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EUROPEAN

SYMPOSIUM

on Detention houses 2026

IMPACT REPORT





A **MOVEMENT** ACROSS **SECTORS**

Systemic change takes more than one sector. At the ESDH26, policymakers, practitioners, civil society organisations, and people with lived experience joined the same conversation and left with a shared commitment to change: #1000HOUSES.

SYMPOSIUM **STATISTICS**

Attendees	**121**
Speakers	**31**
Countries	**20**
#1000HOUSES commitments	**236**



TIRANA

Elona Hoxha, Albania's Deputy Minister of Justice at the ESDH26

MALTA

Invited to speak at the "Towards Justice That Heals" conference

Shortly after her contribution at the symposium, Deputy Minister Elona Hoxha was invited to speak again, this time in Malta, at RISe Foundation's annual conference "Towards Justice That Heals: Detention Houses as a Way Forward". After visiting the transition house in Valletta, Hoxha spoke alongside Maltese ministers, including Minister Clifton Grima of the Ministry for Justice, Research and Innovation.
The thinking from ESDH26 had travelled with Hoxha to the next stage.

GROWTH **ACROSS EUROPE**

The symposium in Tirana sparked new energy in the Balkan region resulting in **new changemakers joining the movement** and the growth of the Western Balkans Research Network gaining momentum, organised by RESCALED ambassador and symposium co-organiser Olta Qejvani.



THE **SUSTAINABLE VISION** ON DETENTION HOUSES

JUSTICE AS A PILLAR OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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

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

Learn more about SDGs and detention houses



"THE QUESTION IS THEREFORE NO LONGER WHETHER JUSTICE IS RELEVANT TO THE SDGS, BUT HOW JUSTICE SYSTEMS CAN ACTIVELY CONTRIBUTE TO ACHIEVING THEM."



GROUNDED IN EUROPEAN & INTERNATIONAL FRAMEWORKS

Council of the European Union

Council of the EU

Council Conclusions on Small-scale Detention: focusing on social rehabilitation and reintegration in society.

Adopted 9 Oct 2024, 57th session, Geneva

UNHRC

UN Human Rights Council

Resolution 57/9: Social reintegration of persons released from detention and persons subjected to non-custodial measures.

Adopted 9 Oct 2024, 57th session, Geneva

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WHAT IF **JUSTICE BEGAN** NOT IN THE COURTROOM, **BUT IN THE COMMUNITY?**

Poverty, trauma, discrimination and social exclusion often shape people's lives long before they enter the justice system. A socially sustainable justice system recognises this context and seeks to ensure that detention does not deepen inequalities or create new forms of exclusion.

Where and how a sentence is served therefore matters. Detention houses can help people maintain relationships, receive individual support and stay connected to the services they need to build their lives with dignity. Detention houses thereby put the People principle of sustainable development into practice, translating dignity, inclusion and participation into concrete conditions in which detention takes place.

During the European Symposium on Detention Houses, Idil Aydinoglu, Daniel Danglades and Angelica Vieira explored what it means to place people, relationships and communities at the centre of justice.

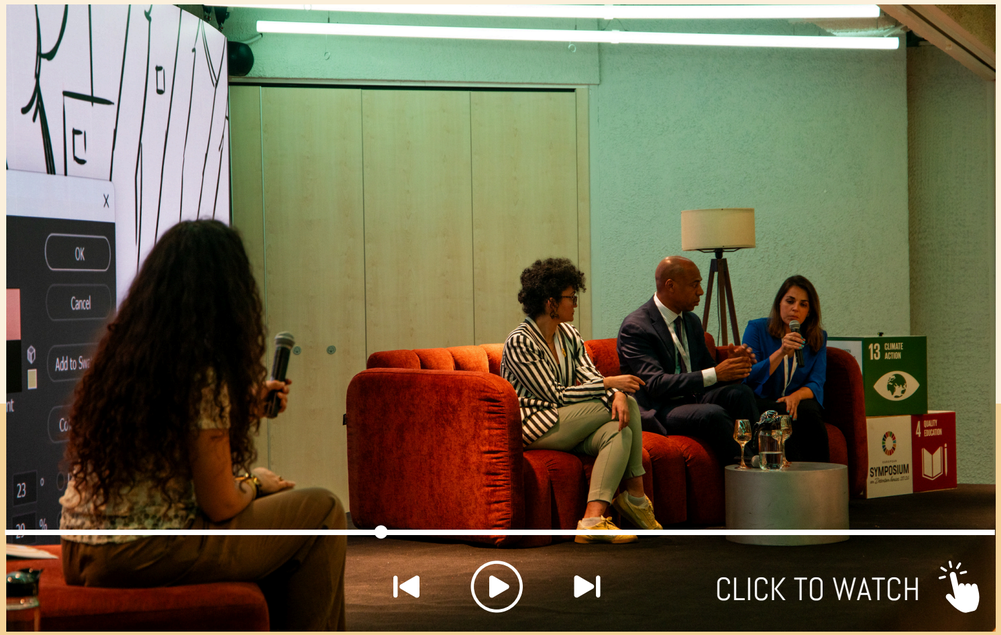


Looking at people beyond labels means recognising the value of their lived experience for reform to be effective and sustainable. They shape it with expertise beyond personal stories, knowledge that policy and research alone cannot provide.

READ MORE

"WE ARE DETERMINED TO END POVERTY AND HUNGER, IN ALL THEIR FORMS AND DIMENSIONS, AND TO ENSURE THAT ALL HUMAN BEINGS CAN FULFIL THEIR POTENTIAL IN DIGNITY AND EQUALITY AND IN A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT."

— Preamble, 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development



READ THE ESSAY

"A JUSTICE ROOTED IN PEACEFUL COHABITATION, RATHER THAN PERMANENT EXCLUSION, CANNOT BE BUILT IN A FORTRESS."

BY **IDIL AYDINOGLU** - REGIONAL PROGRAMME MANAGER, PENAL REFORM INTERNATIONAL EUROPE PROGRAMME (THE NETHERLANDS)

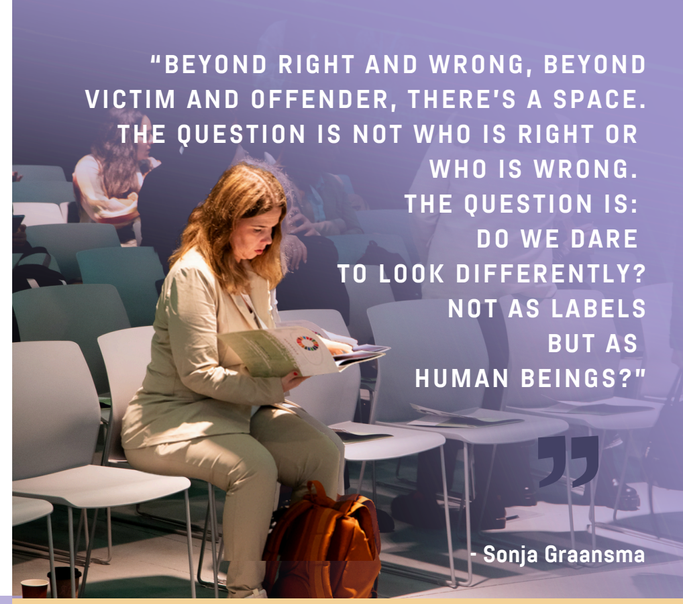


IT IS **NOT** ABOUT **NUMBERS**, BUT ABOUT **PEOPLE.**

In practice, this means organising detention around people's different circumstances, needs and connections to society.

The small scale of a detention house supports stronger relationships, a better understanding of individual needs and more tailored guidance, personal responsibility and autonomy. Because people's lives are shaped by their history, culture, relationships and environment, this individualised approach can support personal growth, reduce harm and strengthen the conditions for desistance.

The location of detention houses within the community is equally important. It helps people maintain contact with family, education, work, healthcare and local services, preserving the connections that support reintegration and continued participation in society.



"WHAT DRIVES ME IS SIMPLE: JUSTICE SYSTEMS SHOULD NOT ONLY RESPOND TO THE PAST, BUT ALSO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE FUTURE."

- Daniel Danglades





Ferme Baudonne shows how detention can be connected to decent work, financial responsibility and participation in community life. Twelve residents work 26 hours a week in organic market gardening under a work-integration contract lasting between 4 and 24 months. They earn the French minimum wage (€11.07/hour from May 2023) and contribute €280 per month towards their room, food and use of the facilities.

Paid work is combined with personalised support and participation in community life, helping to prevent detention from deepening poverty and exclusion while supporting residents in building greater independence.

Related SDGs: Good Health and Well-being · Quality Education · Reduced Inequalities



The **KVJJ Den Haag** shows how the People principle can also respond to different stages of life. The facility accommodates up to eight young people aged 12 to 23 close to their communities. Each resident follows an individual plan that enables them to continue school, work, sport, care and contact with their social network during detention.

Jointly managed by the prison service and a civil-society organisation, the facility combines security with personalised support and limits disruption to young people's development.

Related SDGs: Good Health and Well-being · Quality Education · Reduced Inequalities

By allowing young people to continue their education, work, care and relationships during detention, facilities such as KVJJ Den Haag help prevent a temporary sentence from creating lasting disadvantage. They also demonstrate why differentiation matters: people at different stages of life require different forms of support.

Turning eighteen changes a person's legal status, but development does not stop at eighteen.

The BRIDGE project, explores what young adults need from detention houses to take responsibility and rebuild their lives.



Learn more: BRIDGE country comparison synthesis, policy brief and blueprint for young adults (18-25) in detention.

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HOW CAN **DETENTION** FACILITIES **RESPECT** THE **PLANET** AND LOCAL **COMMUNITIES**?

Detention facilities are not only places where people serve a sentence. They are also buildings that use land, energy, water, food and materials. Their location also affects transport needs, access to services and the ability of residents to maintain connections with their families and communities.

A sustainable justice system is therefore not only about what happens in the detention house, but also how it relates to its surroundings. This includes making use of existing buildings and infrastructure, connecting to local services and transport, and considering how detention facilities are part of their local environment.

In this way, detention houses can put the Planet principle of sustainable development into practice, by reducing unnecessary use of land and resources and by making better use of what already exists within communities.

During the European Symposium on Detention Houses, Suzann Cordeiro, Margarida Villas-Boas and Klaudia Hasanllari explored the question: How can detention facilities respect the planet and local communities?

"WE ARE DETERMINED TO PROTECT THE PLANET FROM DEGRADATION, INCLUDING THROUGH SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION, SUSTAINABLY MANAGING ITS NATURAL RESOURCES AND TAKING URGENT ACTION ON CLIMATE CHANGE, SO THAT IT CAN SUPPORT THE NEEDS OF THE PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS."

— Preamble, 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development



READ THE ESSAY

"BY RECOGNIZING THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT AS A STRATEGY FOR ENSURING RIGHTS - ADOPTING THE IDEA OF INTEGRAL CAPACITY, WHICH INCLUDES PHYSICAL, PSYCHOSOCIAL, SYMBOLIC, AND HUMANITARIAN DIMENSIONS. WE MUST DEVELOP METHODOLOGIES THAT ALLOW US TO DESIGN SPATIAL SOLUTIONS THAT TRULY CORRESPOND TO LOCAL REALITIES."

BY **SUZANN CORDEIRO** - ARCHITECT & PROFESSOR, THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF ALAGOAS; UNODC CONSULTANT (BRAZIL)



EVERY **BUILDING** AND **LOCATION** LEAVES AN **IMPACT**

The environmental impact of detention depends on both the building and its location. Large prison institutions require significant land, energy and materials. Their often remote locations also increase transport needs: people must travel between police stations, courts, hospitals and prisons, while employees, families, food and other supplies may need to cover long distances and reinforce the idea that detention should remain separate from everyday society.

Detention houses offer a different approach. Their smaller scale makes it easier to reuse existing buildings. Where high static security measures are not needed, fewer permanent security features can make buildings easier to adapt over time. This reduces the need for new construction, land and materials.

Located within communities, detention houses use existing public transport, services and social networks. These connections challenge the idea of detention infrastructure as isolated institutions, and make detention houses part of a wider social ecosystem.



"ARCHITECTURE IS LARGE, IT'S VERY PROMINENT AND IT IS A KIND OF CONSTANT COMMUNICATION IN THE BACKGROUND. [...] IT PLAYS HOST TO AND SHAPES THE RELATIONSHIP AND THE DYNAMIC THAT PEOPLE WILL THEN EXPERIENCE.

- Mike Worthington





At **Halbgefangenschaft Winterthur**, residents follow the Swiss model of semi-custodial detention. They continue to work, study and take part in daily life during the day, returning to the facility overnight.

The facility is located within the urban community, keeping residents close to public transport and services. Inside, the building can be adapted as needs change. Hallways and internal spaces can be adjusted to create different living units for different groups of residents. Together, its location and flexible layout make better use of existing infrastructure and allow the building to adapt over time without major rebuilding.

Related SDG: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure



At **Torres Novas**, men nearing the end of their sentence live under an open regime, leaving each morning to work in the community. The facility runs a vertical garden, where residents grow food and learn about farming, nutrition and the environment. The food is used in the facility's kitchen and shared with around 300 local families through the Red Cross, helping improve nutrition, support local food security and promote more sustainable farming. Now, the project is in its fourth year, supported by the local mayor, reflecting the positive impact it has had on residents and the surrounding community.

Related SDGs: Zero Hunger · Sustainable Cities and Communities · Responsible Consumption and Production

SHAPING **WHAT IS POSSIBLE**

A building communicates who is included, valued and trusted equally through its design and its policies (Worthington, 2026). How can we transform detention spaces into urban architectures? Some case studies show strong analogies with the spatial configuration of student housing, retirement homes, and care facilities for mental health or addiction (Marconi, 2026). And what about the scale? Many systems calculate capacity only by counting beds. But a bed is not a unit of dignity or a unit of rights (Cordeiro, 2026). Architecture must align with a facility's staff culture, methodology, target group, and surrounding community.

"UPFARMING'S PRISON-BASED PROJECTS HAVE DISTRIBUTED 2,020 KG OF FOOD, AND DONATED 5,916 FOOD BASKETS TO FOOD BANKS REACHING 609 BENEFICIARIES"

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HOW CAN DETENTION HOUSES MOVE **BEYOND SHORT-TERM FIXES** TO BECOME **LASTING PARTS** OF LOCAL ECOSYSTEMS?

Detention can have long-term consequences for work, housing, education, health and family life. A sustainable justice system should therefore not only respond to what happened in the past, but also create the conditions for people to build a stable future and for support systems to continue working over time. This requires a systems approach. Detention houses need to be embedded in local communities and connected to municipalities, employers, healthcare, housing and other services, rather than functioning as isolated parts of the justice system. When these actors work together, support becomes more continuous, resources can be used more effectively and detention houses can become lasting parts of local social infrastructure.

During the European Symposium on Detention Houses, Alessio Scandurra, Joana Pestana Lages and Fionnuala Gordon explored the question: How can detention houses move beyond short-term solutions and become lasting parts of local ecosystems?



The Ecosystem Perspective: beyond its small scale, differentiation and community-integration. How do we look at a detention house and what does this mean for the implementation process?

READ MORE

"WE ARE DETERMINED TO ENSURE THAT ALL HUMAN BEINGS CAN ENJOY PROSPEROUS AND FULFILLING LIVES AND THAT ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL PROGRESS OCCURS IN HARMONY WITH NATURE."

— Preamble, 2030 Agenda
for Sustainable Development



READ THE ESSAY

"YOU CANNOT HAVE A PROSPEROUS SOCIETY IF YOU HAVE 'WASTELAND' ZONES WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS GO TO DIE. LET US STOP SETTLING FOR 'BETTER PRISONS.' LET US DEMAND PROSPERITY. LET US BUILD AN ECOSYSTEM WHERE SECURITY IS FOUND IN CONNECTION, NOT IN LOCKS; WHERE HEALTH IS A RIGHT, NOT A LUXURY; AND WHERE EVERY INDIVIDUAL HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE LASTING VALUE."

BY **ALESSIO SCANDURRA** - DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH
AT ASSOCIAZIONE ANTIGONE (ITALY)

How a detention house functions, both inside the facility and as part of the local community, has effects long after detention ends - shaping participation and the process of moving away from crime.

The impact of detention houses reaches beyond the justice system. Looking at them through the SDGs can help make these wider effects visible across employment, health, education, inequality, communities and the environment. This shows whether detention facilities create a positive ripple effect or, if they reproduce prison logic, only adding capacity instead of replacing traditional prisons (risk of net-widening). SDG-based monitoring can therefore help assess their lasting systemic impact.

This connects with the National Preventive Mechanism report on the detention houses in Vorst and Kortrijk (Belgium), which describes them as an alternative and potentially less damaging form of detention than traditional prisons, where people face greater risks of harm and inhumane treatment. The report recommends expanding the target group and opening more detention houses, arguing that more facilities allow for better differentiation in each unique house. In practice, differentiation is not a single placement decision but an ongoing process - one that depends on careful placement procedures, the staff's ability to adapt to different needs, recovery-oriented methods, and modular, flexible spaces.



ON THE COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS:

"THE PROGRAMME WORKS BEST FOR PEOPLE WHO WERE NOT CONDITIONALLY RELEASED AND WHO HAD TO SERVE THEIR FULL SENTENCE. (...) THE OVERALL SAVING OF CZK 139.5 MILLION / EUR 5.72 MILLION IS MOSTLY GENERATED BY THE REDUCED RECIDIVISM."

- Zdeněk Rosenberg





House of Recovery Twente supports men during the final 18 months of their sentence. Justice services, municipalities, healthcare, housing and employment organisations work together so residents can prepare for life after detention.

When national funding ended in 2026, all fourteen municipalities in the Twente region chose to keep funding the House of Recovery together. Research shows why: its social benefits are almost twice as high as its costs, making it a valuable investment for both residents and the wider community.

Related SDGs: Decent Work and Economic Growth · Sustainable Cities and Communities · Partnerships for the Goals



Open prison Jirice is a low-security facility where men live in four small houses, with up to eight residents in each. Admission is limited to men within 18 months of release who are able to work and motivated to take part in the programme.

Although the municipality initially opposed the open facility due to safety concerns, this changed through dialogue. Today, residents volunteer in the community and the city's mayor serves on the prison director's advisory board. A cost-benefit analysis found that its social and economic returns are 3.7 higher than its additional costs.

Related SDGs: Decent Work and Economic Growth · Sustainable Cities and Communities · Partnerships for the Goals

The cost of detention goes beyond the daily cost of a facility. Reoffending, unemployment and reliance on social services carry long-term costs for individuals, communities and public services. The UK Ministry of Justice (2019) estimated the annual economic and social cost of adult reoffending at £16.7 billion.

Oslo Economics (2024) estimates the benefits of moving from crime into employment at NOK 30 million in socio-economic benefits - around €90,000 per person per year of employment. Initiatives such as Jiřice and House of Recovery Twente also show that small-scale detention can generate social and economic returns. These figures show why detention should be judged not only by its cost today, but also by the long-term value for society.

Learn more about the long-term value of detention houses



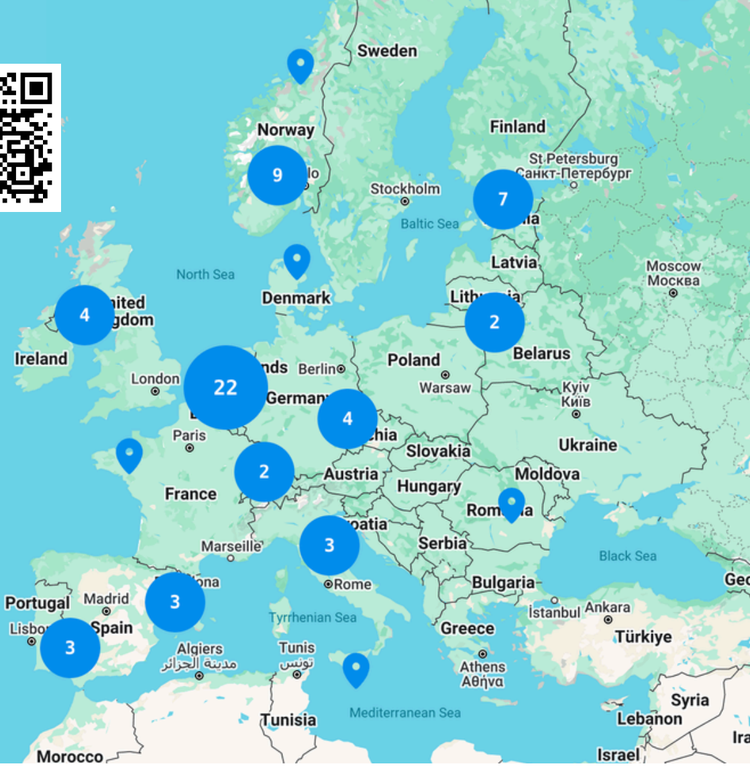
THE #ESDH26 EXHIBITION

#INSPIRE
Inspirational Practices

Across Europe, diverse detention facilities serve as Inspirational Practices for the design and operation of detention houses.

During the ESDH26 exhibition, these practices were highlighted in relation to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), showing how different approaches to detention can contribute to broader goals around justice, wellbeing, inclusion and sustainable communities.

Today, over 80 Inspirational Practices are mapped in our IP database. Visit now to explore them: www.rescaled-inspire.org



ANONYMOUS REFLECTIONS FROM THE EXHIBITION FLOOR



Children
Transition house
Lived-experience
Staff
Survivor perspective

Recordings
People



Social enterprise
Community
Lived-experience
Nature
Ecological respect

Recordings
Planet



Research
Restorative cities
Prison law
Ecosystem
Local communities

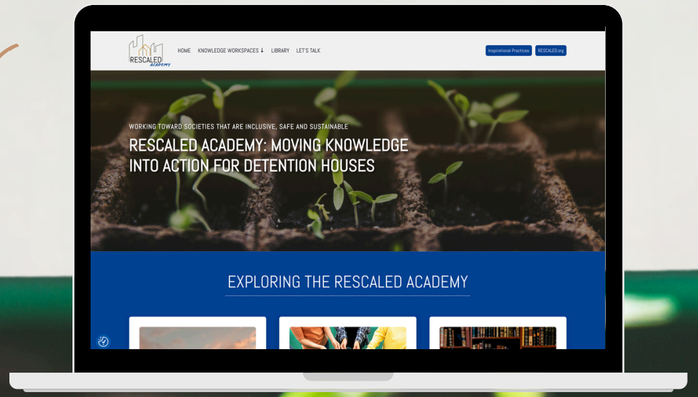
Recordings
Prosperity

MOVING **KNOWLEDGE** INTO **ACTION**

RESCALED connects the quality of knowledge to the relevant context and network of stakeholders.

RESCALED ACADEMY

Check it out!



JOIN A SMALL **GROUP** OF **EXPERTS** FOR **2** HOURS OF **IN-DEPTH DISCUSSION.**

Every two months, RESCALED organises online joint learning sessions to explore key topics related to detention houses and facilitate knowledge-sharing and exchange of experiences across Europe.

Follow our LinkedIn for the dates & registrations or contact us via info@rescaled.org!

THINKING OF **IMPLEMENTING DETENTION HOUSES** IN YOUR **COUNTRY** OR **CITY?**

RESCALED can help facilitate conversations with your stakeholders, organise in-person training and joint learning sessions, … Together, we can analyse your context and support your activities via tailored advice.

Contact us via info@rescaled.org!

ESDH26 PRESENTATIONS

Day 1 [click here]

Day 2 [click here]

Aftermovies [click here].

Replacing 100 prisons with 1 000 houses through

10 000 COMMITMENTS FOR CHANGE

#1000HOUSES

.... a Europe-wide campaign calling for replacing 100 large prison institutions with **1 000 HOUSES** through 10 000 commitments for change by 2030.



BE A VOICE OF CHANGE

During the Symposium, we launched the #1000HOUSES Campaign, bringing together everyone who can contribute to change, from policymakers and professionals to people with lived experience, communities and anyone who believes our systems can be organised differently.

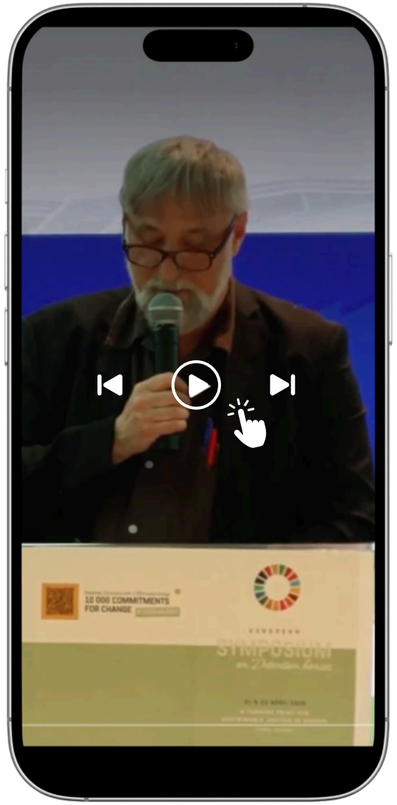
Because every voice, perspective and intention to change matters. Every commitment makes a difference.

Watch the video, discover the commitments, sign the campaign... **and be a voice for change.**

> "I want to build as many as possible detention houses in Belgium (but not as extra capacity but as a better alternative)"

> "Since agreeing on this project and the vision behind is mostly about mindset and perception, I want to actively share this to the world and participate, not only as a witness, but as a player on the field."

> "The event was proof that RESCALED is building a community – people know each other, cooperate, and new voices are joining the topic."



There is an extensive and diverse network of changemakers who are involved in the RESCALED mission to support the use of detention houses instead of large prison institutions. **The grassroots energy of this active movement fuels innovation.**

The NGO, RESCALED ivzw, then ensures coordination, continuity and strategic direction for projects and collaborations within this movement. The balance of both dimensions generate the needed impact for sustainable implementation. See what our NGO has been up to!

WWW.RESCALED.ORG



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