WOMEN
DETENTION HOUSES WITH, FOR, AND BY INCARCERATED WOMEN



DETENTION HOUSES FOR WOMEN

A Guide to Communication with the Public and the Local Community



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I. What is the purpose of this guide?

The aim of this guide is to help prepare the ground for the acceptance of a new type of small-scale, differentiated, and community-integrated detention houses within a local community. It also explains why a detention house is a suitable facility for women and provides some general tips on how to frame and communicate topics related to the criminal justice system and justice reform.

Establishing a new detention facility often presents a challenge, as it tends to encounter two main obstacles: persistent stereotypes about the meaning of punishment (a belief in retribution), and the NIMBY phenomenon – "Not In My BackYard."

This guide offers several tips and recommendations on how to address and overcome the most common objections.
This guide draws on the experience of those who have gone through the process of introducing similar facilities, as well as on existing resources about framing and communicating topics of criminal justice. What matters most is not only a professional conviction about their benefits, but above all the ability to communicate clearly with local residents, address their concerns, and involve them in the process.

II. What makes the incarceration of women specific?

Around the world, women make up a small but growing group within the prison population. According to the World Prison Brief (source 1) over 733,000 women and girls are incarcerated globally, accounting for about 6.8% of the total prison population worldwide. In Europe, the proportion is even lower, around 5% of people in prison are women (2).

Incarcerated women often follow different pathways into crime than men, reflecting different life experiences and vulnerabilities (3). Their paths are frequently characterized by economic hardship, poverty, low levels of education, lack of employment opportunities, and homelessness. While men dominate statistics for violent crime, women are more often imprisoned for non-violent offenses, particularly property and drug-related crimes (4).

When the purpose of detention is not fulfilled

Deprivation of liberty is intended to be proportional, time-limited, and purposeful. After serving their sentence, people should be able to return to society without additional harm, and the damage caused by the offence should be addressed.
In practice, this rarely happens.

Large-scale prison institutions tend to weaken social ties, disconnect people from their families and communities, and undermine the very conditions needed for successful participation in society.

Rather than addressing the underlying drivers of crime, imprisonment is often applied as a standardised, one-size-fits-all response that overlooks individual needs, vulnerabilities, and capacities.

As a result, prison systems frequently perpetuate exclusion. They disproportionately affect people who were already marginalised before their sentence and often reproduce cycles of harm, reoffending, and social inequality. In this sense, today's prison systems fail not only incarcerated individuals, but society as a whole.

DETENTION HOUSES AS A SHIFT FROM PARADIGM OF **ISOLATION** TO PARADIGM OF **INTEGRATION**

ISOLATED ≠ ECOSYSTEM APPROACH



VS



- Large scale prison institutions cut off from communities
- Uncoordinated services
- People released into same circumstances that led to crime

- Detention houses embedded in supportive networks
- Multiple systems working together toward shared goals
- Addressing root causes

YOU CAN'T SOLVE COMPLEX SOCIAL PROBLEMS WITH SIMPLE, ISOLATED INTERVENTIONS.

Key challenges of incarcerated women

1. Psychological and traumatic burden

- A large proportion of incarcerated women have experienced domestic violence, sexual abuse, or neglect during childhood.
- Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorders are more common among women in prison.

2. Increased vulnerability and need for support

- Women serving sentences tend to be more emotionally vulnerable, have an understandable lower self-confidence, and need substantial support when reintegrating into society.

Why this matters for how we respond

Recognising the specific circumstances of women in detention does not mean excusing crime. It means acknowledging that effective justice responses must be proportionate, humane, and tailored to real-life situations.

This is why alternative forms of detention, such as detention houses, are increasingly seen as more appropriate for women. They allow accountability while also providing the conditions needed for rehabilitation, family contact, and long-term reintegration into society.

Why this failure affects women in particular

In addition to these systemic shortcomings, prison systems worldwide share a fundamental problem: they were originally designed by men and for men (5). As women constitute a minority of the prison population, their specific needs are often overlooked within this man-centric framework. The 'one-size-fits-all' approach fundamentally fails to provide a safe, humane, or rehabilitative environment for many incarcerated women.

3. The role of motherhood and primary caregiving

- Most incarcerated women are mothers, often single parents.
- Imprisonment deeply affects both their children and their relationship with them - separation is traumatic for both sides.

Different types of crimes

- Serious violent crimes are less common among women than among men.
- Women are more often convicted of property-related crimes (such as theft or fraud) or offenses linked to family care and survival.

III. Detention houses for women

What are detention houses?

For women experiencing incarceration, large-scale prisons often fail to meet even their most basic needs. But what if women could serve their sentence in a more humane, community-integrated setting? Detention houses provide exactly that. Watch the rescaled video here.

They are characterised by three key principles: **small-scale, differentiation, and community integration**. When multiple small detention houses exist within the community and differ from each other, they can offer the right context for each individual. These principles are closely connected and reinforce one another. To fully appreciate the value and potential of detention houses, it is important to consider all dimensions of their ecosystem.



SMALL SCALE

Detention houses typically accommodate only about 8 to 30 residents, creating a more personal, human-centered environment. This scale supports closeness, a sense of belonging, and the development of meaningful relationships between residents and staff. Because of their limited size, bureaucracy is reduced and personalised approaches are supported, allowing for a stronger focus on dynamic security based on interaction, trust and individual assessment rather than control alone.

DIFFERENTIATION

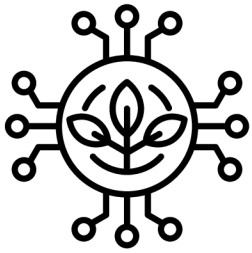
Differentiation means placing individuals in the context best suited to their specific needs, capacities, and life circumstances. This can involve women-only detention houses, mixed-gender houses with differentiated living arrangements, or targeted programmes within a facility.

Staff are trained in gender-responsive and needs-based practices, and programming is tailored accordingly. By organising services flexibly, either by bringing specialised support into the detention house or connecting residents to external providers, detention houses can ensure that everyone receives the help they need. This includes topics such as healthy relationships, parenting skills, and physical and mental health.



COMMUNITY INTEGRATION

Detention houses are embedded in the local community rather than isolated, allowing residents to remain literally and figuratively closer to normal life. People living in detention houses make use of services available in the community and continue to engage in social roles beyond detention. Detention houses collaborate with local social workers, doctors, teachers, sports coaches, local governments, municipalities, and community volunteers. Whether women live in women-only or mixed-gender settings, they use the same service providers—such as teachers, psychologists, trainers, and coaches—as everyone else in the neighbourhood. Detention houses also generate added value for the community through projects such as a social restaurant, a supermarket, a repair shop, or the sale of home-grown vegetables.



THE ECOSYSTEMS OF A DETENTION HOUSE

The ecosystem of a detention house is not limited to the physical boundaries of the facility, nor to the boundaries of the criminal justice system. On the contrary, it exists at the junction of multiple other systems: the criminal justice system, the (mental) health care system, the education system, the employment system, and more.

Both the physical environment and the way detention houses operate improve the quality of life not only for residents, but also for staff. A detention house functions within this broader ecosystem, shaped by the people inside, residents and staff, as well as by the services they interact with, including probation services, social care, healthcare providers, and community organisations.

Because detention houses are small in scale and embedded in the community, this ecosystem is more connected, responsive, and collaborative. Roles and responsibilities between actors are clearer, relationships between institutions are stronger, and communication is more direct. This allows support to be coordinated more effectively around each resident ensuring continuity of care during and after detention.

INSPIRATIONAL PRACTICES

The examples and practices discussed within this guide are intended to inspire the design and operation of detention houses. They illustrate one or more of the principles of small-scale, differentiated, and community-integrated facilities, but do not necessarily represent a “perfect” detention house. Detention houses differ in how they approach security, ranging from a strong emphasis on relational security to varying degrees of openness and the use of static security measures, as well as in the people they serve. This includes differences in length of stay, gender, or special target group, such as addiction, mental health, or family care. Additionally, detention houses also vary in how they interact with surrounding social systems and in their operating models, whether state-run or managed by non-profit organisations.

This flexibility allows it to respond to diverse needs, both those of individuals as for system-level demands while maintaining safety, dignity, and effectiveness.

What unites them is a shared approach: working with incarcerated people through responsibility, rebuilding everyday structure, and gradually restoring self-confidence to support successful reintegration into society.

More information about different examples can be found at the inspirational practices website of RESCALED.



Why are detention houses suitable for women?

Women make up about 5% of the prison population, yet the prison system is largely designed for men. Detention houses offer an approach better suited to women's specific needs, building on their core principles of small scale, differentiation, and community integration.

BENEFITS

TAILORED SUPPORT

Psychological counseling, therapy, education, employment training, and release preparation can be adapted to women's needs, reducing stress and preventing retraumatization.

CLOSER TO HOME

Serving a sentence in the community allows women to maintain meaningful contact with family and children, supporting continuity in social and caregiving roles.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Small facilities can provide dedicated programs for mothers and facilitate family visits in a way that is often difficult in large prisons.

STRESS AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT

The smaller, human-centered environment aligns with gender-specific coping strategies, fostering safer and less stressful interactions.



EXAMPLES OF DETENTION HOUSES FOR WOMEN



The Community Custody Units (Scotland)

Dundee and Glasgow: demonstrate how trauma-informed practice can be embedded throughout a custodial environment for women.

Vanaja Unit (Finland)

Houses up to 57 women in small-scale house units of five people each, plus a special family house for parents with children. This village-like arrangement creates a more intimate environment where staff can develop meaningful relationships with each resident and tailor support to individual needs.



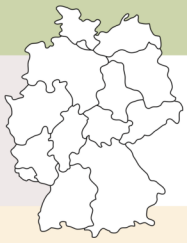


Hope Street (UK)

Run by the NGO One Small Thing, involved women with lived experience in designing the facility, including layout, programs, and daily routines. They requested open space and large windows for natural light while ensuring privacy from outsiders.

HALBE TREPPE (GERMANY)

Managed by the NGO Outlaw gGmbH, adapts to each resident's needs with a strong focus on relational security rather than control.





ŘEPY PRISON (CZECH REPUBLIC)

Encourages residents to engage in meaningful activities, including a partnership with the St. Karel Boromejský home for the elderly. This allows women to gain work experience, skills, and a sense of purpose beyond detention, though the facility is expected to close soon.

For more examples, see the RESCALED inspirational practices website

IV. A shared narrative: Framing and communication tools for detention houses for women

WHAT HELPS WHEN PRESENTING THE TOPIC OF JUSTICE REFORM FOR WOMEN?

Justice reform is a systemic approach that seeks to address the root causes of crime, reduce reliance on incarceration, and promote fairness, safety, and well-being for all. It recognizes how social systems, such as health care, education, and housing, interact and influence people's lives. For women in detention, justice reform supports alternatives like detention houses, which focus on safety, tailored support, family contact, and preparing individuals to participate successfully in society after their sentence.

Public attitudes toward the justice system are shaped by long-standing beliefs, stereotypes, and emotions. Many people have limited direct experience with detention facilities or (formerly) incarcerated people, which means their opinions often come from media portrayals, political debates, or assumptions about crime and punishment. Because of this, any communication about justice reform, including the introduction of detention houses for women, needs to take into account how people think about justice before introducing what we want them to understand.

WHAT HELPS WHEN PRESENTING THE TOPIC OF JUSTICE REFORM FOR WOMEN?

People process new information through mental shortcuts, or "frames," which operate automatically and often without awareness. These frames shape not only what seems credible or understandable, but also how people feel about it. Effective communication, therefore, is about both clarity and emotion: public attitudes toward detention houses are influenced as much by trust, empathy, and experience as by facts. Engaging residents' feelings and building trust through dialogue and participation makes it more likely that messages will be understood, accepted, and acted upon constructively. When we work with these mental shortcuts rather than against them, communication becomes clearer, more effective, and more constructive.

Because of this, any communication about justice reform - including the introduction of detention houses for women - needs to take into account how people think about justice before we introduce what we want them to understand.

Research from the FrameWorks Institute identifies several framing strategies that help the public better understand the issue of incarceration and reduce resistance or prejudice. Keep them in mind when communicating the opening of a new detention house for women.



IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND

Most people instinctively associate punishment with retribution.

Most people assume the purpose of a detention facility is mainly to "make people pay" for what they have done.

FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE COMMUNICATIONS

1

Focus on solutions, not problems

Instead of describing system failures or recidivism, emphasize what helps bring about change – education, work, and accountability programs. People respond better to concrete positive steps than to mere criticism.

Example: Detention houses provide a better environment for the residents and staff compared to traditional prisons. According to data they also reduce recidivism.

2

Explain punishment as a path toward responsibility

Help reframe the idea of punishment from "retribution" to a process of change and taking responsibility.

Show that the true goal of imprisonment is a safer society, made possible when people leaving prison are able to live without committing further offenses and to take responsibility for their acts.

Example: Women in detention houses can get support in gaining control over their lives, taking responsibility for themselves and their children also after release.

They also offer better tools for empowering women to take responsibility for their lives and actions, including greater awareness of the consequences of crime for victims and society.

3

Use real people's stories

Personal stories of incarcerated individuals, their families, or prison staff help the public understand the situation and break down stereotypes about "prisoners." It is also important to mention the needs of victims and tools to meet their needs.

It's important that these stories are authentic, realistic, and show a journey of change.

Example: Women in the facility Řepy in Prague, Czech Republic, receive a nursing course and after that they take care of the patients in an elderly home. It gives them a new purpose in life. Some of them stick to this new profession also after release.

4

Emphasize social benefits

Highlight that a shift in approach to imprisonment benefits not only incarcerated people but society as a whole, by reducing recidivism, increasing safety, saving public funds, and strengthening community cohesion.

Example: Detention houses can provide trauma-sensitive care. They support women in overcoming their traumas and gaining self-respect, preparing them for a safe return to society and dealing with the consequences of criminal activity.

5

Use clear and human language

Avoid technical or punitive-sounding terms ("convicted offender," "prison subject").

Speak of people serving sentences, of rehabilitation, responsibility, and second chances.

A language of respect helps change attitudes.

Example: Women in detention houses learn to trust the staff. This is a crucial step in gaining their trust to other state institutions and being able to ask for help and support in the future.

PRESENTING DETENTION HOUSES TO THE PUBLIC – WHAT CHALLENGES ARE INVOLVED?

Communication Challenge 1 Punishment as retribution

The public often perceives punishment mainly as retribution rather than as an opportunity for change. This view is rooted in deep-seated ideas about justice and responsibility.

RESEARCH SHOWS THAT THREE CORE STEREOTYPES PERSIST IN HOW PEOPLE THINK ABOUT IMPRISONMENT:

- Punishment is meant primarily to repay or avenge the wrongdoing.
- Prisons are places of isolation, not reintegration.
- People with a criminal past are unlikely to change.

These beliefs strongly shape how people respond to any attempt at reform or to more open, rehabilitative approaches to imprisonment.

The role of communication, therefore, is to show that modern detention is about protecting society, supporting positive change, and promoting accountability, not just restricting liberty as punishment.

DON´T

When crime is framed as a matter of personal choice, people lean toward punishment instead of prevention or reform. Don't invite them to think about why someone committed a crime.

DO

Use examples that show how context and systems channel crime and how changing those systems can prevent or redirect.

For many women in detention, the pathways that led to their offending are shaped by factors such as long-term poverty, domestic violence, unstable housing, and coercive relationships.

When these underlying conditions are addressed, for example through trauma-informed support, access to stable housing, education, women gain the tools and confidence to create stability and positive change in their lives. Detention houses make this possible by offering a structured, supportive environment where women can rebuild stability, learn new skills, and receive help for issues such as trauma or addiction. Because detention houses are integrated into the community, these facilities also make it easier for women to remain part of family life and society. Their children can visit more frequently, and the environment is more child-friendly and focused on maintaining healthy relationships. This helps women take responsibility for their roles as parents and strengthens bonds that are crucial for change.Changing the context around women does not excuse harm but it creates the conditions in which accountability leads to lasting change. When women are supported to rebuild their lives, the benefits extend to their children, families and the wider community.



DETENTION HOUSES ARE PART OF JUSTICE REFORM

Justice reform is not "soft on crime", it is about being smart and effective. Current punitive approaches have high recidivism rates and don't address root causes. Evidence shows that community-based interventions, addressing social determinants, and restorative approaches are more effective at creating long-term safety.



DETENTION HOUSES AS A REPLACEMENT

Detention houses represent a completely different philosophy than the institution of prison. They're community-integrated, focused on maintaining relationships and connections and designed to support successful transitions. They're part of broader justice transformation, not just improved imprisonment.



DETENTION AS A LAST RESORT

As part of systemic reform, community-based measures, restorative practices, and detention houses provide more effective and humane responses. When liberty must be deprived, detention houses ensure it is done in the least harmful, effective and sustainable way.

Videos can be also used as a tool to address the public. NGO RUBIKON Centre with Prison Service and director Jan Látal has produced a video focusing on how people from a small community perceive people with criminal pasts. The video "Prisoner, my neighbour" shows how stereotypes play a strong role in judging people, but it also sends a clear message: "People are people no matter their past." You can watch the video here

Communication Challenge 2 "It's a good idea — just not here" (the NIMBY phenomenon)

Even when the public acknowledges the value of a detention house, the reaction is often, "just not in our neighborhood" (NIMBY – Not In My BackYard).
Studies show that this resistance is usually driven by misconceptions about prisons and the people inside them – especially fears about safety.
These fears often stem from unfamiliarity and prejudice rather than real experience.

KEY FINDINGS:

- People tend to fear events that are, in reality, extremely rare (such as escapes or riots).
- A lack of information and dialogue leads to distrust and a sense of unfairness.
- When a project is communicated too late or inaccurately, resistance grows stronger and becomes harder to manage.

Once fears and narratives have taken hold, people interpret new information through that lens. This makes early, proactive communication critical.

Experience from other countries shows that involving local residents early and proactively is key to overcoming NIMBY objections (see link). Projects that invite neighbours to participate in planning meetings, observe facility operations, or share feedback during development reduce fear and increase understanding. Community engagement should aim to build relationships and trust, not just convey information.

That's why open, timely, and transparent communication is essential -- giving community members the chance to ask questions, gain confidence, and feel included in the process.

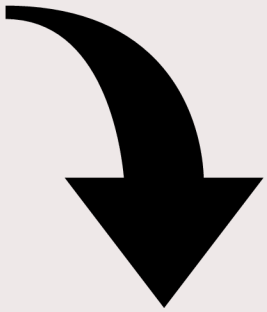
WHAT ARE THE MOST COMMON OBJECTIONS TO ESTABLISHING A NEW FACILITY — AND HOW TO RESPOND?

TYPICAL CONCERNS AND ARGUMENTS AGAINST NEW DETENTION FACILITIES

Public concerns generally fall into three main categories:

1. Safety and crime
2. Impact on the local environment and quality of life
3. Economic issues

Below is an overview of the most common objections and suggested ways to respond



1 SAFETY

"If there's a detention house here, we — and our children — won't be safe."

EXPLANATION

This is one of the most frequent concerns. People often fear an increase in crime or the presence of "dangerous individuals" nearby.

HOW TO RESPOND

While no system can eliminate risk entirely, research and practical experience consistently show that detention houses do not lead to higher crime rates in surrounding areas. Studies examining community-based detention and similar facilities have found no measurable increase in local crime following their establishment (e.g. Martin & Myers, 2005).

Safety in a detention house is not based on isolation or heavy security, but on clear organisation, professional oversight, and everyday interaction:

Professional and present staff

Detention houses are staffed by trained professionals, including custodial staff and support professionals such as psychologists and social workers. Staff are present on a daily basis and work closely with residents.

Clear rules and structured routines

Daily life follows established schedules and rules. This predictability helps maintain order and reduces uncertainty for both residents and staff.

Personal engagement and responsibility

Regular contact between staff and residents allows issues to be addressed early and supports responsible behaviour. This relational approach is central to how detention houses function.

Appropriate and discreet security measures

Physical security measures are in place where necessary, but they are proportionate and designed not to disrupt the surrounding neighbourhood or create a prison-like atmosphere.

Cooperation with local services

Detention houses work closely with probation services, healthcare providers, and local authorities, ensuring that residents are supported and supervised within an established professional framework.

Recommendations

- Explain the philosophy and functioning of the detention house, so that all the stakeholders in the area, including local residents, can understand the approach.
- Provide local residents with clear, concrete information about the facility's rules, routines, and security measures.
- Offer opportunities for locals to meet in person with representatives of the Prison Service or with officials from other municipalities where similar facilities already operate successfully.
- Involve neighbours of existing facilities to share their personal experiences,include women who have served their sentence in a detention house and are now participating in society — personal stories help break down prejudice.

MOST COMMON QUESTIONS



How will safety for the local community be ensured?

CLEAR RULES AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Life in a detention house is governed by clear and strict rules, underpinned by mutual trust between residents, management, and staff. Accountability is central: residents are expected to take responsibility for their behaviour, while management and staff are accountable for responding to incidents in a fair, proportionate, and professional manner. There must be confidence that the management and team handle situations appropriately and consistently. Responses to incidents are determined by the facility itself, taking into account the individual and the national context. Where relevant, the community is informed in a timely and transparent way, such as after an incident, so that residents understand what has happened and how it affects them.

For example

Intermezzo, a detention facility in the Netherlands providing forensic protected living, undertakes various initiatives to promote community integration and accountability. A focus group, closely involving stakeholders such as residents, the police, and local organisations, supports engagement in joint activities, including neighbourhood events like barbecues. The facility operates on the basis of clear living and house rules, which were developed in collaboration with the client council and other relevant partners. Intermezzo also maintains a constructive relationship with the neighbourhood police officer. Residents are encouraged to report perceived neighbourhood nuisances, reinforcing shared responsibility for community well-being. In addition, the facility promotes openness and transparency through a 24/7 contact point for neighbours. This allows concerns to be reported at any time, enabling the facility to respond promptly and take appropriate action when issues arise.

MOST COMMON QUESTIONS



PROFESSIONAL SUPERVISION

Life in a detention house is supported by a multidisciplinary team, including educators, specialised teachers, psychologists, and social workers. Staff competence, presence, and proactive engagement are central, ensuring that daily interactions build trust, foster positive relationships, and create a stable and predictable environment. At the core of safety is relational security, which relies on the quality of staff-resident relationships to prevent incidents and manage risks. By understanding residents' needs, triggers, and social dynamics, staff can anticipate potential issues, provide guidance, and intervene early in a supportive and proportionate manner. Relational security also encourages residents to engage constructively in their programmes, strengthens accountability, and reinforces positive social norms within the facility.

Detention houses operate within a wider safety ecosystem, collaborating closely with prison services, probation services, local authorities, healthcare providers, and emergency services. Clear communication lines and predefined protocols enable swift action when safety concerns arise and allow specialised care or additional expertise to be mobilised temporarily if needed. Together, these measures ensure a high level of safety both inside the facility and in the surrounding community.

For example

The CCUs in Dundee and Glasgow provide an example of professional supervision in action. Staff work with residents using a trauma-informed approach that emphasizes respect, empowerment, and collaboration. A multidisciplinary team, including psychologists, social workers, and educators, engages proactively with each woman to build trust, anticipate challenges, and provide timely guidance.

MOST COMMON QUESTIONS

2 Will this facility also include women convicted of more serious crimes?

This question often arises because serious or violent offences tend to evoke strong emotional responses, particularly concerns about safety and children. These reactions are understandable. At the same time, they are often shaped by the media, assumptions about prisons and risk, rather than by how detention houses actually operate.

Yes, even in a detention house, there may be women who have committed more serious crimes.
However, placement in such a facility is determined by a careful assessment of multiple criteria — not only the nature of the offense, but above all the woman's behavior, progress, and motivation for change during their sentence.

Thanks to thorough risk assessments, only women who have demonstrated genuine commitment and clear positive development are selected.

Experience shows that the life stories of incarcerated women are often complex — involving factors such as addiction, domestic violence, or difficult social circumstances. These aspects are always considered in the decision-making process.
From a communication perspective, it is essential to communicate clearly, truthfully, and transparently.

It is neither effective nor ethical to downplay or distort the seriousness of crimes in an attempt to reassure the public that the detention house will be only for women convicted of "minor" offences.Such an approach may seem easier in the short term but can erode trust once facts become known.

A more constructive approach is to explain how safety is ensured, how decisions are taken, and to explain why detention houses contribute to safer outcomes for individuals and the communities. When people understand who we are talking about and understand the logic of the system and the safeguards in place, fear is more likely to give way for informed judgement.

MOST COMMON QUESTIONS

3 Why do prisoners get such nice conditions? They don't deserve it!"

This reaction is understandable. Many people instinctively associate punishment with discomfort and believe that prison should primarily make people "pay" for what they have done. When detention houses look different from "traditional prisons", this can feel unfair.

Experience and research show that poor conditions — such as overcrowded dormitories, constant noise, lack of privacy, and an absence of meaningful activities — do not support rehabilitation. Instead, they lead to frustration, aggression, and hopelessness.

Detention houses operate differently: they provide a simple but dignified environment where women can work, study, and gradually take back responsibility for their own lives.
Such conditions significantly improve their chances of successful participation after release — which means less recidivism and a safer society for everyone.

Investing in quality environments and effective programs pays off.
Every person serving a sentence will eventually return into society — and it is in everyone's best interest that they return ready to live without needing to break the law again.



2 IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

"A new facility will disturb the peace and harm the character of our community."

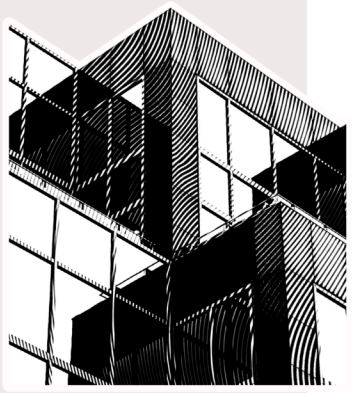
EXPLANATION

Concerns that a detention house might change the village's atmosphere or landscape are very common. People often fear the loss of peace and quiet, increased traffic, noise, or visual disruption. When a new facility is associated with imprisonment, these concerns are often amplified by uncertainty about what daily life around the facility will actually look like.

HOW TO RESPOND

Such concerns are valid, no one wants their environment to lose its character or calm.
However, in the case of detention houses, the impact on the surroundings is minimal. The facility's design, location, and capacity are all planned to blend into the local environment as much as possible.

- The architecture will be sensitive to its setting, without high walls or barbed wire, so it won't disturb the look and feel of the area.
- Construction and operation will be planned with respect for residents: limited working hours, strict noise and traffic control, and a designated contact person to address any concerns.
- Open, early, and continuous communication with residents is key, about construction schedules, working hours, visitor arrangements, and practical details like parking.



Experience from other places shows that a detention house can even become an asset: people serving their sentence often help maintain public spaces, gardens, or community areas, offering real, visible contributions to the local community.

Such a facility does not transform or disrupt a village, it can instead become a natural and beneficial part of it.

3 ECONOMIC ARGUMENTS

"The value of our land and properties will drop, the detention house will drive visitors away, and it will harm local businesses."

EXPLANATION

Concerns like these often arise; people worry about a decline in property values, a loss of customers, or competition from the detention facility itself. These concerns are understandable, especially in smaller communities where economic balance can feel fragile.

HOW TO RESPOND

- Experience from other locations does not show a decrease in property values near small detention facilities. When price changes do occur, they are usually linked to broader economic trends rather than to the presence of a prison.
- A detention house does not have a negative impact on tourism or local life. On the contrary, it can bring new partners, projects, and employment opportunities to the area.
- The facility's primary purpose is to support the reintegration of incarcerated women, not to offer services that compete with local businesses. At the same time, it can provide services that are currently missing in the community, complementing rather than replacing existing local services.

The municipality can, in fact, benefit — incarcerated women can help maintain public spaces or assist in organizing community events, which reduces municipal costs and improves the local environment.

Recommendations for communication:

- Be transparent about what the facility will and will not do economically.
- Avoid overstating economic benefits; focus instead on realistic expectations.
- Share examples from other municipalities where similar facilities operate without negative economic consequences.
- Clarify how local businesses may be involved as suppliers or partners where appropriate.

Overall, the presence of a detention house does not create an economic burden; it can instead bring tangible benefits to the community.

HOW TO APPROACH COMMUNICATION WITH THE LOCAL COMMUNITY WHERE A NEW FACILITY IS BEING ESTABLISHED?

1. WHY LOCAL ACCEPTANCE MATTERS?

The success of establishing a detention house depends not only on legal, financial, or organisational factors, but above all on how it is received by the local community. For local residents, a detention house is not a policy direction or pilot project, it affects their sense of safety, control, and everyday life.

A key concept is the "moment of human acceptance", the willingness of residents to welcome a new neighbor and trust that the facility will not endanger their environment. When entering a place people consider their home, their sense of safety is affected. That's why it's essential to proceed with respect, openness, and patience.

Communication should be treated as a process, not a one-off announcement. The aim is not to convince everyone enthusiastically, but to build understanding, reduce uncertainty, and establish a basis for trust.

2. PRINCIPLES OF SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION

1. BE TRANSPARENT AND CONCRETE

Abstract reassurances are rarely effective. Local residents want clear, practical information about what the detention house will mean in everyday terms.

Communication should clearly explain:

- what the facility will look like and how it will fit into its surroundings
- how many people will live there
- how daily routines and activities are organised
- how safety is ensured in practice
- who residents can contact if concerns or questions arise

It is equally important to be explicit about:

- what has already been decided
- what is still open for discussion
- what cannot be changed

THIS HELPS MANAGE EXPECTATIONS AND PREVENTS DISAPPOINTMENT OR MISTRUST LATER IN THE PROCESS

II. ACKNOWLEDGE CONCERNS WITHOUT DISMISSING THEM

Fears and objections, whether emotional or rational, should be acknowledged as legitimate. Dismissing concerns as "misunderstandings" or "irrational fears" often increases resistance and undermines trust.

Listening carefully and responding respectfully does not mean agreeing with every concern or changing the project in response to all objections. It does mean showing that the community is taken seriously and that their concerns are part of an ongoing dialogue.

Example

Before a new probation house was opened in the town of Písek (Czechia), a public hearing was organised to address questions and concerns from local residents. Local politicians participated alongside the director of the Probation and Mediation Service and other relevant professionals.

III. EXPLAIN HOW THE SYSTEM WORKS

Many concerns arise from uncertainty about how detention houses function in practice. Communication should therefore focus on explaining processes, not merely defending decisions or offering reassurance. This includes explaining:

- how placement decisions are made
- how supervision and accountability function on a daily basis
- how risks are identified, assessed, and managed
- how the detention house cooperates with probation services, healthcare providers, and local authorities

THIS TYPE OF EXPLANATORY COMMUNICATION HELPS PEOPLE MOVE FROM FEAR-BASED REACTIONS TOWARD INFORMED JUDGEMENT AND A MORE REALISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF THE FACILITY.

IV. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS, NOT JUST MESSAGES

Communication is most effective when it combines clarity with relational engagement (see link rescaled). Activities that bring residents and community members together help the facility be perceived as part of the community rather than a distant institution.

Example

- open days or open houses
- opportunities to meet staff (and, where appropriate, residents)
- joint social or volunteer activities
- local initiatives led or supported by the facility

Even small gestures can reduce fear, build trust, and increase openness to change

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION

- Start communicating as early as possible — ideally before construction begins.
- Communicate regularly and transparently.
- Acknowledge and respect both emotional and rational concerns.
- Listen carefully to the community's worries and take them seriously, even if you cannot always offer an immediate solution.
- Be patient — changes in perception take time.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Lead a dialogue, not a monologue.
The goal is not persuasion, but an open conversation.

Act as a good neighbor.
Show clearly that you value the local community, that you are entering their space with respect, and that you want to be a positive presence/contributor.

Build trust, not a "fan club."
The goal is not enthusiasm, but understanding and acceptance — ideally a neutral attitude, and in the best case, the foundation for a future support network.

3. PREPARATION AND PRACTICAL IMPLEMENTATION

Effective communication requires both thorough preparation and a structured approach.



INVEST IN PREPARATION

Before engaging with the local community, authorities should be prepared to:

- clearly present the project and its objectives,
- explain the respective roles of the Prison Service and the municipality, and
- respond thoughtfully and consistently to questions and concerns.

Building understanding and trust takes time. Patience is an essential part of the process.



COMMUNICATION TOOLS AND CHANNELS

Develop a comprehensive communication strategy with a clear plan of actions and activities. Use a combination of communication channels, such as:

- printed materials and notice boards (e.g. at bus stops or municipal offices),
- local radio,
- public meetings and smaller working sessions or community discussions,
- door-to-door outreach campaigns,
- local newspapers or newsletters,
- the municipality's website and social media (both official pages and community groups).

Example

The city of Genk created a dedicated website providing information and answers to frequently asked questions about the newly opened detention house (see link).



WORKING WITH LOCAL ACTORS AND ADAPTING TO CONTEXT

- Collaborate with local associations, business owners, and active residents who influence public opinion and can act as bridges between institutions and the community

- Monitor local public sentiment (for example, through social media reactions) and adapt communication flexibly to the evolving situation

- Take into account the specific characteristics of the location where the detention house is being established. Similar facilities can generate very different reactions depending on local context. An example of this is the construction of two Community Custody Units in Scotland in Glasgow and Dundee. Dundee established the CCU in close proximity to schools and residential areas, while Glasgow chose an industrial location. Each location required working with different stakeholders, choosing different means of communication, and tailoring communication and cooperation strategies to local specifics.

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WOMEN
DETENTION HOUSES WITH, FOR, AND BY INCARCERATED WOMEN

DETENTION HOUSES FOR WOMEN

RESCALED
EUROPEAN MOVEMENT FOR DETENTION HOUSES

RUBIKON CENTRUM pomáháme překročit minulost

SILTA VALMENNUS

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