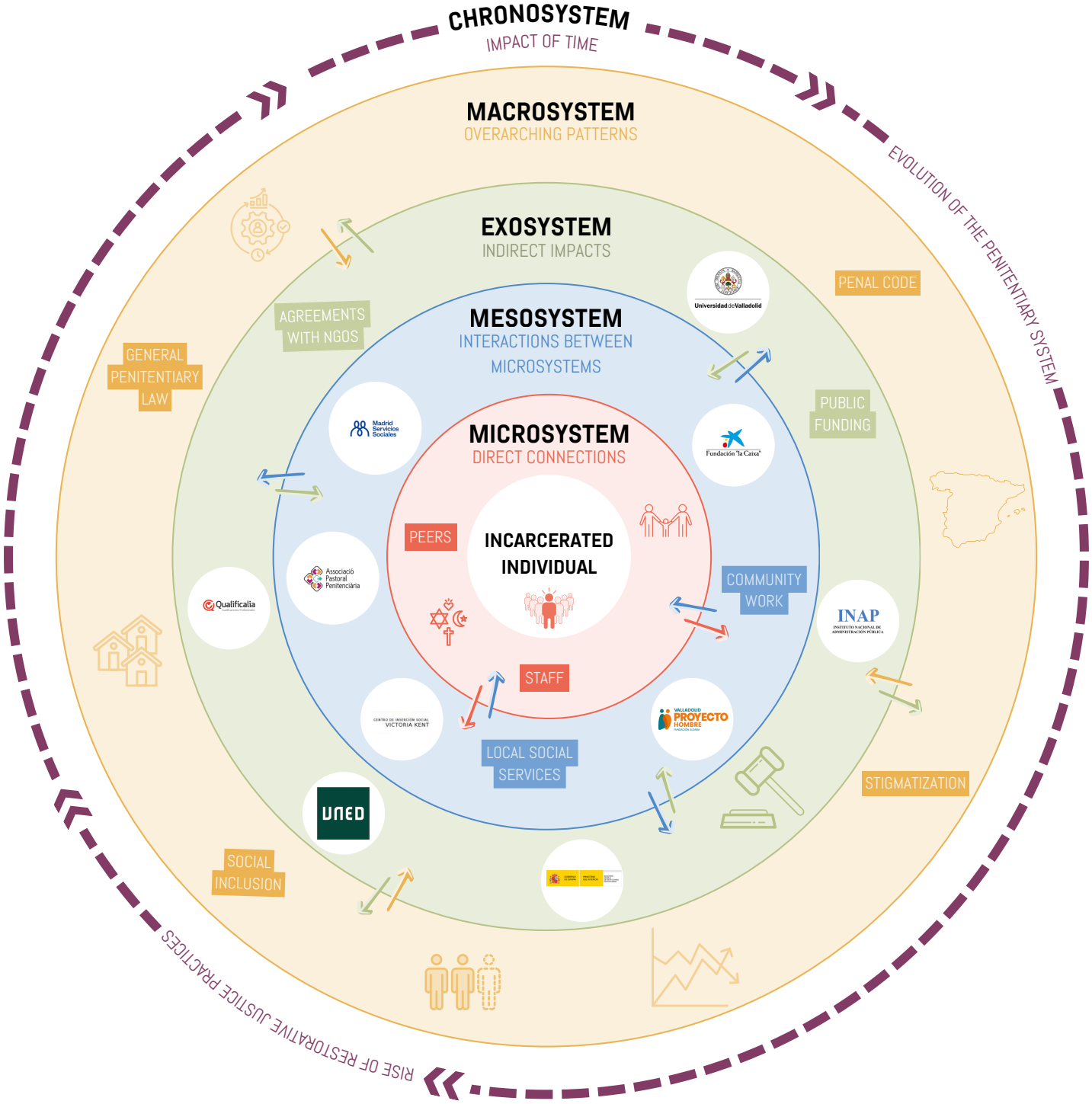
Demographic and social change

Slovenia faces demographic pressures such as an aging population, youth emigration, and growing urban-rural disparities. These trends also affect prisons: more elderly inmates, fewer family support structures, and greater reintegration challenges in depopulated regions.

Demographic shifts increase the demand for differentiated, age-appropriate reintegration services. The lack of such tailored support leaves older prisoners and those in rural areas particularly vulnerable upon release.

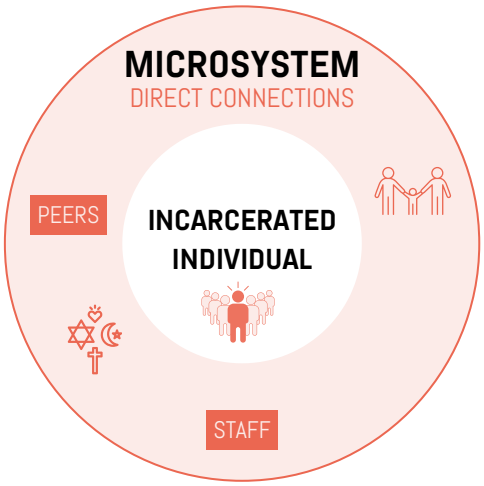
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

SPAIN



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Family relationships Family contact is formally protected by the General Penitentiary Law (LO 1/1979) and the Penitentiary Regulations (RD 190/1996). Measures include ordinary visits, remote communications, and family communications (monthly extended visits), as well as coexistence visits that allow parents and children under 10 to spend longer time together in a private setting. These policies aim to preserve family bonds during deprivation of liberty.	Families serve as a stabilizing link between prison life (micro) and reintegration (meso/exo). Programs like Árbol de la Esperanza (Angel Tree) run by NGOs strengthen this link, but family support is not fully integrated into reintegration planning at systemic levels.
Staff (security and treatment professionals) Correctional staff include both security officers and treatment teams (psychologists, educators, social workers). The Penitentiary Institutions Training Center provides modules on human rights, communication, and dynamic security. Staff play a dual role of maintaining safety and supporting reintegration. In practice, heavy workloads and staff shortages limit their capacity to engage in individualized rehabilitation.	Staff are essential connectors between daily prison life (micro) and broader reintegration structures (meso). Without systematic collaboration with probation, social welfare, and healthcare, their role in bridging systems is reduced to custodial management rather than integrated resocialization.

Psychosocial professionals

Psychologists and social workers in prisons provide assessments, crisis intervention, therapy, and reintegration planning. Their work is crucial for addressing trauma, addiction, and social vulnerabilities. However, limited numbers and high caseloads restrict their ability to offer long-term, structured interventions.

Psychosocial staff should connect people in prison to community services (meso) and health or welfare systems (exo). In practice, most coordination occurs close to release, leaving gaps in continuity of care.

Peers (room or cell sharing)

In Spanish prisons, most people deprived of liberty share cells. Within these small spaces, relationships of coexistence emerge, with unwritten rules and roles such as leader, mediator, or novice. These dynamics strongly shape the immediate living environment, influencing trust, conflict, and emotional well-being. Positive peer interaction in shared cells can create spaces of mutual support and adaptation, while negative dynamics may foster tension, harassment, or violence.

Cell-sharing dynamics connect directly to the overall security climate of the prison (micro level) and affect participation in education, therapeutic, or vocational activities (meso level). A supportive environment encourages engagement with psychosocial staff, NGOs, and training programs, while a hostile climate undermines reintegration efforts and creates additional burdens for security staff and institutional management (exo level).

Healthcare services

Healthcare is a constitutional right, with medical teams in all prisons. Specialist care (psychiatry, dentistry, gynecology) is provided by external doctors. Catalonia and the Basque Country integrate prison healthcare into their regional health systems, ensuring stronger continuity after release. Two national penitentiary psychiatric hospitals cover specialized cases.

Healthcare should link directly with community systems (meso/exo). Fragmentation persists in most regions, weakening continuity for chronic illnesses, addiction, and mental health.

Education and training

People in prison can access formal education (through UNED distance university programs) and vocational training in trades, literacy, and IT. Workshops in textiles, food production, and crafts also exist, linking to internal prison industries.

Education should link to external schools and employment agencies (meso/exo). While programs like Reincorpora (la Caixa Foundation) support pathways into jobs, systematic coordination remains limited.

Religious and spiritual care

Religious freedom is constitutionally guaranteed. Catholic chaplains are present in all prisons, while Protestant ministers, imams, Orthodox priests, and Jehovah's Witnesses cover around half of institutions. Religious activities include worship, counseling, and observances.

Chaplains connect people in prison (micro) with religious communities in society (meso). However, they are rarely integrated into multidisciplinary reintegration teams, limiting their contribution to structured support

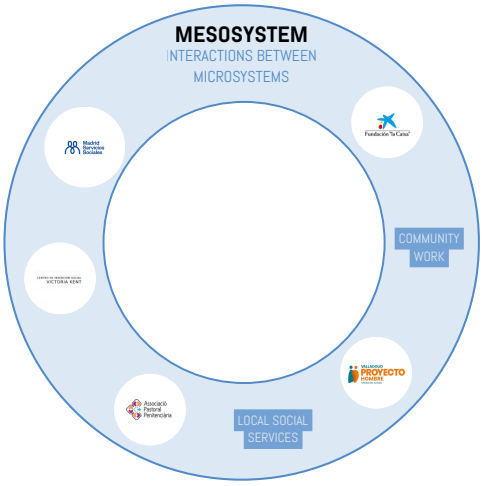
Volunteers and cultural activities

Volunteers provide tutoring, literacy support, mentoring, and sports programs. Cultural projects such as Teatro Yeses (women's prison theater company) and football initiatives by the Real Madrid Foundation use arts and sport to encourage reintegration.

Volunteers and cultural groups act as connectors between prison life (micro) and community engagement (meso). Yet sustainability depends on project funding rather than being embedded into institutional policy.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Municipal social services Municipal Social Services (Servicios Sociales Municipales) are key actors in supporting people deprived of liberty during and after detention. They manage housing requests, economic aid, and family support. In some regions, they participate in formal referral processes, case conferences, and shared intervention plans with prison staff. However, coordination varies by municipality and depends on local resources.	Social services should function as the bridge between detention (micro) and broader welfare systems (exo). Their role ensures that people have access to housing, benefits, and family support upon release. Without structured cooperation, reintegration pathways remain fragile, and people risk falling into cycles of poverty and marginalization.
Training programs Training in Spanish prisons is designed to improve both basic skills and employability. Courses cover trades such as carpentry, welding, mechanics, catering, IT, and languages. Some are certified by regional employment agencies, while others are delivered as workshops without formal accreditation. NGOs and foundations, such as Fundación "la Caixa" through the Reincorpora program, supplement training with life skills workshops and internships in the community. Access and quality vary widely depending on the prison's resources, local partnerships, and staff capacity.	Training links prison learning (micro) with community employment (meso/exo). Programs like Reincorpora (Fundación "la Caixa") combine training with community internships, increasing the chances of stable work after release. Still, uneven access to certified programs weakens long-term impact.

Network of Social Integration Centers (CIS)

The Social Integration Centers (Centros de Inserción Social, CIS) represent a distinctive Spanish approach to reintegration. There are 35 centers across the country, offering supervised housing to people serving sentences in third-degree or semi-release regimes. Residents typically combine work, vocational training, or education with psychosocial support and professional monitoring. Centers like CIS Victoria Kent in Madrid and CIS José Hierro in Santander are known for providing transitional environments that balance autonomy with structured oversight.

CIS centers act as a bridge between prison and full community life. They allow people to gradually reintegrate into society while maintaining professional support networks. This model reduces the abruptness of release and strengthens links with employers, social services, and families. However, their limited geographic availability means that not all eligible individuals can access these opportunities, creating disparities in reintegration outcomes depending on where a person is detained.

NGOs linked to reintegration

NGOs such as Proyecto Hombre, Cruz Roja, and Cáritas have long been central to rehabilitation and reintegration efforts in Spain. They provide addiction treatment, psychosocial support, family mediation, mentoring, and practical aid like clothing or food. Many NGOs maintain continuity of care by offering both in-prison programs and community-based follow-up, ensuring that support does not end at the prison gate. Their networks of volunteers and professionals help address gaps left by the state system, particularly in areas like addiction recovery and family counseling.

The involvement of NGOs extends the reach of reintegration policies beyond the limits of the prison administration. Their programs introduce community-based perspectives into the detention setting and continue after release, helping people feel less isolated and more connected to society. However, their reliance on project-based or EU funding makes their contributions vulnerable to interruption. Without stable funding or institutional embedding, even highly successful programs struggle to expand nationally, leaving reintegration dependent on local opportunities.

Coordination between prison healthcare and the public health system

Healthcare in prisons is delivered by in-house medical teams, but specialized treatment often requires coordination with external providers from the public health system. In Catalonia and the Basque Country, prison healthcare has been fully integrated into regional health services, ensuring smoother transitions to community care. In the rest of Spain, prison healthcare remains under the Ministry of Interior, creating administrative and logistical barriers to continuity after release. This is especially problematic for people with chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, or addiction needs.

When prison healthcare is aligned with the public health system, people benefit from continuity of treatment and are less likely to relapse or experience medical crises after release. Integrated systems also enable better detection of infectious diseases and chronic conditions, protecting both individuals and public health. Where integration is lacking, gaps emerge at the point of release, with people losing access to medication, appointments, or ongoing therapy. These interruptions not only harm reintegration but also increase systemic costs.

Collaboration between prison educators and external training centers

Prison educators work in partnership with adult education centers, vocational schools, and universities such as UNED. These collaborations allow people in prison to complete formal schooling, earn recognized certificates, or even pursue higher education. For example, UNED's distance-learning program enables individuals to follow university degrees during detention and continue after release. In some regions, vocational training is directly tied to labor market certifications recognized by employers.

Strong collaboration ensures that educational achievements inside prison have real value in the outside world. When qualifications are formally accredited, they improve employment prospects and foster long-term reintegration. Without these links, education risks becoming symbolic rather than transformative, with people completing courses that do not meaningfully improve their chances on the job market.

Support from municipal employment agencies

Public employment services such as SEPE and local job centers sometimes collaborate with prisons and CIS centers to provide guidance, job offers, or internships. In Andalusia, for example, vocational training inside prisons has been linked to community employment programs through partnerships with regional job agencies. However, access to these opportunities is inconsistent across Spain.

Employment agencies make it possible to translate skills developed inside prison into real jobs outside. Their guidance, networking, and retraining programs can prevent unemployment and social exclusion after release. Where these agencies are not engaged, people often leave prison without personalized employment support, undermining the benefits of vocational training.

Networking with business partners for labor reintegration

Partnerships with companies provide people in prison or on semi-release with internships, apprenticeships, and jobs. Programs like Fundación "la Caixa" Reincorpora have successfully engaged businesses such as Mercadona and Carrefour, while some smaller firms participate in regional reintegration projects. These opportunities allow people to gain work experience and build professional references before and after release.

Business networks create real pathways into the labor market, reducing stigma by demonstrating that people with prison backgrounds can be reliable employees. They also ease the transition by offering structured, supervised work placements that build confidence and autonomy. However, most opportunities are concentrated among large companies, and small-to-medium enterprises remain underrepresented, limiting the overall scale of impact.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Directorate General of Penitentiary Institutions (DGIP) The DGIP, under the Ministry of the Interior, is the central administrative body responsible for the day-to-day functioning of Spain's penitentiary system. It oversees regulations, staffing, infrastructure, and the distribution of resources across facilities. Its centralized authority ensures consistency but also means that policy shifts at this level have immediate consequences throughout the system.	The DGIP shapes the operational environment in which all other actors function. Its budget allocations, hiring policies, and directives directly influence the quality of prison life, rehabilitation services, and staff working conditions. Because it operates at the exosystem level, its decisions ripple across the ecosystem: for example, prioritizing security infrastructure over education can weaken reintegration pathways, while investment in open-regime centers (CIS) strengthens community links.
National Institute of Penitentiary Administration (INAP) INAP is the state body tasked with planning, research, and professional training across the penitentiary system. It sets standards for prison staff and designs curricula that determine the knowledge, values, and skills correctional professionals bring into facilities.	As a training and planning hub, INAP influences the culture of interaction between staff and incarcerated individuals. By shaping how staff understand rehabilitation, human rights, or dynamic security, it indirectly affects whether prisons function as punitive spaces or as environments fostering reintegration. Its role connects education policy, justice, and labor systems, making it a bridge between the penitentiary world and broader professional ecosystems.
Judicial System (Judges, Prosecutors, Sentencing Decisions) Judges and prosecutors hold decisive power in granting parole, conditional release, or alternative sanctions. Judges of Penitentiary Surveillance play a particularly crucial role in monitoring prison conditions and safeguarding rights.	Judicial actors embody the interface between legal frameworks and lived experience in prison. Their rulings not only impact the length and conditions of confinement but also influence access to rehabilitation programs and semi-liberty. As part of the exosystem, they act as external gatekeepers of opportunities for reintegration, shaping how legal norms are translated into practice inside facilities.

Budgetary Decisions by the Ministry of the Interior

Funding decisions by the Ministry of the Interior determine staff levels, infrastructure investments, and the scope of reintegration programs. Austerity policies often result in understaffed facilities, limited program offerings, and deteriorating conditions.

Budgetary priorities cascade through the entire penitentiary ecosystem. Underfunded services weaken not only internal programs but also the partnerships with NGOs, municipalities, and employers that depend on state support. By contrast, sustained investment in training, healthcare, or open-regime facilities amplifies community-based reintegration, making funding a central lever in connecting or disconnecting the penitentiary system from broader social services.

Professional Training Institutes and Universities

Spanish universities and training institutes collaborate with prisons to deliver higher education, vocational training, and research programs. Agreements with institutions like UNED allow incarcerated individuals to pursue degrees remotely.

These institutions provide a direct bridge between prisons and the knowledge economy. They enable incarcerated people to acquire marketable skills, reducing post-release exclusion. They also influence staff culture: research, internships, and curricula shape how future professionals perceive incarceration, thus embedding reintegration values into the professional ecosystem beyond prison walls.

Regional Governments (Autonomous Communities)

Regions like Cataluña and the Basque Country have competencies in penitentiary management. They can design differentiated models, especially in healthcare integration and rehabilitation programs, while other regions remain under centralized administration.

Regional autonomy creates laboratories for innovation. For example, integrating prison healthcare into the public health system ensures continuity of care and better outcomes. Regional variations also stimulate national dialogue on what works best, allowing the exosystem to test, adapt, and potentially scale new approaches.

Labor Market Dynamics and Economic Context

The broader economic climate directly impacts the reintegration chances of incarcerated individuals. High unemployment, precarious jobs, or discrimination can block access to stable work.

The labor market forms a key structural determinant of recidivism. Even with well-designed training and release programs, if the economy cannot absorb returning citizens, reintegration stalls. Conversely, active labor market policies and private-sector engagement (CSR, apprenticeships) can transform the ecosystem into one that sustains reintegration.

Trade Unions and Professional Associations of Prison Staff

Unions and associations advocate for the rights, working conditions, and professional recognition of correctional staff. Their negotiations influence staff morale, safety, and turnover.

By shaping workforce stability, unions indirectly affect the quality of relationships between staff and incarcerated individuals. Professional identity, recognition, and training support reinforce a culture of respect and rehabilitation, while conflictual labor relations can entrench punitive dynamics. Thus, unions are a crucial but often overlooked exosystem actor.

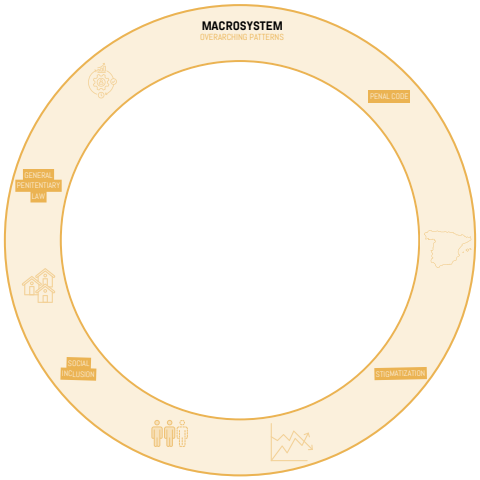
Private Sector and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

Private companies engage in reintegration through CSR programs, offering training, employment opportunities, or funding for workshops. Foundations like la Caixa run initiatives such as Reincorpora, connecting incarcerated people with the labor market.

The private sector expands the reintegration ecosystem beyond state services. Employer participation normalizes the hiring of formerly incarcerated individuals, reduces stigma, and creates pathways to social inclusion. CSR thus links economic ecosystems with correctional and social systems, making reintegration a shared responsibility.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Penal Code and Organic Law on Penal Enforcement The Penal Code and the Organic Law on Penal Enforcement provide the legal foundation for incarceration in Spain. They define the types of crimes that can lead to imprisonment, the length of sentences, and the framework for progression through prison regimes (closed, ordinary, open), parole, and alternative sanctions such as probation or community service.	This legal framework acts as the backbone of the entire penitentiary ecosystem. It regulates not only who enters prison but also the opportunities for rehabilitation and release. For example, provisions that allow open-regime placements or sentence suspension create bridges to the community, while rigid sentencing laws may prolong exclusion. As such, the Penal Code and enforcement laws shape every other system, from the workload of judges to the design of reintegration programs.
Public discourse and social stigma around incarceration Public perceptions of incarcerated people are often shaped by stereotypes that portray them as dangerous, untrustworthy, or unworthy of reintegration. Media narratives emphasizing crime and security concerns reinforce these stigmas.	Stigma operates as a barrier at multiple levels: employers may refuse to hire, landlords may deny housing, and communities may resist reintegration projects. A more balanced discourse that highlights human rights, reintegration success, or structural inequalities can encourage a supportive environment for reintegration initiatives.

National reintegration strategy or incarceration model (punitive vs. rehabilitative)

The overarching philosophy of the penal system - whether punitive or rehabilitative - sets the tone for policy, funding, and professional training. In Spain, the General Penitentiary Law emphasizes re-education and reintegration, but in practice, punitive measures often dominate.

A rehabilitative model encourages investment in education, vocational training, and therapeutic programs, while a punitive approach prioritizes control and infrastructure. This macrosystem factor cascades down through the entire ecosystem: it shapes how staff are trained, how incarcerated individuals experience their sentence, and what communities expect upon release. In other words, it provides the normative compass for all lower-level interactions.

Religious or moral norms around forgiveness and second chances

Spain's Catholic heritage emphasizes themes of repentance and forgiveness, and faith-based organizations (e.g., Cáritas, Prison Fellowship Spain) are active in prisons, offering programs like Árbol de los deseos or Angel Tree. However, in broader public discourse, these values are not always reflected in penal attitudes: political debates often frame incarceration as primarily punitive.

Faith-based actors create a support layer within the reintegration ecosystem by providing counseling, family support, and advocacy. Their presence softens stigma for some incarcerated people, particularly those who engage with religious or spiritual frameworks. At the societal level, however, punitive moral narratives still dominate, limiting the extent to which forgiveness translates into widespread acceptance of formerly incarcerated individuals.

National policies on mental health and addiction

Mental health and addiction are significant challenges in Spanish prisons. While Organic Law 1/1979 guarantees equivalent healthcare, implementation is uneven. Cataluña and País Vasco have integrated prison health into regional health services, improving continuity of care. Elsewhere, psychiatric support remains fragmented, with limited availability of specialized units.

The lack of a fully integrated health-justice framework at the national level weakens reintegration prospects. People treated for addiction or mental illness inside prisons may lose access to consistent care after release. This disconnect contributes to relapse, homelessness, or recidivism. By contrast, where regional integration exists, incarcerated individuals experience smoother transitions into community health systems, demonstrating the importance of aligning penitentiary policy with broader health policy.

Cultural attitudes towards authority and punishment

Spain has a long tradition of strong institutional authority, influenced historically by authoritarian regimes and later democratization. This dual legacy means respect for authority is culturally embedded, but there is also public sensitivity to state overreach. In penal matters, punishment is still widely seen as a necessary consequence of wrongdoing, though progressive reforms have introduced reintegration discourse.

These cultural attitudes directly affect how correctional staff enforce rules and how incarcerated individuals perceive legitimacy. In regions with strong civic participation (e.g., Cataluña, Basque Country), there is more openness to rehabilitation-oriented models, while in other parts of Spain, the culture of discipline and order dominates. The macrosystem cultural norms thus filter down into everyday interactions, shaping whether rules are seen as just or as oppressive.

Migration policy and treatment of foreign incarcerated individuals

Spain's prisons hold a significant proportion of foreign nationals, often from North Africa and Latin America. Migration laws intersect with penal enforcement, particularly regarding residence permits and deportation orders. Many non-citizens face legal uncertainty upon release, with limited family or community networks.

Foreign incarcerated individuals are often excluded from reintegration services tailored to nationals. For example, a person without legal status may complete vocational training in prison but be unable to secure legal employment outside. Migration policy thus determines whether reintegration is even possible: restrictive laws perpetuate cycles of exclusion, while inclusive approaches (e.g., residence permits linked to work contracts) would strengthen the rehabilitation ecosystem.

Social inequality and access to education

Prison populations in Spain disproportionately come from socially excluded groups, including people with low education levels, unstable employment, and migrant backgrounds. Education and employment gaps are a major predictor of incarceration, reflecting broader inequalities in Spanish society.

These inequalities mean that reintegration requires not just prison-based programs but systemic investment in education, housing, and employment access. For instance, vocational courses in carpentry or hospitality may provide skills, but if structural discrimination persists, reintegration remains blocked. Thus, inequality at the macrosystem level sets the baseline conditions that prisons alone cannot correct.

International Human Rights Agreements

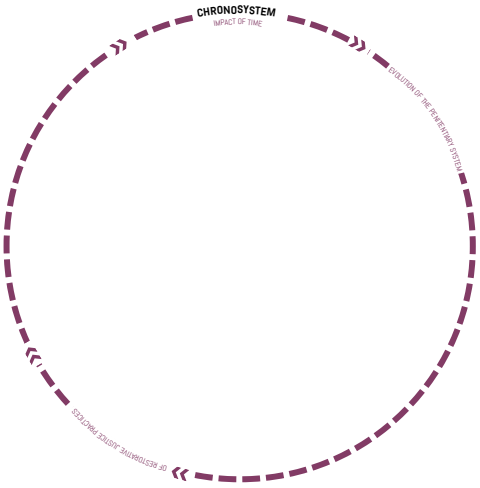
Spain is bound by international frameworks such as the European Convention on Human Rights, the UN Mandela Rules, and the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT), monitored by the Ombudsperson (Defensor del Pueblo) as National Preventive Mechanism. Reports by the CPT (Council of Europe) regularly assess Spanish prison conditions, highlighting issues such as overcrowding, healthcare access, and use of isolation.

These agreements bring external accountability into Spain's penal system. They strengthen the advocacy position of NGOs, universities, and professional associations working on prison reform. Although compliance varies, international standards create pressure to reduce overcrowding, expand alternatives to incarceration, and safeguard dignity. They act as a counterweight to domestic political pressures for punitive policies, connecting Spain's penitentiary ecosystem to global human rights norms.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:

Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Changes in legislation over time (e.g., drug laws, sentence reductions) Spain has experienced significant penal law reforms: the Penal Code of 1995, amendments expanding alternatives to incarceration, and more recent debates about permanent reviewable sentences. Drug-related offenses have historically contributed heavily to prison populations, but reforms introducing substitution measures (treatment programs, fines) have moderated some impacts.	Shifts in sentencing frameworks directly reshape the prison population profile. For example, reductions in drug-related sentences lowered overcrowding, while harsher laws on violent crimes lengthened stays. These legal evolutions reverberate through the ecosystem by altering facility demand, reintegration needs, and the workload of probation and social services.

Rise of restorative justice practices

Restorative justice is gaining traction in Spain through pilot programs in youth justice and some adult facilities, supported by European networks and NGOs.

By reframing justice as dialogue and accountability, restorative practices shift focus from punishment to healing. This influences not only incarcerated individuals but also victims, staff, and communities. Over time, restorative justice may reduce stigma and strengthen reintegration, embedding new values into the justice ecosystem.

Technological progress in surveillance or education

The Spanish penitentiary system has adopted electronic monitoring (bracelets) for alternatives to imprisonment and expanded digital learning opportunities through agreements with UNED and other universities. Telemedicine was strengthened during COVID-19.

Technology modifies the prison-community interface. Surveillance tools allow more flexible semi-liberty regimes, while online courses expand educational horizons beyond prison walls. Telemedicine connects incarcerated individuals to broader healthcare ecosystems, mitigating isolation. These innovations progressively shift the system from closed isolation to community-linked integration.

Global events (e.g., COVID-19)

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Spanish prisons to adopt strict isolation measures, restrict visits, and expand remote communication methods (video calls). Early releases and temporary measures reduced populations to mitigate contagion risks.

Global crises create systemic shocks. During COVID-19, restrictions disrupted family bonds but also accelerated digital innovation. The long-term consequence is a dual lesson: the fragility of social connections in detention and the potential for technological adaptation. Such events reshape how the ecosystem balances security and human rights.

Institutional reforms in the justice system

Spain has periodically built new facilities to address overcrowding and closed outdated ones. The introduction of Centros de Inserción Social (CIS) reflects a structural reform aimed at community integration.

New or reformed facilities reshape not only living conditions but also program availability and staff culture. Closing large, outdated prisons can reduce overcrowding and improve dignity, while CIS centers embody a shift toward open regimes. These structural reforms signal long-term transformations in the ecosystem's architecture.

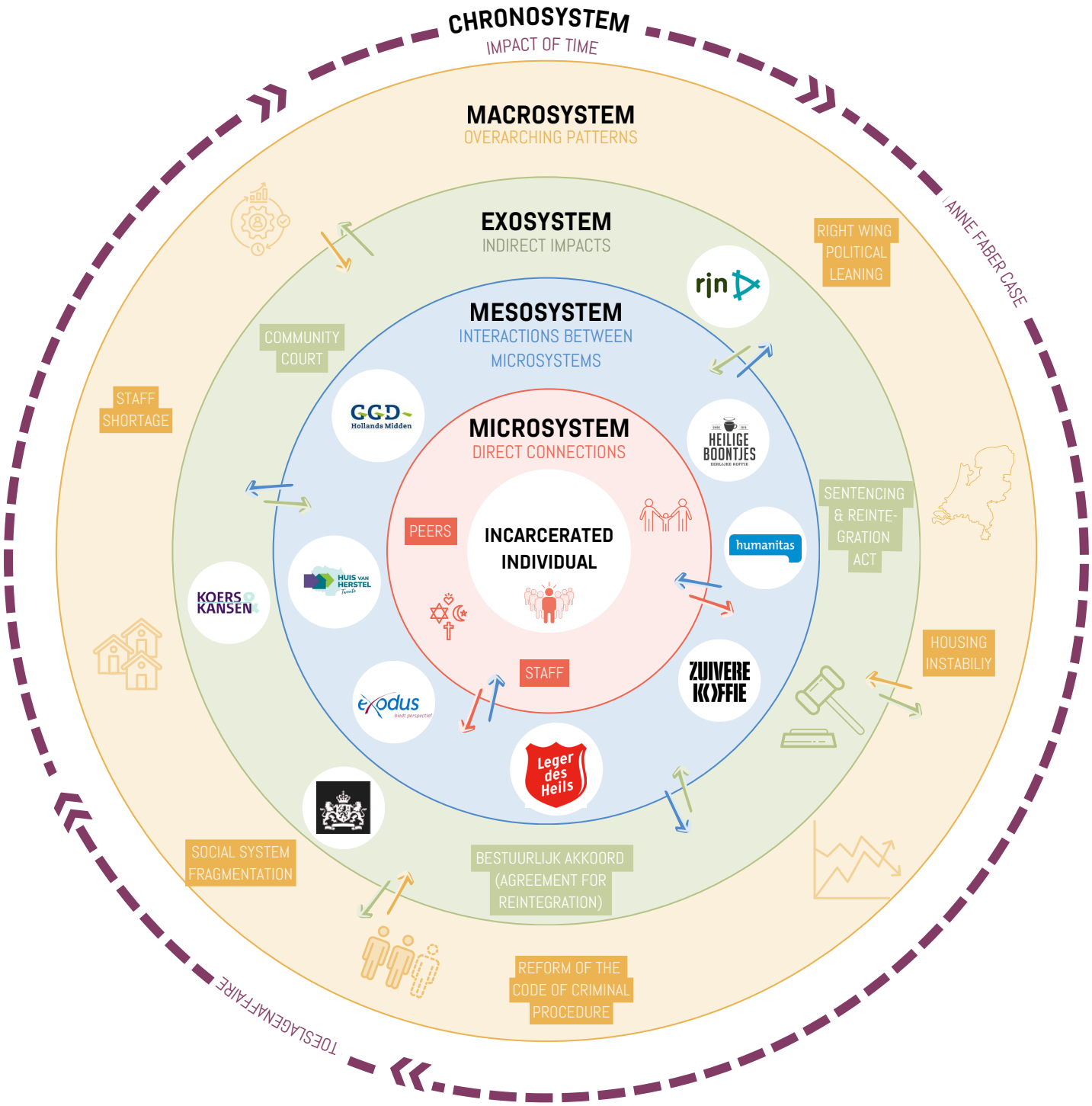
Evolution of staff roles and professional identity

Over decades, Spanish correctional staff have shifted from a security-first identity toward more professionalized, rehabilitative roles. Training in dynamic security and human rights has expanded.

As staff professional identity evolves, relationships with incarcerated individuals shift from confrontational to cooperative. This improves institutional climate and reinforces reintegration. Long-term investments in staff culture thus ripple across the ecosystem, transforming daily interactions and reintegration outcomes.

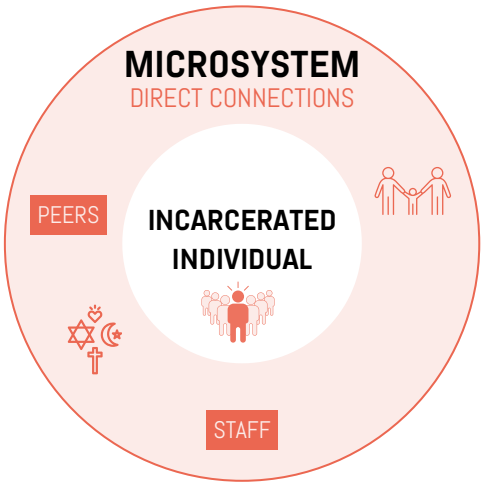
RESIZE
Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

THE NETHERLANDS



MICROSYSTEM

The most immediate environment, including family, peers, staff, and the detention facility itself, directly influences individuals' development and well-being. Positive interactions within this microsystem can foster resilience and enhance individuals' ability to cope with challenges.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Daily staff (e.g. case managers, reintegration coaches) In small-scale facilities (such as the House of Recovery in Almelo and Exodus Houses), security is primarily managed by daytime supervisors rather than traditional security officers. Unlike prisons, which focus on static control measures (e.g., surveillance, gates), daytime supervisors emphasize trust-building, open communication, and relational security. Staff involved in reintegration support in small-scale facilities are typically trained to fulfill multiple functions, rather than having separate roles for security, supervision, employment planning, and counseling, as is common in prisons.	The relational security model in small-scale facilities (such as the House of Recovery or the Exodus Houses) allows supervisors to build genuine relationships with residents, observe behavioral patterns over time, and respond to individual needs more quickly and personally. Their familiarity with residents supports early identification of risks and progress, making them valuable partners in reentry support. Compared to prisons, where staff often have large caseloads and limited availability, the lower resident-to-staff ratio in small-scale facilities enables more meaningful planning and connection to external resources such as housing and employment services.
Interactions with nature Programs like Plantje voor Morgen bring structured interaction with nature into detention facilities. Through gardening, green space development, and horticulture-based activities, residents build practical skills and cultivate self-confidence and self-worth. Initiatives that facilitate connections with nature create a calming, purposeful environment that contrasts with the sterile, high-stress settings of prisons.	Integrating work with nature into a routine offers daily rhythm, responsibility, and emotional benefits, particularly valuable in environments where people often feel disempowered. In small-scale facilities, where staff-resident relationships are more personal and schedules more flexible, programs like this can be meaningfully integrated into (re)integration plans. The presence of green spaces in detention also contributes to a positive atmosphere and better mental health support.

Spiritual counselors (e.g. imams, priests, humanists, rabbis, chaplains)

Spiritual caregivers have a legal right to access all facilities. The Spiritual Care Service of the Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI) coordinates spiritual care across eight religious and philosophical traditions, employing around 167 caregivers who serve approximately 30,000 incarcerated people annually, around 9,000 to 10,000 on any given day, through group sessions, services, and one-on-one visits.

Small-scale facilities encourage stronger personal connections, between residents, staff, and spiritual counselors. Unlike prisons with rotating in-house staff, these settings enable ongoing, resident-led contact with local faith networks. This continuity supports trust, cultural relevance, and a lasting sense of belonging, during detention and beyond.

Family relationships

Contact between incarcerated parents and their children plays a critical role in emotional well-being. While most facilities do not allow children to live with incarcerated parents, exceptions exist, especially in small-scale facilities, such as the Mother and Child House (MMK) in PI Ter Peel. The father wing in the prison of Veenhuizen is another well-known example. Most prisons offer "Parent-Child Visits" in child-friendly rooms several times a year. Additionally, programs such as the Exodus Autumn Camp and Let's Get Loud (by Not My Crime) provide meaningful opportunities for bonding. During the camp, children and fathers can play sports, do music workshops, and participate in talent shows.

These practices are grounded in national law (e.g., Article 5(4) and Articles 38–43 of the PBW), as well as broader human rights commitments emphasizing the importance of family ties. In small-scale facilities, the physical environment is more welcoming, visiting is less restrictive, and staff are more likely to know individual family contexts, enabling flexible scheduling and personalized arrangements. This supports child well-being and reinforces reentry by maintaining essential family connections. Organizations like Expertisecentrum KIND also support these efforts by advising professionals and promoting children's rights in the justice context.

Physical and mental healthcare

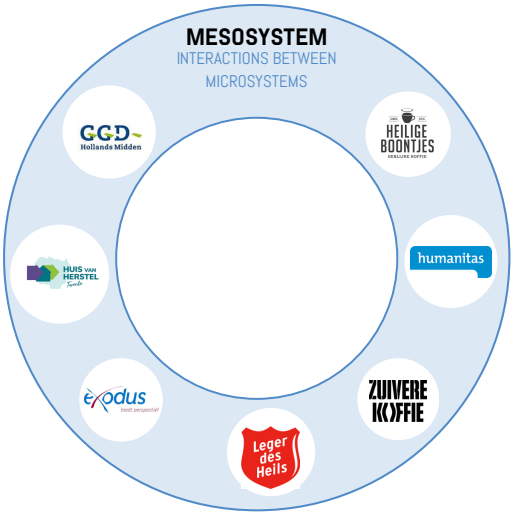
In prisons, care is delivered through in-house medical services, mobile dental units, and escorted hospital visits for specialist treatment. Mental health services are available but often limited due to staffing shortages and the large scale of the facilities. Small-scale facilities that prioritize community integration rely more on local healthcare providers, integrating general practitioners and mental health professionals directly into reentry planning.

Facilities that are both smaller and more community integrated offer more flexible access to healthcare by coordinating directly with regional providers, allowing for earlier intervention and smoother continuity of care post-release. Unlike prisons, which rely heavily on internal services and security-based hospital visits, these smaller facilities connect residents more easily to local clinics, physiotherapy, and mental health professionals. Importantly, this also includes the opportunity to continue ongoing treatments and continuous appointments, a critical issue that's lacking in traditional facilities in the Netherlands.

Note: In this model, detention facilities are broadly categorized into small-scale facilities and prisons. Small-scale facilities include 8 open (BBA) units for men and 2 for women, as well as Houses of Recovery (e.g., Almelo), KVJJ's, Exodus Houses, and organizations providing forensic care, such as HVO Querido and Doorpakkers. These facilities are community-integrated and designed to support reintegration. Approximately 10% of people in detention are placed in some form of forensic institution, most of which are small-scale. Additionally, many facilities are run by external organizations contracted by the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security (DJI). Prisons, by contrast, consist of around 26 large-scale prison complexes, 2 detention centers (for both criminal law and immigration cases), and 3 closed facilities for women. JJIs and TBS clinics fall into both categories, depending on their specific design and focus.

MESOSYSTEM

This encompasses the interactions between various microsystems, such as the relationships between the detention house and community organisations such as care facilities, schools, employers, and social services. These connections can enhance or hinder the support individuals receive, emphasizing the need for collaboration among different systems to promote successful reintegration. The meso level highlights the complex and interdisciplinary nature of the challenges and opportunities surrounding detention and its interaction with the broader community, where different systems and contexts influence and shape each other.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Staff training & recruitment partnerships Acquiring and training staff in the Netherlands varies significantly by facility type. For youth institutions, the DJI Training Institute (Opleidingsinstituut DJI) provides structured, practice-based education for new and existing staff. Courses emphasize dynamic security, communication, and behavioral monitoring, core components of relational security. Facilities like Exodus often recruit independently, seeking staff with casework or social work experience, and offer internal onboarding and informal training tailored to their specific facilities.	Effective staffing relies on coordinated partnerships between government, training institutes, and NGOs. The varying approach allows for the differentiation by facility and specific trainings for different competencies (such as youth care methods like YOUTURN in juvenile facilities or counseling skills in transition houses). This ensures that staff are equipped for the relational demands of each context. These partnerships shape the day-to-day experiences of residents and improve staff's ability to connect individuals to external networks.
Public sector and municipality collaborations Effective community integration relies on cooperation between detention facilities and external organizations. Key partners include: **GGD (Municipal Health Services):** Public health screenings and connect (previously) incarcerated individuals to community care post-release. **WMO (Social Support Act) Organizations:** Tailored social services. **Zorg- en Veiligheidshuizen (Care and Safety Houses).** **Reclassering Nederland, Verslavingszorg, and Leger des Heils (Salvation Army):** Three primary probation services of the Netherlands. Also responsible for certain in-prison and post-release treatment for substance use disorders, and housing and social work programs.	These collaborations are supported in policy by frameworks such as DJI's "5 Basic Conditions for Reintegration" and the VNG's reintegration guide for municipalities. In practice, coordination varies by region, and municipalities often struggle with follow-through. Still, partnerships with trusted local actors improve access to housing, healthcare, work, and education, making reintegration efforts more customizable and sustainable.

Volunteer-based support programs

Humanitas Buddy Program: Pairs incarcerated individuals with trained volunteers in restorative justice who visit, help with administration, and build reintegration plans through Reintegration Centers (RICs).

Stichting Exodus: Supports incarcerated people through educational sessions, in-prison programs, Exodus Houses, and family-focused initiatives like seasonal camps for children of incarcerated parents.

Gevangenenzorg Nederland: Over 630 volunteers support residents and their families through visits, chat support, and reintegration courses.

In smaller scale and differentiated facilities residents often have better access to volunteers which foster trust and long-lasting benefits that are harder to achieve in larger, closed institutions. These programs also indirectly address systemic barriers like stigma through the normalization principle and lack of access to resources. Volunteer involvement is typically organized through NGOs, not direct statutory mandate. However, four organizations receive funding from the Ministry of Justice and Security to work with incarcerated people, including those detained abroad via the International Office of the Dutch Probation Service.

Cultural and sports programming through local partnerships

Programs use creative expression and sports as tools for personal growth and skill-building. Examples include Peter Faber Stichting, which offers workshops in acting and storytelling; Werk via Sport and the INSIDE project, which use football to promote structure and resilience; and Turn-Over, which delivers rugby-based mentorship programs focused on discipline and self-confidence.

Cultural and sports programs strengthen engagement with the local community, self-expression, and personal growth. Small-scale facilities with flexible structures and easier access to the community are better positioned than traditional prisons to host these initiatives regularly. These programs are especially impactful in youth and small-scale facilities, where participation tends to be more consistent, personalized, and integrated into daily routines.

Municipal co-funding of small-scale reintegration facilities

Several small-scale reintegration facilities (such as the House of Recovery Twente) are partly funded and supported by municipal governments. For instance, Almelo municipality provides grants and subsidies for the House of Recovery's operational costs and service delivery infrastructure.

Local funding helps anchor these facilities in specific regions and supports staff recruitment. Municipal partnerships not only provide essential financial resources but also lead to accountability and engagement with local service networks such as probation, healthcare, and employers. When municipalities invest directly, they have a stronger stake in the facility's success.

Social enterprises

Community integrated enterprises like Zuivere Koffie and Heilige Boontjes offer residents and formerly incarcerated people hands-on experience in coffee roasting, barista training, and retail work. This builds skills, relationships, and confidence for other employment, and additionally they offer available jobs on their staff for post-release.

Enterprises bridge small-scale facility settings with real-world work environments through structured collaboration between facilities, employment programs, employers, and the public. Smaller scale and community integrated facilities make it easier to embed such initiatives into daily routines.

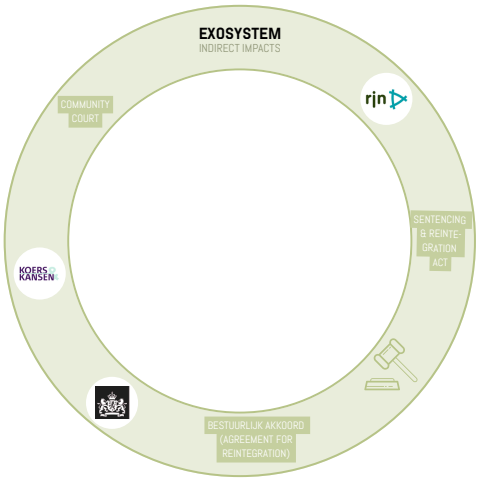
CurrentWerkt employment agency

A job agency founded by people with lived experience that specializes in helping individuals with a history of detention find suitable employment post-release.

This organization plays an important role in helping formerly incarcerated individuals overcome the barriers and stigma that are associated with having a criminal record in the Netherlands.

EXOSYSTEM

External factors that indirectly impact individuals, such as government policies, community resources, and social services, play a crucial role in shaping experiences within detention facilities. Changes in the exosystem, such as shifts in funding or legislation, can have significant implications for the quality of care and support available to individuals.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Sentencing and Reintegration Act (Wet straffen en beschermen) Enacted in July 2021, it redefined how prison sentences are executed in the Netherlands. Conditional release was shortened to a maximum of two years and is now granted on a case-by-case basis, considering public safety and individual behavior. Reintegration leave is no longer guaranteed and must demonstrate a clear contribution to safe reentry. Open prison models (BBI/ZBBI) were replaced with Limited Security Units (BBA) allowing for increased out of prison work, and mandatory prison labor was abolished. The law encourages more small-scale, reintegration-focused programs.	Tying reintegration leave to demonstrated progress and public safety criteria requires closer coordination between detention facilities and the prosecution office, followed by increased collaboration with external organizations such as employers, social services, and housing providers to support reentry. It also increases the responsibility on staff to track progress in real time, something more feasible in smaller facilities, where staff interact with residents regularly. At the policy level, this shift fueled growing support for expanding non-custodial alternatives like electronic monitoring as effective, cost-effective sentencing options, not just as tools of probation.
Multi-Agency oversight: Detention facilities are overseen by several ministries and independent bodies, depending on the facility type and population. The Ministry of Justice and Security (JenV) is the primary authority for most detention centers, while the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport (VWS) and the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (OCW) provide oversight in youth detention settings. Inspectorates under these ministries, like the Inspectorate of Justice and Security and the Health and Youth Care Inspectorate, conduct regular checks. Independent supervisory committees also oversee police detention centers, military facilities, and traditional prisons, with municipalities handling (re)integration efforts.	This cross-sectoral oversight aims to ensure that deprivation of liberty is evaluated from legal, health, and educational perspectives. While coordination can be challenging, it promotes transparency and accountability. In practice, reintegration efforts depend heavily on municipalities. The Bestuurlijk Akkoord (Administrative Agreement for Reintegration), signed by DJI, municipalities, and probation services, reinforces this by outlining a joint responsibility for supporting reintegration from the earliest stages of detention, sometimes even before it begins. The agreement aims to align efforts across agencies while respecting individual responsibility and public safety, but requires sustained coordination and local follow-through to succeed.

Lived experience

The role of people with lived experience (such as formerly incarcerated individuals and children of incarcerated parents) is becoming more visible in the Dutch justice system, largely through the work of organizations like Restorative Justice Netherlands. Additional initiatives like Puinruimen, Not My Crime, and Stolen Time bring their voices into detention facilities, schools, and training programs. Movisie and PakKans embed peer coaches into reintegration support. While some facilities and pilot programs have embraced this shift, there is no national policy mandating structural inclusion.

Lived experience offers unique insight into the personal and systemic impact of detention and reentry, making these voices critical to both program design and advocacy. Their involvement strengthens the legitimacy and responsiveness of alternatives to traditional incarceration, including detention houses. Advocacy organizations help amplify these perspectives in public debates, policy reform, and media. However, for their contributions to be sustainable, coordinated funding and formal policy mechanisms are needed to move beyond isolated initiatives toward consistent, system-wide integration.

Ministry of Justice and Security (JenV) program

Koers en Kansen was a policy innovation program initiated by (JenV) that explored alternative, community-connected models of detention. A key example is the Small-Scale Detention Facility Middelburg (KVM), part of the "Detention Local and Flexible" initiative. The KVM pilot focuses on core RESCALED principles: maintaining employment, housing, and social relationships during detention.

Programs like KVM represent a positive shift toward reintegration-focused detention. These initiatives rely on coordinated efforts between the Ministry of Justice and Security and local organizations offering employment support, housing, and social services. However, many of these facilities were closed prematurely, highlighting a key challenge in the Netherlands: the lack of systemic infrastructure to sustain such projects.

Legal frameworks defining facility type

A complex legal framework enables differentiated placement of individuals across various facility types based on age, sentence phase, mental health status, and other characteristics. Key laws include the Penitentiaire beginselenwet, Jeugdwet, Wet forensische zorg, and Wet verplichte geestelijke gezondheidszorg.

These laws govern the criteria for their placement in traditional prisons, youth institutions, or alternative facilities such as transition houses and supported housing (beschermd wonen). This diversity of legal options is a major strength of the Dutch system—it allows for more tailored pathways that better match individual needs. For example, courts can apply juvenile sanctions to emerging adults, enabling their placement in JJI or KVJJ facilities instead of adult prisons.

Advocacy organizations

Several national organizations advocate for systemic change and justice reform in the Netherlands. Restorative Justice Netherlands promotes wider adoption of restorative practices across the justice system, while the Netherlands Helsinki Committee works to strengthen human rights, rule of law, and institutional accountability at both the national and European levels.

These organizations influence national policy conversations, support pilot programs in detention facilities, and elevate the voices of individuals with lived experience. They help build momentum for alternative justice models like detention houses by contributing to legal reform, media narratives, and public engagement. Their local and international collaborations are also essential for bridging systemic reform movements.

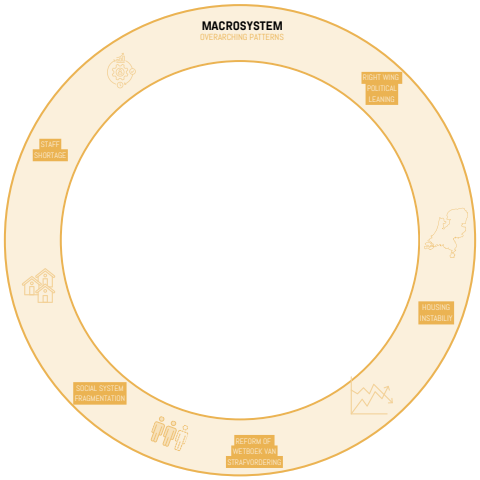
Community Courts (Wijkrechtspraak)

They aim to resolve cases closer to where people live. These courts bring together judges, municipalities, housing corporations, and care providers to address not only the legal case, but also underlying social problems such as debt, housing insecurity, or addiction. Stichting Jongerenrechtbanken Nederland engages youth in legal processes through peer-led youth courts.

While not yet governed by a specific standalone law, these pilots are supported by local agreements with courts and municipalities. This model reflects a shift toward more restorative, context-sensitive justice, aligning with RESCALED's goal of small-scale, community-integrated responses to crime. Community courts show how legal systems can function as part of broader support networks rather than isolated punitive processes.

MACROSYSTEM

The broader cultural, societal, and ideological context influences individuals' opportunities and experiences within the detention house. Legislation around labour and employment, staff training, social security, health care, urban development, cultural norms, prejudices, and power structures all shape the environment in which detention houses operate, impacting access to resources and support for incarcerated individuals. Social inequality, stigma, and discrimination can impede access to care and reintegration, as well as opportunities for successful reintegration after incarceration.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
Reform of the dutch code of criminal procedure (Wetboek van strafvordering) This major structural reform of the legal foundation for how criminal cases are investigated, prosecuted, and adjudicated replaces the current code, dating from 1926, to reflect technological change, evolving crime types (such as digital and subversive crime), and new legal standards. The revised code introduces more flexible, digital-adapted procedures and expands judicial oversight during the pre-trial phase, with the goal of reducing unnecessary detention and shortening case processing times. It also aims to reinforce fundamental rights and legal protections for defendants throughout the criminal process.	For impacted individuals, if carried out correctly, this reform should lead to faster case resolution, fewer pre-trial detentions, and stronger procedural safeguards. For facilities (primarily open ones) that intentionally incorporate technology, the digitalization of the justice chain may be most effective in streamlining coordination with external agencies, government bodies, and support organizations. It also reshapes the legal framework in which sentencing and non-custodial alternatives (such as supervised community-based sanctions) are developed and implemented.
Systemic Juvenile Justice Reform In 2019, the national government launched a major reform of the juvenile justice system, aiming to replace large-scale institutions with small-scale, community-integrated facilities known as KVJJ (Kleinschalige Voorzieningen Justitiële Jeugd). These youth-focused facilities are designed to be closer to home, less punitive, and more oriented toward care, education, and reintegration.	The shift toward small-scale models for youth detention has influenced similar innovations in adult justice. For example, the House of Recovery Twente serves adult men in the final phase of detention, providing targeted support for reintegration in a community-based setting. These developments signal a positive long-term trend toward deinstitutionalization and personalized, needs-based approaches to detention and reentry.

Staff shortages

Since late 2023, the Dutch prison system has faced growing capacity shortages, largely driven by staffing deficits, tightened conditional release policies, and an increase in custodial sentences. However, not due to rising crime rates. In 2023, the Custodial Institutions Agency (DJI) recorded over 2,000 new hires and 1,754 departures, with over 1,000 open vacancies. These challenges are especially pronounced in closed prisons, where staff roles are more rigid and stress levels are higher due to the security-driven environment. In youth facilities, staff shortages are compounded by the need for specialized care qualifications. As of March 2024, over 330 prison cells were unusable due to insufficient staff. Youth detention centers have also reached capacity limits, resulting in young adults being placed in adult prisons, including in specialized units at JC Zeist and PI Almelo. This crisis has exposed longstanding underinvestment in physical infrastructure and personnel across both adult and youth detention sectors.

High turnover directly undermines the quality and consistency of interaction between incarcerated individuals and staff. It disrupts trust-building, reduces familiarity with individual needs, and creates gaps in continuity with external services such as housing or healthcare providers. In contrast, staff working in more specialized facilities (e.g. for youth or substance use treatment) report lower levels of stress and tension, partially due to relational security practices and smaller-scale environments. The expanding use of smaller scale or specialized facilities is often proposed as a way to alleviate pressure on overcrowded facilities. However, without careful implementation, these alternatives risk contributing to net-widening: pulling in individuals who might otherwise qualify for non-custodial sanctions or community-based support. As demand for space increases, there is a policy temptation to use small-scale facilities as overflow solutions rather than targeted interventions. This shifts the justice system's orientation toward expanding custodial capacity rather than effectively applying the principles and goals of RESCALED.

Housing Instability

Housing after release is one of the most pressing reintegration challenges in the Netherlands. While probation services like Reclassering are involved in supporting transitions, there is no national policy ensuring consistent housing support, leaving decisions largely to individual prison directors. Even in during-sentence transition houses, where reintegration starts earlier in a more practical sense, the lack of clear housing pathways weakens the effectiveness of reentry planning. The broader Dutch housing crisis, characterized by severe shortages, rising costs, and long waiting lists for social housing, exacerbates this issue. People with criminal records face additional barriers, such as rejection by housing corporations and private landlords, further limiting their options.

This housing instability directly undermines reentry efforts, delaying access to stable accommodation, which is critical for securing work, healthcare, and social support. Housing support varies widely depending on local policies, meaning reintegration chances differ across municipalities. The housing crisis affects everyone, which can lead to public frustration and tensions regarding justice reform. If the general population feels that systemic issues like housing are not being addressed for them while support is provided to formerly incarcerated individuals, it can create a sense of unfairness. Addressing this requires systemic national-level solutions and stronger collaboration between municipalities, organizations, and housing providers to ensure sustainable reentry outcomes.

Social system fragmentation

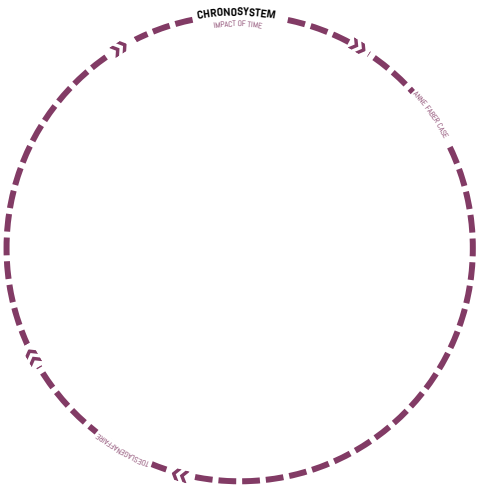
After release, many individuals face significant gaps in accessing healthcare, employment, education, and social welfare. The transition from prison-based services (e.g., healthcare or training provided by DJI) to external systems is often inconsistent. Challenges include a lack of housing or insurance, delays in accessing benefits, data-sharing restrictions under privacy law, and low alignment between in-prison programs and real-world labor or education opportunities. Coordination with municipalities and social services varies widely, leaving many former detainees vulnerable during reentry.

Initiatives like In-Made and Ex-Made demonstrate how structured social-support programs can bridge internal efforts with external job markets. They provide skill-building and employment continuity. Similarly, organizations like Exodus Netherlands provide aftercare and transitional housing that align more closely with local services. To improve reintegration outcomes, policy and practice must support stronger partnerships between detention facilities, municipalities, and social service providers on the outside to make sure social supports are integrated within the justice system and accessible.

CHRONOSYSTEM

This dimension considers the impact of time, including major life events that affect individuals and communities, as well as broader socio-historical shifts such as the War on Drugs, the victims' rights movement, and the rise of mass incarceration. Changes in the chronosystem can influence development at all other levels of the ecological system. This is particularly relevant when considering our rapidly changing society:

Both technological and artificial intelligence systems play an increasingly bigger role in the justice system and, if not well-thought-out and monitored, come with severe consequences. Increased public awareness and (grassroots) movement also influence perceptions on the justice system, highlighting systemic injustices and racial disparities in incarceration. This has led to public demand for accountability, policy reform, and greater transparency within the justice system.



FACTOR	ECOSYSTEM CONNECTIONS
The Anne Faber case and aftermath In 2017, Anne Faber was raped and murdered by a man with a history of sexual violence and psychiatric challenges who had been granted unsupervised leave from a forensic psychiatric facility. The case, alongside reports of prior mismanagement, led to national outrage and eroded public trust in the forensic care system. In response, the government imposed stricter laws and protocols for risk assessment and leave procedures. This included reforms like the 2021 Wet straffen en beschermen (Sentencing and Protection Act), which made reintegration leave conditional and more tightly monitored.	This case triggered a shift in how the justice system balances integration efforts with perceptions of public safety. It raised political and media pressure for more oversight within facilities and complicated conversations around detention house implementation. While safeguards were strengthened, the resulting policy made leave and reentry processes more complicated, especially for community-integrated facilities that depend on external coordination and trust. As a result, small-scale facilities must navigate these concerns carefully while continuing to demonstrate that structured reintegration is essential to long-term public safety and reentry outcomes.

Technology in the dutch justice system

Digitalization efforts are advancing across the system in positive and negative ways, with facilities of all types introducing in-cell tablets, telecommunication platforms, and broader applications of electronic monitoring and surveillance technologies. Residents legally retain the right to at least one hour of visitation and one or more phone calls weekly under the Penitentiary Principles Act (PBW), but growing staff shortages and facility constraints have reduced access, sometimes substituting physical visits or outdoor time with tablets and streaming access. Video calling is not yet a legal right but has been introduced in several prisons as an informal solution to restricted contact.

Especially in traditional prisons under overcrowding or staffing pressure, technology may replace meaningful social engagement, undermining crucial interpersonal relationships in the facility and with external relationships. In contrast, smaller-scale facilities are better positioned to integrate technology as a supplement rather than a substitute. There are ongoing conversations about what exactly this should look like in practice. Open facilities like post-release transition houses also commonly allow for personal phones and even TVs in their facilities to promote agency and connection with the outside world.

The childcare benefits scandal (Toeslagenaffaire)

Between 2013 and 2019, thousands of Dutch families (many with immigrant backgrounds) were wrongly accused of childcare benefits fraud by the Dutch Tax Authority. The aggressive enforcement and lack of due process led to severe financial hardship, family separations, and in some cases, homelessness. The scandal sparked public outrage and led to the resignation of the entire Dutch cabinet in 2021. It exposed systemic discrimination, lack of legal safeguards, and bureaucratic overreach.

The Toeslagenaffaire eroded public trust in government institutions and led to growing demands for transparency, fairness, and better governance across public services, including in the justice and legal systems. It also raised awareness around institutional bias and unequal treatment. This has far reaching influence into how reentry programs, municipal services, and probation offices address stigma and systemic harm. The case continues to shape the national discussions on accountability and the rights of marginalized populations.

Structural inequality and discriminatory practices

Over time, systemic discrimination and socio-economic exclusion have contributed to the overrepresentation of certain groups (particularly people of color, migrants, and individuals from lower-income backgrounds) within the justice system, Research shows that these groups are much more likely to face surveillance, prosecution, and custodial sentencing. Simultaneously, structural barriers to education, employment, and housing increase their vulnerability to incarceration. The relationship between poverty and detention is reinforced by the government's role as a primary debt collector, with many incarcerated individuals entering prison already facing significant financial burdens.

These patterns reflect how broader historical inequalities become embedded in the justice system over time. The exclusion of marginalized groups from the labor market and broader society continues to shape who ends up in detention and what kind of support they receive. For small-scale facilities aiming to disrupt this pattern, it is essential to acknowledge and address these root causes of poverty, racial bias, and debt-related incarceration. Changes must be made at the level of individual mindsets, within facilities, and also across broader policy and systemic structures.

Decentralization of welfare and justice services

In 2015, the Dutch government implemented a major structural reform, transferring responsibility for key social services (including youth care, social support, and parts of reintegration) to municipalities. The goal was to bring services closer to citizens and improve coordination. However, in practice, this has led to significant regional disparities in the availability and quality of services. Local political will, funding capacity, and infrastructure now heavily influence access to housing, healthcare, and employment for justice-involved individuals and others in need.

This decentralization reshaped the social welfare and reintegration landscapes. While some municipalities have built strong partnerships with probation services, NGOs, and detention facilities, others lack the resources or prioritization to do so. As a result, post-release support varies widely across the country. For detention and transition houses, successful reentry increasingly depends on strong local coordination and municipal assistance. This makes structural justice outcomes partially reliant on geography rather than policy consistency.

RESIZE

Reshaping Correctional Competencies through RESCALED Innovation

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