



## Summary

### Advisory report on Incarcerated women in focus

#### Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles (RSJ)

On February 20, 2025, the Advisory Division of the Council for the Administration of Criminal Justice and Protection of Juveniles (hereinafter referred to as 'the RSJ') issued an advisory report on its own initiative on women in secure custodial settings.

Considering the specific background characteristics and needs of women, and the lack of regard for these within correctional institutions, the Bangkok Rules were drafted by the UN. These rules form the normative framework for this advisory report. The RSJ assessed the Dutch situation against this framework with reference to a number of themes in the prison system, young offenders institutions and forensic care. The themes concern the way in which the correctional institutions are organised, policy development, the connection to gender-specific needs of women, the living environment and treatment, and finally the perspective of women after their release.

#### Conclusion

Women make up only a small part of those who come into contact with the criminal justice system. Prisons and other correctional institutions were primarily designed and implemented for the male offender. Because women's backgrounds and needs are different from men's, the organisation of correctional institutions, policies and treatment are not always a well suited for women. This can lead to inequality and additional harm to the women. All of this also has an effect after release, with a reduced chance of successful resocialisation.

The RSJ believes that more attention should be paid to women within secure custodial settings so that the system can better reflect their gender-specific background characteristics and needs. Because too little attention is paid to this, women are a somewhat underexposed group.

#### *Women in focus*

Compared to men, women show different delinquent behaviour, are more likely to suffer from (complex) psychological problems and are more likely to have been victims themselves in the past. For example, they experienced sexual abuse, which causes them to struggle with trauma. In addition to the often complex issues, women experience little support and assistance from their social network during their stay in a correctional institution, receive few visits and are more socially isolated than men.





reintegration is necessary here. The RSJ sees opportunities to increase knowledge and attention to women-specific aspects of reintegration.

## Recommendations

### Organisation of correctional institutions

1. *Provide more institutions where women can be placed*

Provide for a better regional distribution by ensuring that (young) women can be placed in more locations in youth offenders institutions, prisons and forensic care. This will also create a wider offer for (young) women in terms of care, education and work, and other activities, as men and women can participate in activities together.

2. *Evaluate joint activities and mixed placement on special wards and in forensic hospitals*

Although segregated placement within the prison system is the starting principle, women can also be placed mixed with men on special wards within the prison system and in forensic care. As little is yet known about the effects of mixed placement and joint activities, it is important to conduct research into this.

3. *Take into account difference in need for security*

Consider the difference in the security needs between men and women when designing and setting up correctional institutions. Ensure a tailored approach through individual risk management. Minimise the need to ensure security through control and invest in relational safety.

4. *Take into account difference in care needs*

Consider the difference in care needs in the organisation of correctional institutions. For example, the high prevalence of incarcerated women with psychiatric problems should also lead to increased provision of care in prisons.

### Take women into account when developing policy

5. *Adopt gender-sensitive policies*

Consider gender differences when developing policies and avoid policies that are unequal or discriminatory to women. For example, consider using 'yes, provided that...' as a starting principle for video calling and encourage participation in reintegration activities for women.

### Consideration for women-specific needs

6. *Policy for mothers in detention or in forensic care and their children*

Adopt - mandatory - national policies focused on the relationship between mothers and their children in prisons, youth offenders institutions and forensic care. For instance, create a mother's wing for women and encourage so-called Autumn camps or similar activities for mothers and their children. The RSJ also calls for adequate support for mothers with children in all institutions.



7. *Women's health*

Increase attention to and knowledge of women's health issues and needs related to personal hygiene. It is important that staff are trained in this so that they can provide the correct support to incarcerated women.

8. *Practical facilities*

Make sure that practical facilities are geared to women's needs. Such as the product range on the shopping list, input options, as well as toilet facilities during transport by the Transport and Support Service (DV&O). The fact that practical facilities are geared to gender-specific needs must be a given and not a privilege.

### Living environment and treatment of women in custody

9. *Human dignity and respect as starting principle*

Invest in a culture where there is explicit attention to ensuring respect, dignity and privacy and adopt measures aimed at preventing (sexually) transgressive behaviour. This starts with the way staff are treated by management.

10. *Invest in professionals who work with incarcerated women*

Working with women requires specific expertise and skills. Ensure secure selection of management and executive staff and invest in training in order to work in a gender-sensitive manner. Also ensure adequate support and attention for the professionals.

11. *Lay down policy on working with women nationwide*

Make sure policies are geared towards the maximum protection of women. Make sure there is enough space to guarantee privacy. Lay down policy on working with women and the treatment of women nationwide. Consider, for example, the composition of the team, training requirements and the four-eye principle. Make sure a substantial part of the team consists of women. Especially when it comes to transporting female detainees. Keep in mind that the careful treatment of women takes extra time and staff.

12. *Guarantee that body searches are carried out only by someone of the same sex*

Maintain as starting principle that body searches should not be done routinely, but only in response to a concrete risk, and that these are always carried out by staff of the same sex. Adjust the various fundamental laws, secondary and tertiary regulations and policies for this purpose. Alternatives must be sought to minimise damage caused by examination of the body, including external cavity searches.

### Women's prospects after release

13. *Facilities for women after release*

Invest in sufficient counselling and care facilities and invest more in sufficient (living/working) facilities for women after release.



*14. Consideration for women-specific needs in reintegration*

Invest in chain cooperation and, as a probation service, also pay attention to specific policies for female clients.

*The advisory report is available on [Advies Ingesloten vrouwen in beeld | Advies | Raad voor Strafrechtstoepassing en Jeugdbescherming](#).*

