



Promoting fair and
effective criminal justice

Call for information

Rehabilitation and reintegration for women prisoners: implementation of the UN Bangkok Rules

Penal Reform International, together with the Thailand Institute of Justice are developing guidance on gender-specific rehabilitation and reintegration programmes for women prisoners to assist with the implementation of the UN Bangkok Rules. As part of this we are collating best practices which implement the UN Bangkok Rules and are seeking input from a variety of countries and contexts (low, medium and high-income).

Information sought

We would welcome examples of programmes, initiatives and projects set up for women in prison, or at the post-release stage, specifically covering:

- Skill-building and vocational training for increasing employment opportunities for women while in prison and post-release
- Work programmes in prison that lead to employment or have provided women with a means of earning while in prison, and schemes for saving money, etc.
- Rehabilitation programmes that address the specific backgrounds/ needs of women in prison, including: histories of domestic and sexual violence, alcohol and substance dependence and mental healthcare needs. Also programmes that assist with pregnancy, being a mother or other caretaking responsibilities.
- Programmes that have addressed typically low-level employment status, lack of support from family and other social networks, as well as stigmatisation.
- Rehabilitation programmes that allow flexibility for women who have children living with them in prison (or similarly allow for caretaking responsibilities post-release)
- Programmes for specific categories of women, for example foreign national prisoners or Indigenous women, elderly or sick, long-term prisoners, or women with substance dependencies
- Rehabilitation or reintegration programmes for girls or young female adults

Scope: 'Rehabilitation' should be understood in a wide sense, in that all aspects of a prison regime from health services to disciplinary sanctions, impact on rehabilitation efforts. While this guidance will touch on this more holistic perspective of rehabilitation, focus will be given to the programme of activities for addressing root causes of offending. These would, for example, include vocational training, counselling, courses, skill-building, employment opportunities, etc. We are also including reintegration services pre-release and the period immediately post-release.

Information methods: We are happy to receive reports, press items, photos, videos, or even bullet points with information about where and what programmes cover. Quotes or testimonies from beneficiaries/ service users would be very much welcomed! Please note we do not use images with faces of people involved in criminal justice systems, or name sources of such testimonies so identities would be protected.

Information is sought preferably in English, but if you only have information in another language do send on. Sources will be referenced unless you indicate this would not be ok.

Please send the information to intern@penalreform.org by **30 October 2018**. Any inclusion of information you provide will be checked before publishing.

Background and context

While there are some efforts to ensure rehabilitation and reintegration of women prisoners in many countries, a large majority tend to fulfil gender stereotypes. Given there is an evidenced link between women's offending and poverty and violence, rehabilitation must be focused on ensuring that these root causes are overcome. There are unique challenges facing prison administrations and reintegration agencies with regard to women offenders, and this project seeks to explore these and propose solutions.

International standards (see below) are clear that prison systems should be rehabilitative and gender-specific in the case of women. However, Penal Reform International has observed that there is a lack of understanding about how to design and deliver rehabilitation programmes that fit the unique needs of women prisoners. There are still barriers for women in prison in accessing services available to male prisoners. For example, the European Parliament noted difficulties for women prisoners in accessing activities, sports grounds, libraries, etc., due to being housed in wings of male prisons, and concluded that the Bangkok Rules are 'seldom adhered to' in the EU member states.¹ Also, in Uganda, women are mostly excluded from formal education opportunities offered in prison, as evidenced in the 2017 O-Level examinations where there were no female prisoner candidates.²

Furthermore, in many prisons the types of activities offered to women as part of rehabilitation programmes are gendered,³ traditionally thought appropriate for women. While skills taught to men are generally framed in terms of preparation for employment on release those taught to women rarely are (e.g. hairdressing or knitting). Where they are not mirroring domestic work conventionally conducted by women in the household, they equip for the most low-paid jobs in the economy. This reinforces women's dependency on men and the inability to find employment with sufficient income following release.

International standards

¹ Joëlle Bergeron, European Parliament Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, *Report on prison systems and conditions*, 6 July 2017 (2015/2062(INI)), A8-0251/2017, p19.

² 'Are female prisoners left behind?', *Daily Monitor*, 19 February 2018, www.monitor.co.ug/OpEd/Letters/Are-female-prisoners-left-behind-/806314-4310210-o2pd1a/index.html.

³ See for example Rashida Manjoo (A/68/340), para. 68; see also Report of the Special Rapporteur on the right to education, Vernor Muñoz, *The right to education of persons in detention*, 2 April 2009, UN-Doc. A/HRC/11/8, para. 51.

The UN Nelson Mandela Rules state that the purpose of imprisonment is to protect society against crime and to reduce recidivism. Rule 4 goes on to say that ‘Those purposes can be achieved only if the period of imprisonment is used to ensure, so far as possible, the reintegration of such persons into society upon release so that they can lead a law-abiding and self-supporting life’; and ‘To this end, prison administrations ...should offer education, vocational training and work, as well as other forms of assistance that are appropriate and available, including those of a remedial, moral, spiritual, social and health- and sports-based nature. All such programmes, activities and services should be delivered in line with the individual treatment needs of prisoners.’

Furthermore, the UN Bangkok Rules on women prisoners supplement the Nelson Mandela Rules, requiring the specific reintegration requirements of women prisoners to be catered for. Rule 29 specifies that staff should be trained so they are enabled to ‘address the special social reintegration requirements of women prisoners and manage safe and rehabilitative facilities.’ Rule 40 requires classification methods to be gender-specific so that ‘appropriate and individualised planning and implementation’ towards early rehabilitation, treatment and reintegration. A multitude of other rules on mental health, contact with outside world and those relating to women with children living in prison with them are also relevant.

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