

BRIDGE
DETENTION HOUSES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

DETENTION HOUSES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

BLUEPRINT

Co-funded by the European Union

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SUMMARY

Across Europe, young adults aged 18 to 25 occupy a unique yet largely overlooked position within criminal justice systems. Legally, they are generally treated as adults. Developmentally, however, they remain in transition. Scientific research demonstrates that neurological, psychological and social development continues well into the mid-twenties.[1] During this period, they are building identities, developing autonomy, entering education or employment, and establishing their place in society.

At the same time, young adults are significantly overrepresented within detention systems. Many experience multiple and intersecting vulnerabilities, including mental health problems, traumatic childhood experiences, disrupted education, unstable housing, poverty, substance use and weak social support networks.[2] Despite these realities, most European detention systems continue to rely on legal frameworks and institutional models designed primarily for adults.

The BRIDGE project was established to explore how youth criminal justice and detention systems can better respond to the specific needs and potential of young adults. Through comparative research in six European countries (Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Switzerland) and through a process of international exchange and learning, the project identified both promising practices and persistent structural challenges.

A central finding of the BRIDGE project is that no participating country currently possesses a coherent and comprehensive framework specifically designed for the 18–25 age group.[3] While innovative initiatives exist, young adults remain largely invisible as a distinct target group within detention policy and practice. They frequently find themselves positioned within youth or adolescent justice or between youth justice and adult justice systems, benefiting fully from neither. This institutional gap stands in contrast to the growing body of evidence demonstrating the importance of this developmental phase.

BRIDGE
DETENTION HOUSES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

PROJECT
BRIDGE

BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY & INCLUSION THROUGH DETENTION HOUSES FOR YOUNGSTERS TO SUPPORT GROWTH & EDUCATION

RUNNING FROM 2025–2026

Funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union



The comparative analysis highlights several recurring challenges across Europe. Young adults are typically placed in adult detention environments after an abrupt transition at the age of eighteen. Large prison institutions remain the dominant model in many countries, and structured, development-oriented progression pathways are largely absent: movement through detention systems is often driven by administrative or security considerations. Age-specific training for professionals is rare, and the lack of reliable, disaggregated data on the 18–25 age group limits evidence-based policy.[4]

At the same time, the BRIDGE project identified numerous promising practices that point towards a different approach. Examples from Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium and other countries demonstrate the value of small-scale facilities, relational approaches to safety, enhanced community integration, restorative practices and individualised support.[5] Their effects on young adults have not yet been systematically evaluated, however, which makes evaluation an essential part of further development. These initiatives show that detention can be organised in ways that strengthen rather than undermine development. Building on these findings, the BRIDGE Blueprint proposes a European framework for detention houses for young adults. The blueprint identifies five areas that are essential for the positive development of young adults in detention.



Young adults should be supported in continuing their personal, social and educational development throughout detention. Detention should prepare young people for the future rather than disconnect them from it.



Positive relationships are among the most important factors in desistance.[6] Effective detention systems invest in meaningful relationships between young adults, professionals, families, mentors and communities.



Detention should remain connected to society. Reintegration begins on the first day of detention, not on the day of release.



Young adults develop responsibility by exercising responsibility. Detention environments should therefore create opportunities for decision-making, learning and independent living skills.



Young adults should actively participate in shaping their own trajectories, environments and futures. Development is most successful when individuals collaborate as partners in their own changing processes.

To support these five areas, the blueprint promotes detention houses that are small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated. Small-scale facilities create the conditions for meaningful relationships and individualised support. Differentiation recognises that young adults are not a homogeneous group and require different forms of care, education, work opportunities and support. Community integration strengthens connections with families, employers, schools, services and neighbourhoods, thereby increasing the likelihood of successful reintegration.

These principles are translated into a practical instrument: the Detention House Quality Wheel (DHQW). Originally developed by Sarah Holbrouck in 2016 in the context of the vision of De Huizen and applied within the BRIDGE project to the specific situation of young adults, the Quality Wheel assesses detention houses across six dimensions and twenty criteria.[7] It can already help structure discussions and identify areas for improvement. Its reliability as an assessment instrument still requires further testing, and guidelines for applying it specifically to young adults are still being developed. The Quality Wheel does not carry the argument on its own: it is the combination of this practical instrument with an understanding of young adulthood and the five areas that makes the blueprint relevant to young adults.

THE BLUEPRINT MAKES SEVEN EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS (PART II):

- Recognise young adulthood as a distinct developmental phase.
- Drive innovation towards small-scale detention houses.
- Build differentiated trajectories.
- Embed detention within communities.
- Involve people with lived experience on different levels.
- Invest in specialised staff and multidisciplinary teams.
- Develop European quality standards for detention houses for young adults.

This blueprint opens with the BRIDGE Quality Framework (Part I), built around the Detention House Quality Wheel, followed by the European recommendations (Part II). Together, they translate the findings of the BRIDGE project into a practical assessment tool and concrete steps for policy. Parts III to VI then set out the evidence and vision on which they are based: the developmental realities of young adulthood, the five areas of the BRIDGE Vision, the three principles of detention houses, and the conditions for moving from vision to practice. The appendices contain the Quality Wheel questionnaire.

The BRIDGE Blueprint does not propose a single uniform model for all countries. Rather, it offers a shared framework that can be adapted to different legal, cultural and institutional contexts while remaining grounded in common principles and evidence. Ultimately, the blueprint is based on a simple conviction:

Young adults should not be defined solely by their offence or legal status. They should be recognised as young people in a critical and transitional phase of life. The question is therefore not whether society should hold young adults accountable for behaviour in conflict with the law. The question is how that accountability can be organised in ways that support development, strengthen responsibility and contribute to safer and more inclusive societies. The BRIDGE Blueprint offers a framework for answering that question.

PART I: THE BRIDGE QUALITY FRAMEWORK

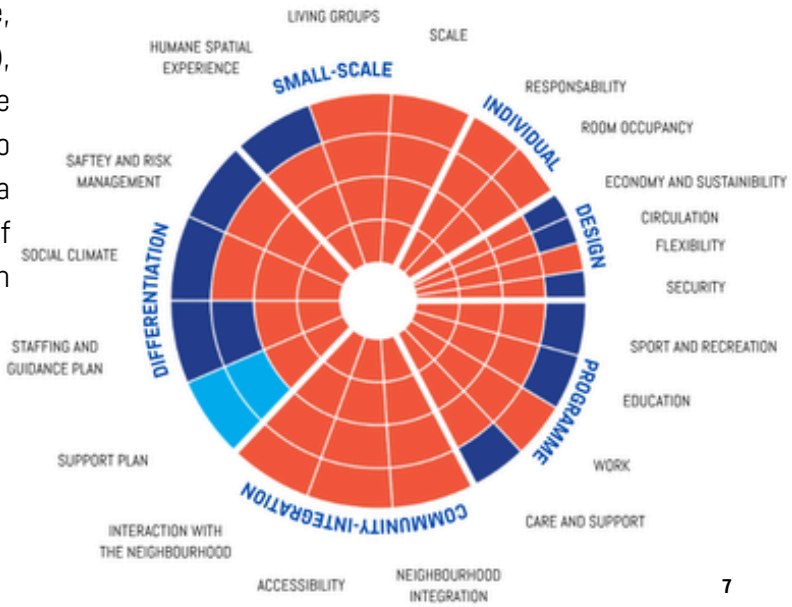
The BRIDGE Blueprint sets out a vision for detention houses that support the positive development of young adults. Translating this vision into practice requires more than principles and recommendations. It also requires a way to reflect on how detention houses are designed, organised and connected to society.

For this purpose, the BRIDGE Blueprint builds on the Detention House Quality Wheel (DHQW), developed by architectural engineer Sarah Holbrouck in 2016 in the context of the vision of De Huizen.[8] The DHQW was designed as an assessment tool to examine to what extent a detention project reflects the principles of small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated detention, rather than reproducing the characteristics of traditional prison environments.

Holbrouck developed the Quality Wheel in her master's thesis at Ghent University, as part of a broader framework for evaluating locations for detention houses. Inspired by the Urban Community Quality Wheel of MVRDV and The Why Factory, she translated the three core principles of De Huizen (small scale, differentiation and community-integration), complemented by the programme, the position of the individual and design-related characteristics, into twenty criteria. Each criterion is scored through a questionnaire, and in the original wheel the size of each segment reflects the weight of the criterion within the vision of a detention house.

The Quality Wheel is particularly relevant to the BRIDGE Blueprint because its underlying principles closely correspond to the organisational model developed throughout this document. The BRIDGE project confirms that detention houses for young adults should be small-scale, differentiated and embedded in the community, while creating conditions for autonomy, development, meaningful relationships and reintegration.

The DHQW provides **a structured tool for reflection, assessment and development.** It can help policymakers, designers, practitioners and other stakeholders identify strengths, gaps and priorities when developing or evaluating detention houses for young adults. At this stage, the Quality Wheel is best used as a tool for reflection and development: it can already structure discussions and identify areas for improvement. Its reliability as an assessment instrument still requires further testing, and guidelines for applying it specifically to young adults are still being developed.



1. THE STRUCTURE OF THE QUALITY WHEEL

The Detention House Quality Wheel assesses a detention facility through twenty criteria, organised around six interconnected dimensions. Together, they provide a broad picture of the extent to which the physical environment, organisational model and daily functioning of a detention house support a small-scale, differentiated and community-integrated approach.

FROM THE FIVE AREAS TO THE SIX DOMAINS

The five areas introduced earlier in this Blueprint (Development, Relationships, Community, Autonomy and Participation) describe what young adults need in order to develop positively during detention.

The six domains of the Quality Wheel operate at a different level. They examine the structural, organisational and physical conditions through which these principles can be realised. The two sets of concepts therefore do not correspond one-to-one. Instead, the Quality Wheel provides the practical environment in which the five BRIDGE areas can take shape.

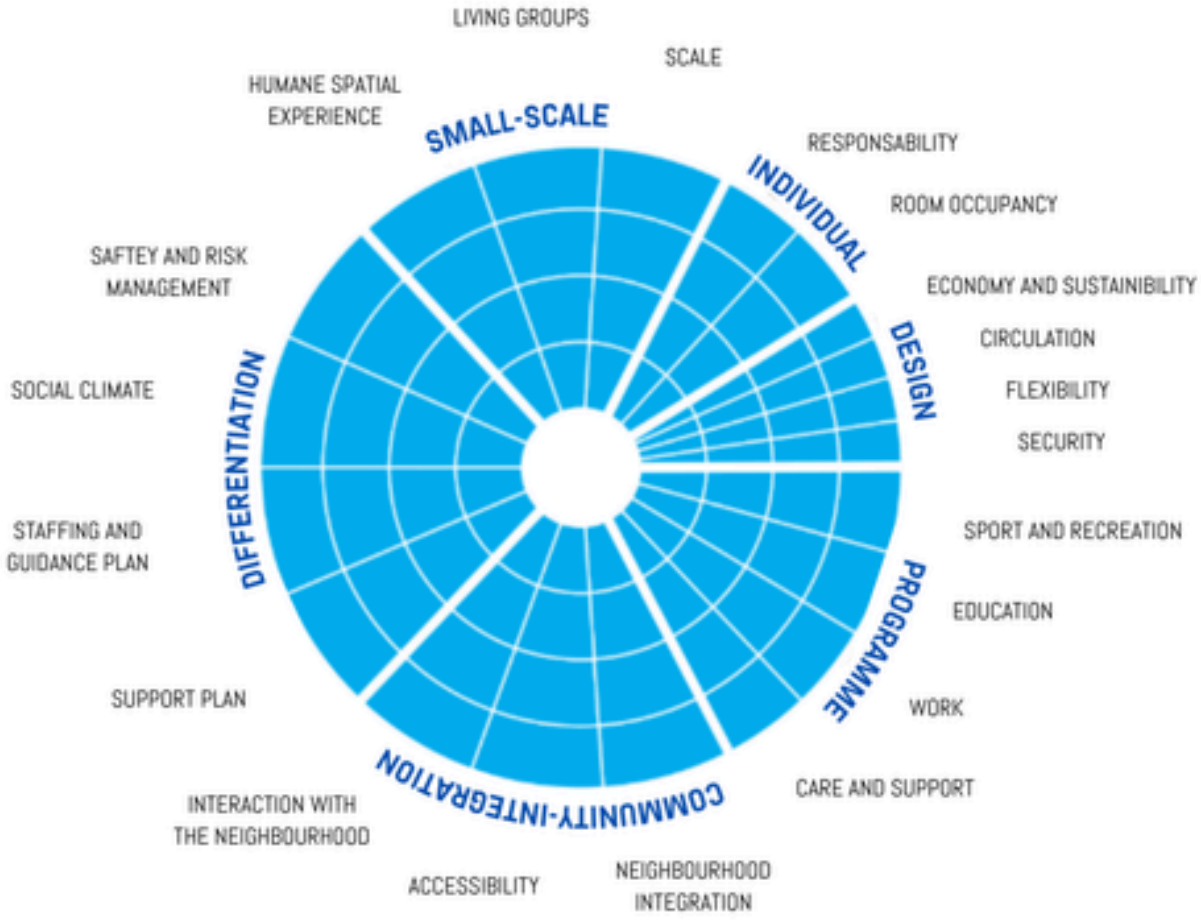


Figure 1. Detention House Quality Wheel (DHQW), developed by Sarah Holbrouck (2016). The Wheel visualises the extent to which a detention project reflects the principles of the detention-house model across twenty criteria.

1. SMALL-SCALE

Small-scale detention is assessed through:

SCALE

the overall capacity of the facility;

LIVING GROUPS

the extent to which residents live together in small groups;

HUMANE SPATIAL EXPERIENCE

whether the physical environment is personal, domestic and non-institutional.

Small-scale organisation is not simply about reducing the number of residents. It creates the conditions for recognition, meaningful relationships, individual support and a living environment that resembles ordinary life as closely as possible.



Examples from practice: the detention house in Kortrijk (Belgium) works with living groups of at most twelve people, and Hope Street (United Kingdom) is a small residential community that was co-designed with justice-involved women.[10]

2. DIFFERENTIATION

Differentiation is assessed through:

SUPPORT PLAN
the existence of an individual plan covering detention, development and reintegration;

STAFFING AND GUIDANCE PLAN
the organisation and specialisation of staff and support;

SOCIAL CLIMATE
the possibility of adapting programmes and daily regimes to different groups and needs;

SAFETY AND RISK MANAGEMENT
the possibility of adapting security measures to the needs, risks and programme of different groups.

The underlying principle is that detention should not impose the same pathway on every person. The organisation, support, security and progression of detention should respond to individual circumstances and development.



Example from practice: in the small-scale judicial youth facility (KVJJ) in The Hague (the Netherlands), each resident has a personal plan that allows activities such as school and sports to continue as they did before detention.[11]

3. PROXIMITY AND COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

The connection between the detention house and its surrounding community is assessed through:

NEIGHBOURHOOD INTEGRATION

the location and physical relationship of the detention house with its surroundings;

NEIGHBOURHOOD INTERACTION

reciprocal use of facilities, services, activities and opportunities between the detention house and the community;

ACCESSIBILITY

access to public transport, infrastructure and the wider community.

A detention house should therefore not function as an isolated institution. It should remain physically and socially connected to the society to which young adults will return. The original Quality Wheel explicitly considers reciprocal interaction: the community can provide opportunities to residents, while residents and detention houses can also contribute to the surrounding community.

For young adults in particular, this connection is essential for maintaining family and social relationships, accessing education and employment, and creating continuity between detention and life after release.



Examples from practice: the transition house in Leuven (Belgium) is located in the city centre, close to public transport and services, while Pis d'Acollida (Spain) shares a community room with its neighbourhood.[12]

4. THE INDIVIDUAL

The position of the individual within the detention house is assessed through:

RESPONSIBILITY

opportunities to take responsibility for everyday life, work and contribution to society;

ROOM OCCUPANCY

the availability of individual living space and privacy.

The Quality Wheel, therefore, recognises residents as active participants in daily life rather than passive recipients of institutional routines. Everyday responsibilities such as cooking, cleaning, working and contributing to the community can become opportunities to practise autonomy and prepare for independent life.

This dimension is especially important for young adults, as the transition to adulthood involves precisely the gradual development of independence, responsibility and self-direction.



Example from practice: the residential home of the RISE Foundation (Malta) offers residents high levels of individual autonomy in organising their daily lives.[13]

5. PROGRAMME

The programme available to residents is assessed through:

- **CARE AND SUPPORT**
- **WORK**
- **EDUCATION**
- **SPORT AND RECREATION**

A detention house should provide access to the activities and support required for personal development and successful reintegration. This includes appropriate medical, psychological and therapeutic support, meaningful work, education and vocational training, and opportunities for sport, culture and recreation.

For young adults, these elements should not be treated as separate activities added to detention. Together, they form part of a coherent developmental trajectory that strengthens skills, wellbeing, identity and future prospects.



Example from practice: the Larvik unit (Norway), dedicated exclusively to young adults aged 18–25, combines school activities (including higher education for some residents) with stress and anger management, group meetings and physical exercise.[14]

6. DESIGN-RELATED CHARACTERISTICS

Finally, the Quality Wheel assesses several characteristics of the physical environment:

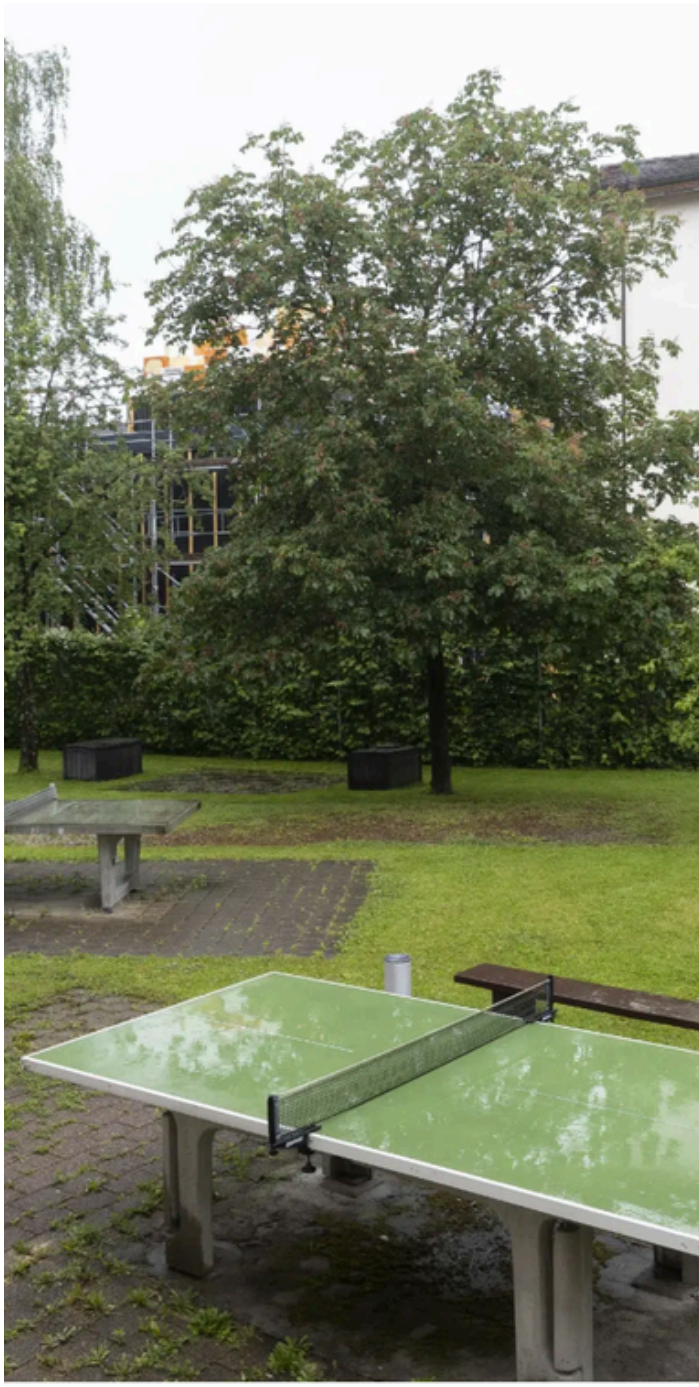
SECURITY
the extent to which security measures are naturally and unobtrusively integrated into the design;

FLEXIBILITY
whether spaces can adapt to different uses and changing needs;

CIRCULATION
whether unnecessary institutional circulation space is avoided and spaces are meaningfully connected;

ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABILITY
investment in sustainable locations and flexible, durable accommodation.

These criteria reflect an important principle of the BRIDGE Blueprint: architecture is not merely the setting in which detention takes place. The built environment actively influences relationships, autonomy, wellbeing, behaviour and perceptions of safety. A detention house should therefore be designed as an environment for development rather than as a smaller version of a conventional prison.



Example from practice: the semi-detention facility in Winterthur (Switzerland) uses flexible living units that can serve different target groups depending on local needs.[15]

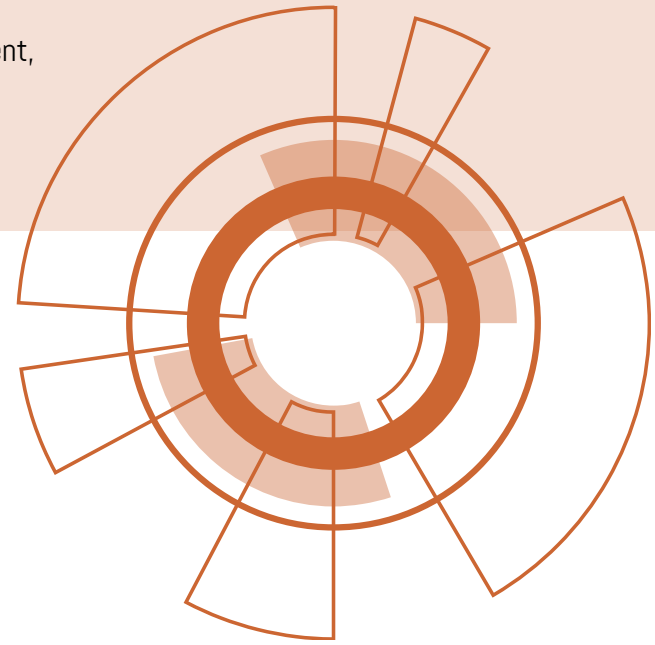
2. HOW TO USE THE DETENTION HOUSE QUALITY WHEEL

The DHQW uses a questionnaire to assess each of the twenty criteria. Depending on the criterion and the extent to which the underlying conditions are met, a project receives a score ranging from 0 to 4. The possible scores differ per criterion: for most criteria one point is awarded for each condition that is met, while for others only certain values are possible, such as 0, 2 or 4. These scores can then be represented visually in the Quality Wheel.

The resulting wheel makes it possible to see at a glance where a project is strongly aligned with a detention house and where further development may be required. The wheel presents a profile, not an overall rating. Holbrouck noted that the instrument does not produce an overall percentage; in this blueprint, the scores are deliberately not added up into a single figure, because a strong score in one dimension can hide a serious weakness in another.

The value of the instrument lies not only in the scores. Its main purpose is to create a structured conversation about quality. It can be used:

- during the development of a new detention house;
- when selecting or assessing a location;
- during architectural and organisational design;
- for self-assessment of an existing facility;
- as a basis for dialogue between residents, staff, management, policymakers and community partners;
- to identify priorities for further development.



3. USING THE DETENTION HOUSE QUALITY WHEEL FOR YOUNG ADULTS

The original Detention House Quality Wheel was developed as a general instrument for assessing sustainable detention projects. The BRIDGE Blueprint applies it specifically to detention houses for young adults aged 18–25. Its focus on small scale, differentiation, community integration, responsibility, meaningful programmes and humane architecture is highly relevant to the principles identified throughout the BRIDGE project.

When applied to young adults, the criteria should be interpreted through a developmental lens.

The assessment should consider not only whether particular facilities, programmes or organisational features exist, but whether they create opportunities for young adults to:

- develop autonomy and decision-making skills;
- take increasing responsibility for everyday life;
- maintain meaningful relationships and community connections;
- participate in decisions affecting their lives;
- access education, employment and other opportunities;
- acquire practical and social skills; and
- prepare for life after detention.

The same criterion may therefore require a specific interpretation for young adults. Responsibility, for example, concerns not only having tasks but having genuine opportunities to make choices and learn from them. Community interaction concerns not only proximity to services, but whether young adults can meaningfully access them and maintain connections outside the detention house. Differentiation should take into account the different needs and developmental stages within the 18–25 age group. This distinction is essential. A facility can meet a structural criterion without offering young adults meaningful autonomy, participation or access to the community: a house can be small yet run like a conventional prison, or be located in a city centre while its residents rarely leave it. The five areas are therefore not an optional addition to the Quality Wheel; they are what make its application relevant to young adults.

The five BRIDGE areas are essential for this interpretation:

- **Development**: opportunities to acquire skills, build confidence and move towards greater independence;
- **Relationships**: meaningful and constructive relationships with peers, staff, family and others;
- **Community**: continued connection to ordinary community life and opportunities;
- **Autonomy:** genuine opportunities to make choices and take responsibility;
- **Participation**: a meaningful voice in decisions affecting daily life and the detention house.

In this way, the DHQW provides a practical bridge between the principles of the BRIDGE Blueprint and their implementation, helping stakeholders assess and continuously improve the physical environment, organisation and daily practices of detention houses for young adults.

4. TESTING THE QUALITY WHEEL IN PRACTICE



Exodus Utrecht

The Quality Wheel and its application to young adults were presented and discussed during the third BRIDGE joint learning session in September 2026. Participants from several European countries received it as a relevant and practical instrument. It was described as practical enough to guide the development of new detention houses: as a talking piece, a tool for reflection and even a basis for institutional plans. Its robustness as an evaluation instrument will need to be tested further through practical use in the coming years.[16]

The Quality Wheel itself has already been applied in practice. In her research, Holbrouck used it to assess four Exodus houses in the Netherlands that she visited, the first planned detention house of De Huizen, the designs of two Flemish youth institutions and a number of student designs. The four Exodus houses produced very similar wheels, reflecting their shared small-scale approach, and the assessment also showed which of them could serve as a closed detention house and which only as an open one. The designs for the youth institutions scored well on most criteria, but less well on their location. Holbrouck evaluated the method positively: the wheel shows at a glance where a facility scores well or less well, and the questionnaire is easy to complete, although some criteria, such as the circulation area, are difficult to score when information is limited. These applications concerned the original Quality Wheel. Guidelines for applying it to young adults still need to be developed and tested in practice, together with staff and young adults.[17]

Practitioners also recognised the dimensions from their own work. When describing inspirational practices across Europe, the same themes emerged intuitively, which suggests that the Quality Wheel captures what matters in practice. Where these dimensions were largely implicit a few years ago, they are now explicit, making it easier to describe what small-scale detention actually means. At the same time, a meaningful assessment of an existing facility requires time on site and cannot rely on external observation alone.

Finally, the experience of Italy shows that a sound model does not sustain itself. Italy's juvenile detention system, which also accommodates young adults up to the age of 25, has long been regarded as a small-scale model. Most of its twenty juvenile detention centres met small-scale criteria, and research by Antigone found that both staff and young people experience life in detention as better with smaller numbers. Since 2023, however, the population of these centres has risen by around 50%. This rise was driven not by more serious offending but by the so-called Caivano decree, which introduced stricter penalties and expanded pre-trial detention for minors. The resulting overcrowding has made it increasingly difficult to individualise support and to differentiate between age groups. The decree also allows young people who turn eighteen to be transferred to adult prisons after disciplinary sanctions. A detention house that scores well on the Quality Wheel therefore also needs safeguards in policy and practice.[18]

PART II: EUROPEAN RECOMMENDATIONS

As the following parts of this blueprint show, detention houses for young adults are both necessary and achievable.

Across Europe, promising practices already exist. Various inspirational practices have shown that detention can be organised differently. At the same time, these initiatives often remain fragmented, localised or dependent on individual champions.[19] The challenge is therefore no longer to identify promising approaches, but to create the policy frameworks, partnerships and investments needed to make them sustainable and scalable.

The following recommendations are addressed to European institutions, national governments, justice administrations, local authorities and civil society organisations.[20] Together, they form a roadmap towards a more holistic approach to young adults in detention.

RECOMMENDATION 1: RECOGNISE YOUNG ADULTHOOD AS A DISTINCT DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE

Young adults aged 18–25 occupy a unique position within criminal justice systems. While legally considered adults, they continue to experience significant cognitive, emotional and social development.[21] Policies and detention practices should recognise young adulthood as a distinct developmental phase requiring specific responses. European standards already leave room for this: Council of Europe recommendations allow young adults to be dealt with in a way comparable to juveniles where appropriate.[22]

- Develop age-specific policies for young adults.
- Improve data collection on the 18–25 age group.
- Promote awareness of developmental research among policymakers and practitioners.
- Ensure continuity between youth and adult services.

RECOMMENDATION 2:
DRIVE INNOVATION TOWARDS SMALL-SCALE DETENTION HOUSES

The transition towards small-scale, community-oriented detention should be gradual and evidence-based. Governments should create space for experimentation, evaluate outcomes and progressively scale up successful models until they become the preferred approach for young adults.

- Fund pilot projects and innovation programmes.
- Invest in small-scale detention houses.
- Limit group sizes.
- Promote local and community-based alternatives.
- Create flexible regulatory frameworks.
- Promote international exchange and shared learning.
- Evaluate and scale successful initiatives.
- Align funding and governance between justice, welfare and local authorities to enable integrated, long-term trajectories.

RECOMMENDATION 3:
BUILD DIFFERENTIATED TRAJECTORIES

Young adults are not a homogeneous group. Detention systems should offer differentiated environments, interventions and support that reflect individual needs, strengths and aspirations. Every young adult should have access to a tailored pathway that maximises opportunities for personal development and successful reintegration.

- Develop different houses and living environments.
- Create flexible progression pathways.
- Tailor education, vocational training and employment opportunities to individual needs.
- Provide meaningful cultural, sporting and community activities.
- Strengthen partnerships with educational institutions and employers.
- Facilitate family contact and participation in planning.
- Develop mentoring programmes and strengthen community connections.
- Develop gender-sensitive approaches and provision for young women.

RECOMMENDATION 4:
EMBED DETENTION WITHIN COMMUNITIES

Reintegration begins long before release. Detention environments should maintain strong links with the communities to which young adults will return.

- Locate facilities close to communities.
- Develop partnerships with local organisations.
- Promote volunteering and community engagement.
- Invest in neighbourhood relations.

RECOMMENDATION 5:
INVOLVE PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE ON DIFFERENT LEVELS

Young adults possess valuable expertise regarding their own experiences and needs. Their perspectives should inform both individual trajectories and system development.

- Establish resident councils.
- Develop feedback systems.
- Include people with lived experience in policy design.
- Promote participatory evaluation methods.

RECOMMENDATION 6:
INVEST IN SPECIALISED STAFF AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Young adults benefit most from professionals who understand their developmental needs and work together to build trusting, consistent relationships. Detention systems should invest in specialised staff and multidisciplinary collaboration as the foundation of a safe, supportive and effective detention.

- Develop specialised training programmes on young adult development.
- Promote multidisciplinary collaboration across disciplines and services.
- Invest in staff wellbeing, retention and stable staff teams.
- Strengthen relationship-building skills and trauma-informed practice.
- Embed relational security in organisational culture, daily practice and policy frameworks.

RECOMMENDATION 7: DEVELOP EUROPEAN QUALITY STANDARDS FOR DETENTION HOUSES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Europe currently lacks a shared framework for assessing whether detention houses for young adults provide the conditions needed for positive development. Common quality standards can support learning, accountability and continuous improvement. The Detention House Quality Wheel, as applied to young adults in Part I of this blueprint, offers a starting point for such standards. European benchmarks should, however, be developed on the basis of further experience with the instrument and its application to young adults, rather than simply adopted from current scores.

- Develop European benchmarks.
- Promote peer learning.
- Establish monitoring frameworks.
- Support comparative research.
- Use the Quality Wheel as a shared reference for self-assessment and peer learning, complement it with guidelines for young adults, and base European benchmarks on the experience gained.

Young adults represent one of the greatest opportunities for positive change within criminal justice systems. The challenge is not whether Europe can afford to invest in the positive development of young adults in detention. The challenge is whether Europe can afford not to.

PART III: UNDERSTANDING YOUNG ADULTHOOD

1. YOUNG ADULTHOOD AS A CRITICAL DEVELOPMENTAL PHASE

1.1 MORE THAN A LEGAL CATEGORY

Across Europe, the age of eighteen represents an important legal transition. Individuals become recognised as adults and, within many justice systems, move from youth justice frameworks into adult justice frameworks. This transition often involves a fundamental change in how young people are approached: from systems focused on education, support and development towards systems primarily organised around punishment, security and legal responsibility. However, human development does not follow legal boundaries.[23]

Research from neuroscience, psychology, sociology and criminology demonstrates that development continues well beyond the eighteenth birthday. Cognitive capacities, emotional regulation, impulse control, identity formation and decision-making continue to mature throughout the early and mid-twenties.[24] Young adults are capable of responsibility, but they are also still developing many of the skills and experiences required to navigate adult life.

Young adulthood should therefore not be understood merely as a legal category. It is a distinct developmental phase characterised by transition, exploration and growth. During these years, individuals gradually build independence, establish their identities and develop the foundations of their adult lives.

This understanding is particularly important within justice systems. Treating young adults solely as adults risks overlooking their developmental stage and missing opportunities for positive change. Worse, it can reinforce instability and disrupt development that is still under way.



1.2 EMERGING ADULTHOOD

The period between approximately eighteen and twenty-five years old is increasingly recognised as a distinct phase often referred to as emerging adulthood.[25] During this period, individuals experience a range of interconnected transitions: completing education, entering employment, developing relationships, becoming financially independent and establishing their place within society.[26]

Young adulthood is a time in which people explore who they are and who they want to become.[27] Experiences during this phase can strongly influence future opportunities, wellbeing and social participation.

At the same time, young adulthood is not experienced in the same way by everyone. For some, it is a period of opportunity supported by stable relationships, education and employment. For others, it is shaped by exclusion, poverty, trauma, unstable housing or limited access to support.[28]

This combination of vulnerability and potential makes young adulthood a particularly important period for intervention. Young adults are still developing, but they are also highly capable of learning, adapting and changing. Supportive environments, meaningful relationships and opportunities for responsibility can have a lasting impact on their future trajectories.

Justice systems should therefore recognise young adulthood not only as a period of risk, but also as a period of possibility.

1.3 YOUNG ADULTS IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEMS

Across Europe, young adults are significantly overrepresented within criminal justice systems.[29] More than 120,000 young adults aged 18–25 are currently detained across Europe.[30] As section 2 shows, many young adults entering detention have experienced multiple and intersecting challenges.[31]

These experiences do not excuse behaviour that causes harm. Rather, they provide important context for understanding the circumstances in which many young adults develop and the support required to prevent further exclusion.

A key challenge identified across countries is that young adults often occupy an uncertain position between youth and adult justice systems. Once they reach adulthood, they frequently lose access to youth-oriented approaches that recognise development, education and support. At the same time, adult detention systems often do not adapt sufficiently to their specific developmental needs. As a result, many young adults fall between two systems: considered too old for youth justice, but not fully recognised as a distinct group within adult justice.[32]

This gap is particularly significant because it occurs during a crucial period of life. The first experiences with the criminal justice system can influence education, employment, relationships, identity and future opportunities for years to come.[33] A justice response for young adults should therefore go beyond managing offending behaviour. It should create the conditions in which responsibility, personal development and reintegration can grow.

2. VULNERABILITIES, NEEDS AND STRENGTHS

2.1 BEYOND THE OFFENCE

Young adults entering detention are often described through legal categories, risk assessments and criminal records. While these elements are relevant, they rarely tell the full story. Behind every legal file is a young person whose life has been shaped by a unique combination of experiences, opportunities, challenges and relationships. The comparative analysis conducted within the BRIDGE project shows remarkable similarities across countries. Despite differences in legislation, detention systems and institutional structures, young adults in detention frequently share common patterns of vulnerability and disadvantage. [34]

Research and practice consistently show that young adults in detention are disproportionately affected by:

- educational exclusion;
- unemployment or precarious employment;
- unstable housing;
- poverty and financial insecurity;
- family conflict or family disruption;
- mental health difficulties and substance use problems;
- traumatic experiences;
- social marginalisation.

These challenges seldom occur in isolation. A young person who leaves school early may struggle to find employment, and limited employment opportunities may increase financial stress. Housing instability may weaken social relationships, and mental health problems may remain untreated. Over time, these difficulties can reinforce one another and contribute to contact with the criminal justice system.

2.2 TRAUMA, WELLBEING AND SUPPORT

For many young adults, experiences of adversity precede contact with the justice system. These may include neglect, abuse, exposure to violence, family instability, loss of caregivers or parental incarceration.[35] Such experiences can influence emotional regulation, trust, self-esteem and relationships with others. Trauma is not always visible. Some young adults express distress through withdrawal, anxiety or depression, while others respond through aggression, impulsivity or risk-taking behaviour.

Mental health difficulties are common, yet access to appropriate support is often limited, and stigma or previous negative experiences may prevent young adults from seeking help.[36] Building trust is therefore essential. Support is most effective when it is based on meaningful relationships, respect and consistency. Mental health and wellbeing should not be treated as separate issues addressed only through specialised interventions; they are fundamental elements of development and reintegration.

2.3 BUILDING THE FOUNDATIONS OF ADULT LIFE

Education, employment and housing are not only practical needs; they are central to identity, independence and social participation. Many young adults express aspirations that are often described simply as wanting a "normal life": stable work, financial independence, meaningful activities and a sense of belonging. Detention can also provide opportunities to reconnect with learning, develop skills and prepare for future employment. Stable housing is equally important. Without safe and sustainable accommodation, maintaining education, employment and positive relationships becomes significantly more difficult.

Relationships are part of these foundations. Family members, friends, mentors and other supportive figures can provide emotional support, encouragement and practical assistance during the transition to adulthood. Relationships are not always straightforward, however. Some young adults have experienced family conflict,[38] violence, neglect or harmful peer influences. Others have supportive families but lack wider social networks that can help them build an independent future. Positive relationships are among the most important factors in desistance: support from family, friends and mentors, together with a stable social network, helps young adults to move away from offending.[39] Young adults therefore need opportunities to develop supportive relationships both inside and outside the detention environment.

Vulnerabilities should never become the only lens through which young adults are viewed. Many demonstrate significant resilience despite adversity, and possess strengths such as creativity, adaptability, perseverance, practical skills, social intelligence and aspirations for the future. Desistance research shows that lasting change also depends on a meaningful sense of identity: young adults move away from offending when they can see themselves as more than someone who has offended.[40] A development-oriented approach therefore requires more than preventing reoffending. It supports young adults in building the foundations of a stable adult life and approaches them as people with capacities to develop.

2.4 YOUNG WOMEN IN DETENTION: AN OFTEN INVISIBLE GROUP

Although young women represent a relatively small proportion of the young adults in detention, their experiences deserve specific attention. Across Europe, young women are often accommodated within general women's units and rarely benefit from age-specific provision.[41] Research consistently shows high levels of trauma, victimisation, mental health difficulties, caregiving responsibilities and social vulnerability among this group. Despite these realities, young women frequently remain invisible within policy and practice. The BRIDGE Blueprint therefore emphasises that gender-sensitive and age-sensitive approaches should be developed simultaneously.[42]

3 HOW DETENTION SHAPES DEVELOPMENT

3.1 DEVELOPMENT DOES NOT PAUSE

Detention is often understood as a pause in normal life. For young adults, it rarely is. The years between eighteen and twenty-five are among the most important in forming adult identity, social roles and future opportunity, and decisions made during detention can shape education, employment, relationships and wellbeing for years afterwards. Development does not stop when someone enters detention: detention either supports its continuation or actively disrupts it. The question is never whether detention shapes development, but how.

This creates a paradox in large prison institutions. Young adulthood is a period of increasing independence: making decisions, solving problems, taking responsibility, building relationships and preparing for adult life. Large prison institutions often demand the opposite. Meals are scheduled, movement is restricted, contact is controlled, decisions are made by the institution and responsibility is limited. Young adults are asked to develop autonomy inside environments that give them little chance to practise it.[43] Over time, some adapt by becoming dependent on external structure. This institutionalisation can reduce initiative and confidence, make decision-making more difficult and complicate adaptation after release.[44] The risk grows wherever detention offers few opportunities for participation, responsibility or meaningful engagement, and it matters most for young adults who are still learning to navigate adult life.

3.2 RELATIONSHIPS, IDENTITY AND HOPE

Detention can disrupt the relationships described in section 2.3. Distance from home, restricted contact and stigma weaken support networks precisely when identity is still forming, while placement in large, anonymous environments can expose young adults to negative peer influence instead.[45] What matters is whether the relationships young adults experience in detention contribute to their growth.

Detention also plays a part in how young adults answer fundamental questions about who they are and who they want to become. The risk is that it reinforces a single identity: that of someone who has offended. When young adults are seen primarily through the lens of risk or punishment, room for other identities narrows, such as student, employee, family member, volunteer, artist, athlete, neighbour or citizen. The broader the range of positive identities available, the greater the room for change. Hope is an important driver of that change.[46] Young adults who believe they can build a different future are more likely to engage with education, employment and personal development, while environments that communicate hopelessness tend to reinforce disengagement. Without a future perspective, detention risks becoming little more than waiting. With one, it becomes a period of transition and constructive preparation.

PART IV: THE BRIDGE VISION 'FROM DETENTION TO DEVELOPMENT'

The previous chapters demonstrate that young adulthood is a critical developmental phase characterised by both vulnerability and potential. They also highlighted how detention environments actively shape development, either positively or negatively.

The BRIDGE Blueprint proposes detention houses for young adults. This approach is built on five areas that emerged consistently throughout the BRIDGE project, the comparative analysis of six European countries, and the examination of promising practices across Europe.

These areas are not programmes or interventions. They are foundational values that should guide the design, organisation and evaluation of detention environments for young adults.



DEVELOPMENT

Young adults should leave detention better equipped for life than when they entered. This approach does not diminish accountability or overlook the harm that may have been caused. Instead, it recognises that accountability becomes meaningful when young adults are given genuine opportunities to learn, develop and build a different future. Detention environments should therefore be organised around the goal of supporting development.

Development or transition is a broad and multidimensional process that extends far beyond formal education or vocational training. It includes personal growth, emotional development, social skills, mental wellbeing, identity formation, education, employment, citizenship and participation. It takes place through everyday experiences, relationships and opportunities. Every interaction, activity and decision within detention can contribute to learning, growth and preparation for life after release. For this reason, each aspect of daily practice should be guided by a simple but fundamental question: how does this contribute to the future of this young adult?

RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are among the most powerful drivers of change. Across the promising practices examined within the BRIDGE project, a consistent finding emerged: people change through relationships.[47] Relationships shape behaviour, wellbeing, identity and motivation. Detention houses for young adults should therefore actively invest in building and maintaining positive relationships rather than treating them as secondary aspects of detention. Professionals play a crucial role in this process by building trust, providing stability, encouraging responsibility, supporting future planning and modelling positive ways of relating to others. Consistency is especially important, as young adults benefit from the presence of stable adults who accompany them throughout their trajectory.

Relationships extend beyond professionals. Family members, friends, mentors and other supportive figures often represent important sources of resilience and support. Where these relationships are positive and safe, detention systems should actively strengthen and maintain them. Strong social networks create essential bridges between detention and community life, helping young adults sustain positive change and build a future beyond detention.

The BRIDGE project also highlights the importance of relational security as a foundation for safe and supportive environments. While safety is often associated with physical measures such as walls, locks and procedures, relational security is built through trust, dialogue, consistency, meaningful interaction and a deep understanding of individuals.[48] Safety emerges not only from control, but also from relationships that foster respect, connection and mutual understanding. In this way, strong relationships contribute simultaneously to development, wellbeing and security. These relationships form part of the wider ecosystem of the detention house: the web of connections between residents, staff, visitors and local partners that shapes, and is continuously reshaped by, everyone involved.

COMMUNITY

Rather than separating individuals from their communities, detention should maintain and strengthen social connections. Since young adults will return to society, reintegration should begin from the very first day of detention.[49] Every aspect of the detention experience should therefore contribute to preparing young adults for a successful return to community life.

Achieving this requires active collaboration between detention houses and a wide range of community partners, including local government, schools, employers, housing providers, healthcare services, sports clubs, cultural organisations and volunteer networks.[50] These partnerships create opportunities for education, employment, participation and social inclusion, helping young adults maintain meaningful links with the wider community. These partners are not merely resources the detention house draws upon: as participants in the same ecosystem, they are themselves affected by, and help shape the detention house. Community involvement is therefore not an addition to detention, but a fundamental component.

AUTONOMY

Autonomy is an essential part of development and is learned primarily through experience. Decision-making, planning and self-management cannot be acquired through instruction alone; they require opportunities for practice.[51] A detention house should therefore create environments in which young adults can take responsibility in meaningful ways and gradually develop the confidence and skills needed to manage their own lives.[52]

Everyday activities play a crucial role in strengthening autonomy. Tasks such as preparing meals, managing finances, organising daily routines, participating in education, engaging in employment and maintaining living spaces provide practical opportunities to develop responsibility and independence. These experiences help young adults build the competencies required for successful participation in society and independent living beyond detention.

At the same time, autonomy does not mean the absence of support. Young adults often need guidance as they learn to handle increasing levels of responsibility. The role of professionals is therefore to support, coach and encourage rather than to take responsibility away from them. By combining opportunities for autonomy with appropriate support, detention can prepare young adults for life beyond institutions, with the ultimate goal of fostering independence, active citizenship and meaningful participation in society.

PARTICIPATION

Participation is a fundamental element because it enables young adults to take an active role in shaping their own growth and future. When young adults are involved in decisions that affect them, they develop a stronger sense of ownership, motivation, responsibility and self-confidence. People are more likely to engage in change when they have a voice in the process, making participation an important driver of personal development. Detention environments that remove all opportunity for participation unintentionally remove opportunity for development.

Participation should be embedded in everyday life and can take many different forms, including individual planning, house meetings, resident councils, feedback mechanisms and shared decision-making. While the specific structures may differ across settings, the underlying principle remains the same: young adults should have meaningful opportunities to influence matters that affect their lives. The BRIDGE project also highlights the value of involving young adults and people with lived experience in the design, evaluation and improvement detention itself and its services. Their perspectives contribute to environments that are more responsive, effective and humane, demonstrating that participation should extend beyond individual trajectories and also shape organisational development.

Participation is more than a management strategy; it is a practical expression of active citizenship. By contributing to decisions, solving problems collectively and engaging with their communities, young adults develop skills and attitudes that remain valuable long after detention ends. In this way, participation supports not only personal development but also the capacity to take an active and responsible role in society.

PART V: BUILDING DETENTION HOUSES FOR YOUNG ADULTS

The previous chapters established why young adults require a distinct approach to detention and introduced the five areas from the BRIDGE Vision. This section translates these areas into concrete practices and organisational models. The question is no longer why detention houses for young adults are needed. The question is how it can be organised in practice.

The BRIDGE Blueprint proposes three interconnected principles: small scale, differentiation and community integration.



SMALL-SCALE

Small-scale detention is one of the fundamental building blocks of detention houses for young adults. The BRIDGE project consistently demonstrates that scale is not merely a question of capacity or infrastructure, but a core organisational principle that shapes the quality of daily life, relationships and reintegration. Smaller environments create the conditions for meaningful interaction, personalised support, participation, responsibility and successful community integration. For young adults, whose development is strongly influenced by social relationships and a sense of belonging, the scale and organisation of the detention environment are therefore of critical importance.

Small-scale detention is not simply a smaller version of a traditional prison. It represents a fundamentally different philosophy in which young adults are recognised as individuals rather than as anonymous numbers, and where professionals have the time and opportunity to build trusting relationships.

The BRIDGE Blueprint recommends living groups of approximately seven to ten young adults, organised within facilities accommodating no more than thirty residents. Stable multidisciplinary teams are assigned to each living group, providing continuity, consistency and personalised support. This creates an environment that combines the benefits of community living with the individual attention necessary for healthy development.

The physical environment is an integral part of this philosophy. Architecture is not a neutral backdrop but an active contributor to development, influencing behaviour, wellbeing, stress levels, relationships, autonomy and perceptions of safety. Detention houses for young adults therefore require buildings that actively support growth rather than reinforce institutionalisation. Facilities should be human in scale, avoid large anonymous structures and provide an environment that feels as home-like as possible, promoting dignity, familiarity and comfort. Access to green spaces and nature enhances wellbeing, while flexible spaces allow the environment to adapt to different activities, developmental needs and stages of the detention trajectory. At the same time, facilities should remain connected to the surrounding community, reinforcing that young adults continue to be part of society and are preparing for their return.

Well-designed environments also balance privacy with community living. Young adults need private spaces where they can reflect, maintain their identity and experience personal autonomy, alongside shared spaces that encourage interaction, participation and social learning. Communal kitchens, living rooms, study areas and other shared facilities create opportunities to practise everyday responsibilities and independent living skills. In this way, architecture becomes an architecture of autonomy, enabling young adults to develop responsibility, confidence and practical competences rather than dependence on institutional routines.

A smaller scale also enables greater participation and responsibility. Young adults become active members of a living community where they contribute to daily routines, decision-making and mutual support. This mirrors ordinary community life and strengthens practical, social and emotional skills that are essential for successful reintegration.

Importantly, the BRIDGE project challenges the assumption that larger institutions automatically provide greater safety. In practice, small-scale environments often enhance safety because professionals know the young adults personally, recognise changes in behaviour at an early stage and can intervene proactively. A Norwegian study of closed prisons found that small prisons scored better than medium-sized and large prisons on most quality-of-life dimensions, including relationships with staff, the atmosphere and dealing with aggression.[53] Trust, familiarity and constructive relationships become central elements of security, reducing conflict, anonymity and social isolation. Safety is therefore created not only through physical security measures but through the quality of human relationships, the social climate and the environment itself.

By combining small-scale organisation with development-oriented architecture, detention becomes a place where young adults are known, valued and actively engaged in their own development. Rather than merely reducing the size of institutions, this approach fundamentally reimagines detention as a supportive living environment that fosters responsibility, wellbeing and sustainable reintegration into society.
In the Quality Wheel, these elements are assessed through the criteria scale, living groups and humane spatial experience, together with the design-related characteristics (see Part I).



DIFFERENTIATION

Detention houses for young adults recognise that they are not a homogeneous group and that a single approach cannot adequately respond to the diversity of their needs. Some young adults require intensive care and support, while others primarily benefit from educational opportunities, vocational development or preparation for release. Effective detention systems therefore acknowledge individual differences and tailor interventions to the specific circumstances, strengths and developmental needs of each young adult.

Rather than relying on a single institutional model, the BRIDGE Blueprint proposes a network of differentiated environments designed to support different developmental pathways. These may include Education Houses focused on learning and academic progression, Work Houses centred on vocational training and employment, Care Houses providing specialised mental health, trauma and addiction support, Transition Houses preparing young adults for release and independent living, and Secure Small-Scale Units that combine higher levels of security with developmental principles. Together, these environments create a flexible system capable of responding to a wide range of needs while maintaining a consistent developmental focus.

The Larvik unit in Norway shows that this is possible even in a closed, relatively high-security setting. It accommodates at most fifteen young adults aged 18 to 25, is located close to the city centre and allows ten to twelve hours outside the cell each day. Each young person has a personal contact officer, and relational security is treated as an essential part of safety rather than something separate from it. Some young men take part in sports and leisure activities outside the prison together with their contact officer.[54]

A key principle within this approach is that placement should not be determined solely by legal status. Developmental needs, strengths and progress should also play a central role. Young adults should have opportunities to move between different environments as their circumstances evolve, ensuring that support remains relevant and responsive. Progression should be guided by personal growth, engagement and readiness, allowing detention to become a dynamic process that adapts to development rather than a static placement based solely on risk or offence characteristics.

In the Quality Wheel, differentiation is assessed through the support plan, the staffing and guidance plan, the social climate, and safety and risk management (see Part I).





COMMUNITY-INTEGRATION

Community-integration is a fundamental principle of detention houses for young adults. Detention should not isolate young adults from society but actively strengthen their connection with the community, ensuring that every day contributes to their development and prepares them for a successful return to community life.

Young adults should have access to education, vocational training, higher education, literacy programmes and digital skills development, enabling them to build knowledge and improve their future opportunities. Equally important are meaningful employment opportunities that foster responsibility, practical skills, self-confidence and financial independence. Together, education and work provide structure, purpose and a sense of progress throughout the detention trajectory.

Community-integration also requires opportunities to participate in activities that strengthen personal development and social inclusion. Sports, arts, culture, volunteering, community projects and restorative initiatives help young adults develop their identity, improve their wellbeing and experience a sense of belonging. To support this process, each young adult should have an individual development plan covering key life domains such as education, employment, housing, health, relationships and future aspirations. This plan should be developed and regularly reviewed together with the young adult, ensuring that detention remains focused on growth and future participation in society.

Strong social relationships are equally essential for successful reintegration. When family relationships are safe and supportive, families should be actively involved throughout the detention process through visits, family meetings, participation in planning and digital communication[55]. These connections provide emotional support, continuity and stability, helping bridge the gap between detention and community life.

Not all young adults can rely on supportive family networks. Development-oriented detention should therefore actively help build wider social capital by connecting young adults with mentors, volunteers, employers, teachers, peers and community organisations. These relationships create opportunities, expand support networks and strengthen the young adult's sense of belonging. The objective is that no young adult leaves detention without meaningful social connections and realistic pathways to participate in society. By replacing isolation with connection and exclusion with inclusion, community integration becomes one of the strongest foundations for sustainable desistance and long-term reintegration.

In the Quality Wheel, this principle is reflected in the dimension of proximity and community integration, and in the programme criteria for care, work, education, and sport and recreation (see Part I).

PART VI: FROM VISION TO PRACTICE

Detention houses for young adults will not emerge through vision alone. Transforming detention systems requires practical implementation, organisational change, political commitment and long-term partnerships. The BRIDGE project demonstrates that many of the areas described in this blueprint are already being implemented across Europe. The challenge is therefore not to invent entirely new approaches, but to create the conditions under which promising practices can grow, connect and become sustainable.

Turning detention houses for young adults into reality requires more than new legislation or policy frameworks. It depends on building public support, creating space for innovation and establishing a culture of continuous learning. These three elements form the foundation for sustainable reform.

BUILDING SUPPORT

Detention houses for young adults can only succeed when it is supported not only by governments and professionals, but also by local communities. New detention houses often raise understandable concerns among residents about safety, neighbourhood impact or property values. Such concerns should never be dismissed. Community acceptance cannot be expected automatically; it must be earned through openness, transparency and genuine dialogue.[56]

Experience across Europe shows that resistance frequently decreases once communities become actively involved. Rather than isolating detention houses from society, development-oriented detention seeks to strengthen their connection with the surrounding neighbourhood. Local volunteers, community organisations, employers, schools and residents all become potential partners in creating opportunities for young adults. Open communication, neighbourhood activities, shared projects and community ambassadors help replace uncertainty with familiarity and trust.[57]

Importantly, this relationship should be reciprocal. Detention houses for young adults are not only intended to benefit young adults but can also create value for local communities. It strengthens volunteering, stimulates partnerships between organisations, promotes social inclusion and contributes to safer, more cohesive neighbourhoods. Detention houses become part of the community rather than institutions hidden from it.

INNOVATION THROUGH PRACTICE

Transforming detention systems requires experimentation. Many of the most promising initiatives identified within the BRIDGE project did not emerge through comprehensive reforms, but through pilot projects that tested new ideas in practice.[58] Innovation often develops before legislation fully adapts, making experimentation an essential driver of change.

Detention houses for young adults cannot be implemented solely through policy documents or strategic plans. Organisations need opportunities to learn by doing, test new approaches and adapt them based on practical experience. Pilot projects provide space to identify challenges, evaluate outcomes, strengthen professional expertise and build confidence among policymakers and practitioners.

Not every pilot project should become permanent. However, successful initiatives should inform wider system reform. Decisions about scaling up should be guided by evidence rather than assumptions, considering outcomes such as wellbeing, educational participation, employment, housing stability, social relationships and desistance from crime.

Governments and public administrations play a crucial role in enabling innovation. Flexible regulatory frameworks, dedicated funding, cross-sector partnerships and opportunities for experimentation create the conditions in which promising practices can develop. Innovation requires both ambition and the practical freedom to explore new solutions.



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LEARNING AND IMPROVING

Sustainable reform requires systematic monitoring, evaluation and a willingness to learn from both successes and setbacks. Accountability is essential, but evaluation should primarily support improvement rather than compliance alone.

Assessment should extend well beyond traditional security indicators. Detention houses for young adults should monitor educational participation, qualifications, employment readiness, mental health, wellbeing, family relationships, social support, housing stability, community participation and long-term desistance from offending.[59] These broader outcomes provide a more complete understanding of whether detention is achieving its developmental objectives.

Young adults themselves should play an active role in this learning process. Their experiences provide invaluable insight into how detention is perceived and how services can be improved. Regular feedback, interviews, resident surveys and participatory evaluation methods help ensure that reforms remain grounded in the realities of daily life.

Finally, detention houses for young adults should cultivate a genuine learning culture. Good practices should be shared across organisations, sectors and countries, while mistakes should be viewed as opportunities for reflection and improvement. The BRIDGE project itself illustrates the value of international collaboration, demonstrating that sustainable innovation emerges when knowledge, experience and evidence circulate across Europe. Continuous learning is therefore not the final stage of implementation but the mechanism through which detention houses for young adults continue to evolve and improve over time.

SOURCES

The BRIDGE Blueprint is based on a combination of comparative research, policy documents, study visits, expert presentations and international knowledge exchange conducted throughout the BRIDGE project. The following sources are referred to in the footnotes:

[1]Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), pp. 2 and 6; BRIDGE Consortium (2026a).

[2]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a); Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), p. 2.

[3]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a). Many European countries do have some legal provision for young adults: a WODC study found that 34 Council of Europe member states allow for a separate treatment of young adults who committed an offence after their 18th birthday, although the target group and content of these provisions vary widely (Zeijlmans, Sipma & Van der Laan, 2019, pp. 9 and 34). What is missing is a coherent framework that extends into detention.

[4]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a).

[5]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a); Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 353–355.

[6]Weijers et al. (2013), as cited in De Huizen (2019), p. 16; Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 343–344.

[7]Holbrouck (2016).

[8]Holbrouck (2016). The questionnaire and Quality Wheel were later reproduced in De Huizen (2019).

[9]Holbrouck (2016), pp. 34 and 52; see also De Huizen (2019), p. 39.

[10]The practice examples in this section were presented and discussed during the BRIDGE joint learning sessions (2026). For Detention House Kortrijk, see RESCALED (n.d.), 'Detention House Kortrijk', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2023/12/21/detention-house-kortrijk/.

[11]RESCALED (n.d.), 'KVJJ The Hague', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2025/04/08/kvjj-the-hague/.

[12]RESCALED (n.d.), 'Transition House Leuven', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2024/03/08/transition-house-leuven/; RESCALED (n.d.), 'Pis d'Acollida', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2024/02/27/pis-dacollida/.

[13]RESCALED (n.d.), 'RISe Foundation's Residential Home', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2024/02/27/rise-foundations-residential-home/.

[14]RESCALED (n.d.), 'Larvik prison', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2025/10/17/sondre-vestfold-fengsel-larvik-avdeling/.

[15]RESCALED (n.d.), 'HG Winterthur', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2025/12/23/halbgefangenschaft-winterthur/.

[16]This section draws on the discussions during the BRIDGE joint learning sessions (2026).

[17]Holbrouck (2016), pp. 139–193, in particular pp. 175, 185 and 193.

[18]Stroppa (2026).

[19]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a).

[20]These recommendations build on the BRIDGE Policy Brief (BRIDGE Consortium, 2026b).

[21]Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), pp. 2 and 6

[22]Council of Europe Recommendations Rec(2003)20 and Rec(2008)11 (rules 17 and 21.2), as discussed in Rom & Herbots (2009), pp. 31 and 39.

[23]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a); Gailliaert (2026a); Arnett (2000), pp. 471–472 and 477

[24]Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), pp. 2 and 6, De Huizen (2019), p. 14; Anciaux (2024), pp. 4 and 7–9.

[25]Arnett (2000), pp. 469–473; Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), p. 1.

[26]Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), p. 2. The Council of Europe has likewise acknowledged the 'extended transition to adulthood' (Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)20, para. 11, as cited in Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester, 2018, p. 6).

[27]Arnett (2000), pp. 473–474.

[28]Arnett (2000), pp. 477–478.

[29]Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), pp. 2 and 6; Skjærvø et al. (2024), p. 1.

[30]Gailliaert (2026b), citing SPACE I data.

[31]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a); for Belgium, see De Huizen (2019), pp. 14–15.

[32]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a); De Huizen (2019), p. 6; Gailliaert (2026a).

[33]Skjærvø et al., 2024, p. 2; Van der Laan et al., 2012, as cited in De Huizen, 2019, p. 15).

[34]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a); McTaggart (2026); Skjærvø et al. (2024), p. 1.

[35]McTaggart (2026); Skjærvø et al. (2024), pp. 1–3.

[36]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a); McTaggart (2026); De Huizen (2019), pp. 14–15.

[37]De Huizen (2019), p. 14; Weijers et al. (2013), as cited in De Huizen (2019), p. 16.

[38]De Huizen (2019), p. 17; Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 343–344.

[39]Weijers et al. (2013), as cited in De Huizen (2019), p. 16; Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 343–344; Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), p. 2.

[40]Weijers et al. (2013), as cited in De Huizen (2019), p. 16; Matthews, Schiraldi & Chester (2018), p. 2; Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), p. 344.

[41]BRIDGE Consortium (2026a).

[42]BRIDGE Consortium (2026b).

[43]Arditti & Parkman (2011) describe this as the 'developmental paradox' of incarceration and re-entry for young men (as cited in De Huizen, 2019, pp. 9 and 17); see also McTaggart (2026).

[44]McTaggart (2026); on avoiding institutionalisation, see Kilkelly, Forde & Malone (2016), p. 17.

[45]Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 346–347; McTaggart (2026). In the Netherlands, young adults convicted under adult criminal law may share facilities with people over 25, which raises concerns about criminal recruitment (BRIDGE joint learning sessions, 2026).

[46]Weijers et al. (2013), as cited in De Huizen (2019), p. 16, identify hope and a stronger self-image as catalysts for desistance among young adults. More generally, emerging adults tend to be highly optimistic about eventually achieving their personal goals (Arnett, 2000, p. 474). See also Jewkes (2018), as cited in Oostermeijer & Dwyer (2019), p. 25.

[47]Dwyer (2023), as cited in Oostermeijer (2026); Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 343–344.

[48]Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), p. 348, describing relational security as the most effective security measure in youth custody (citing Armytage & Ogloff, 2017; Tighe & Gudjonsson, 2012). For practice examples, see Oostermeijer & Dwyer (2019), p. 4, and Oostermeijer (2026).

[49]Council of Europe Recommendation Rec(2003)20 states that preparation for release should begin on the first day of any custodial measure, with reintegration organised in phases, including through open facilities (Rom & Herbots, 2009, p. 31). See also De Huizen (2019), p. 15; BRIDGE Consortium (2026b).

[50]In Norway's 'import model', regular public services such as healthcare, education, and labour and welfare services remain responsible for providing their services inside detention (BRIDGE Consortium, 2026a).

[51]Arditti & Parkman (2011), as cited in De Huizen (2019), p. 17.

[52]Young people themselves consistently name accepting responsibility for oneself, making independent decisions and becoming financially independent as the most important criteria for adulthood (Arnett, 2000, pp. 472–473).

[53]Johnsen, Granheim and Helgesen, as cited in Holbrouck (2016), p. 41; see also Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 345–346.

[54]Slump (2026); RESCALED (n.d.), 'Larvik prison', https://rescaled-inspire.org/2025/10/17/sondre-vestfold-fengsel-larvik-avdeling/.

[55]De Huizen (2019), p. 17; Dwyer & Oostermeijer (2023), pp. 346–347. Holbrouck concludes from the prison of Beveren (Belgium) that accessibility for visitors has a more direct influence on reintegration than light, air and space, because visits are often the only way for people in detention to stay in contact with society (Holbrouck, 2016, p. 199).

[56]De Huizen (2019), p. 29, drawing on Deprez (2014). In her study of site selection for detention houses, Holbrouck identified local resistance as probably the greatest obstacle to realising a suitable location (Holbrouck, 2016, p. III).

[57]De Huizen (2019), p. 29. Volunteers can play an important role: Exodus in the Netherlands, which runs small-scale houses for people leaving detention, works with roughly as many volunteers as paid staff (Holbrouck, 2016, p. 159).

[58]For example, the small-scale facility in Amsterdam started as a three-year pilot and has since become a permanent part of the regional youth justice system (Dwyer & Oostermeijer, 2023, p. 353).

[59]De Huizen (2019), pp. 30–31.

PRACTICE EXAMPLES AND STUDY VISITS

The detention house in Kortrijk and the transition house in Leuven (Belgium); Larvik prison unit (Norway); KVJJ Amsterdam, KVJJ Rijnmond, KVJJ The Hague, Exodus Nederland and De Tafelberg (the Netherlands); Hope Street (United Kingdom); Pis d'Acollida (Spain); RISE Foundation (Malta); and the semi-detention facility in Winterthur (Switzerland). Descriptions of most of these facilities are available in the RESCALED Inspire database of inspirational practices (https://rescaled-inspire.org/).

INTERNATIONAL LEARNING AND EXCHANGE

The blueprint further draws upon study visits, partner exchanges and discussions with practitioners, policymakers, researchers and people with lived experience from Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Austria, Spain and Switzerland, as well as on contributions from Scotland, Italy and Australia during the three BRIDGE joint learning sessions.

APPENDIX 1: DETENTION HOUSE QUALITY WHEEL QUESTIONNAIRE

SMALL-SCALE

1. Scale

What is the total capacity of the facility?

Number of people	Pts
More than 100	0
Between 50 and 100	2
Fewer than 50	4

2. Living Groups

Do residents live together in small living groups? If so, what is the maximum capacity of a living group?

Answer	Pts
No, MAX. > 24	0
Yes, 12 < MAX. < 24	2
Yes, MAX. < 12	4

3. Human Spatial Experience

How many of the following conditions regarding the spatial experience are met?

- The entrance, lobby and visiting area have a personal, homelike atmosphere.
- Circulation areas that have no additional function do not exceed the following dimensions: 3 metres high, 2 metres wide and 6 metres long. If a circulation area has been assigned an additional function, these dimensions may be exceeded.
- The floor plan is characterised by an organic and dynamic layout rather than a repetitive and impersonal design.
- Inhumane security measures, such as bars and conspicuous perimeter walls, are absent.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

DIFFERENTIATION

4. Support Plan

How many of the following conditions does the support plan meet? The support plan:

- is drawn up at the start of detention and immediately specifies the release date;
- sets out the legal situation, sentences and offences, as well as the current situation and the steps to be taken;
- contains a comprehensive detention plan, i.e. a time-bound plan showing the progression in security, social climate and support;
- contains a reintegration plan.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

5. Staffing and Guidance Plan

How many of the following conditions does the staffing and guidance plan meet?

- Only one security officer or receptionist is present per house.
- Other staff members act as house counsellors and support-plan counsellors.
- Appropriate training and screening are provided for counsellors and management.
- Counsellors contracted from the wider community are involved.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

6. Social Climate

For a differentiated social climate, both of the following conditions must be met:

- It is possible to divide residents into as many target groups as there are different social climates and to manage these groups flexibly. These target groups must be able to function independently.
- A tailored programme is provided for each target group, supported by the necessary infrastructure and guidance.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	0
2	4

7. Safety and Risk Management

For differentiated safety and risk management, the following condition must be met:

- It is possible to provide appropriate safety and risk-management measures for each target group and its corresponding social climate/programme, using both physical and electronic measures.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	4

COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

8. Neighbourhood Integration

How many of the following conditions are met?

- The detention house is located in a city, town or village centre, or close to important infrastructure and amenities.
- Staff living in the immediate vicinity are employed.
- A buffer zone is provided between public and private space.
- Privacy and anonymity can be ensured.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

9. Interaction with the Neighbourhood

How many of the following conditions are met?

- The neighbourhood makes infrastructure available to residents of the detention house, such as sports facilities, multipurpose rooms or classrooms.
- The detention house or prison makes infrastructure available to the neighbourhood, such as sports facilities, multipurpose rooms or classrooms.
- The neighbourhood provides services and activities for residents, such as themed evenings, lectures, cooking sessions or social visits.
- ·Residents provide services or work for the neighbourhood, for example through a social restaurant, animal farm, bicycle repair workshop or woodworking workshop.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	0
2	2
3	3
4	4

10. Accessibility

How many of the following conditions are met?

- The distance to the nearest bus stop, tram stop or railway station is less than 4,500 metres.
- The distance to a local railway station is less than 2,000 metres, or to a main railway station less than 5,000 metres.
- Public transport frequency: more than one bus, tram or train service per hour, or one service with at least two departures in each direction per hour.
- Good accessibility by car: convenient connection to major roads (A, E, N, R roads, etc.) and parking facilities are available.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

THE INDIVIDUAL

11. Responsibility

How many of the following conditions are met?

- Residents are responsible, individually or together with fellow residents, for household tasks such as cooking, laundry and cleaning.
- Residents can contribute to their own living expenses by working and earning money.
- Self-discipline is encouraged.
- Residents can give something back to society, for example by working in a social restaurant or bicycle repair workshop, or by maintaining public green spaces.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

12. Room Occupancy

Does each resident have an individual room? If so, does the room have its own sanitary facilities?

Answer	Pts
No	0
Yes	3
Yes, with private sanitary facilities	4

PROGRAMME

13. Care & Support

How many of the following conditions are met?

- The facilities within the detention house and its surroundings allow for all relevant forms of care, including medical and therapy rooms for both individual and group sessions.
- A sufficiently broad range of care and support services is available—medical, psychological, therapeutic, etc.—both within the detention house and in the surrounding community.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	2
2	4

14. Work

How many of the following conditions are met?

- The facilities in the detention house or its surroundings, depending on the applicable social climate, allow every resident to undertake meaningful work tailored to their abilities, including intellectual or industrial work.
- Residents have the opportunity to carry out household tasks and maintain the building and garden.
- Residents have the opportunity to perform work that benefits the immediate neighbourhood or individual victims.
- Residents have the opportunity to perform work leading to recognised certification as part of vocational training.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

15. Education

How many of the following conditions are met?

- The facilities in the detention house or its surroundings allow for all relevant forms of education, including theoretical and practical training, as well as study rooms and similar facilities.
- A sufficiently broad range of educational and training opportunities is available in the surrounding area and can be accessed either within the detention house or externally.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	2
2	4

16. Sport & Recreation

How many of the following conditions are met?

- Indoor and outdoor sports facilities are available in the detention house or nearby.
- Cultural opportunities are available in the detention house or nearby, such as a theatre/auditorium, library, etc.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	2
2	4

DESIGN-RELATED CHARACTERISTICS

17. Security

Security is integrated into the design as effectively and unobtrusively as possible. How many of the following conditions are met?

- Security measures are discreetly integrated into the design by balancing physical and electronic security measures.
- Natural, everyday or existing elements are used to provide security, for example water features or green areas as boundaries, avoiding bars, or reusing existing separation walls.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	2
2	4

18. Flexibility

How many of the following conditions are met?

- Flexible construction is used: open floor plates with flexible partition walls and/or prefabricated elements and/or mobile facilities and/or modular units, etc.
- Spaces have multiple uses or operate according to different time schedules.
- Multiple entrances are available.
- Different circulation routes/cores are available.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

19. Circulation

How many of the following conditions are met?

- Circulation area per resident, excluding areas with an additional function, is less than 5.9 m².
- Circulation area per resident, excluding areas with an additional function, is less than 3.4 m².
- The need for dedicated circulation space is reduced by connecting rooms directly or by assigning an additional function to circulation areas.
- The height of circulation spaces does not exceed 3 metres.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	1
2	2
3	3
4	4

20. Economy & Sustainability

How many of the following conditions are met?

- Investment is made in a sustainable location.
- Investment is made in flexible and sustainable accommodation.

# conditions met	Pts
0	0
1	2
2	4

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BUILDING RESPONSIBILITY & INCLUSION THROUGH DETENTION HOUSES FOR YOUNGSTERS TO SUPPORT GROWTH & EDUCATION

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