



SUMMARY:
JUVENILES IN DETENTION WEBINAR
27 MARCH 2025

Introduction

EuroPris organised a webinar on Juveniles in Detention on 27 March 2025. Experts from the Netherlands, Northern Ireland, Sweden, and Estonia shared their knowledge on youth justice policies, reforms, and challenges in their respective countries. Below are the key takeaways from each presentation.

Characteristics and Needs of Young Children and Young People in Detention by Fleur Souverein (The Netherlands)

- **Criminal Responsibility** – Since 2016, Dutch policymakers have developed diverse youth institutions, including six high-security, prison-like facilities with a pedagogical approach and five smaller, low-security rehabilitation centres. Juvenile law applies to ages 12–23, with 96% of offenders being boys. While 17% stay over three months, extended stays average 3.5 to 4 years.
- **The Effectiveness of Small-Scale Detention Facilities** – In the Netherlands, small-scale, community-based detention centers have proven to be more effective than traditional high-security institutions. These facilities focus on education, work opportunities, and maintaining positive relationships between youth and staff, creating an environment that fosters rehabilitation.
- **The Problem with Short Detention Sentences** – Short periods of detention often disrupt a young person's education and community ties without providing sufficient time for meaningful intervention. Research suggests that alternative approaches, such as supervised community programs, are often more effective in preventing reoffending.
- **International Research Group on Youth Justice** – An international research group called GIRAF (Group of International Research in Adolescence Forensics) was formed to explore different approaches to youth justice, bringing together researchers for monthly discussions.

Hydebank Wood College and Woman's Prison by Richard Taylor & Cathy Russell (Northern Ireland)

- **The Transformation of Hydebank Wood** – Hydebank Wood, formerly a young male offenders' institution, is now a "secure college" and also houses Northern Ireland's female prisoners. This model prioritises education and vocational training over punishment, helping young people develop skills that improve their prospects after release.

- **Changing the culture with detention centres** - One of the biggest challenges during this transformation was improving relationships between staff and young people. Establishing trust, setting clear expectations, and involving staff in decision-making were key steps in creating a more positive and rehabilitative environment.
- **The success of Hydebank Wood's transformation was due in part to strong partnerships** with community organisations, educational institutions, and local businesses. By offering education, job training in car mechanics and barbering, as well as family support, the facility helps young offenders improve their chances of successful reintegration into society. They have also become creative about their collaborations; for instance, a local museum donated vehicle maintenance as part of their educational offerings, allowing students to work on vehicles in a real-life setting. Additionally, the staff canteens and kitchens are operated by residents who have received qualifications in hospitality and catering, providing valuable skills that help them upon release.

Juveniles in Detention - A Swedish Perspective by Gunilla Hansson & Sarah Åhlén (Sweden)

- **The Changing Landscape of Youth Crime in Sweden** – While overall youth crime rates in Sweden have declined, there has been a concerning increase in juvenile involvement in organised crime, particularly in violent offenses such as shootings and bombings. This shift presents new challenges for law enforcement and the justice system.
- **Tougher Criminal Policies for Young Offenders** – In response to the rise in youth crime, Sweden is implementing stricter penalties, including a proposal to lower the age of criminal responsibility. Additionally, penalty discounts for young offenders, previously intended to account for their age and immaturity, this is now being reconsidered.
- **Specialised Detention Units for Juveniles** – Recognising the need for a different approach to young offenders, Sweden is developing specialised detention facilities for youth aged 15 to 17. These units aim to provide safer conditions, structured activities, and staff with specialised training to work with young people in custody.
- **Expansion and Capacity** – In Sweden, the prison and remand infrastructure is under significant pressure due to a rising number of detainees. Over the past decade, the workforce has doubled, and there are currently 45 ongoing real estate projects aimed at building new prisons. The Swedish Prison and Probation Service (SPPS) is actively working to address this issue.

Initiatives Aimed at Preventing Juvenile Offenses, Supporting Young Offenders in Their Reintegration, and Reducing Reoffending by Stanislav Solodov (Estonia)

- **Restorative Justice and Child-Friendly Practice** – Estonia's EU co-funded Youth-Friendly Legal Justice System (2019-2024) shifted youth justice towards restorative practices, focusing on attitude change, skill development, and child-friendly procedures. It prioritised training specialists, including police and prosecutors, in restorative justice and trauma. The project emphasised alternative interventions over detention and launched pilot training for eight individuals who later taught the programme. Restorative justice is now embedded in Estonian law, juvenile mediation services are widely available, and swift legal proceedings are prioritised for youth cases.

- **Reducing Recidivism and Supporting Reintegration** - The second ongoing EU co-funded project, "Reducing Recidivism among Young Offenders," focuses on four key areas: community interventions for legal compliance and independence, job training in prison, reintegration activities, and strengthening the criminal justice system through specialised training and collaboration. It also emphasises psychological support for professionals and integrates restorative justice in prisons, probation, and victim services. Additional efforts include a communication strategy for 2023-2029 and an evaluation of the project's impact.
- **International Collaboration, Evaluation, and Development** - The success of the reforms has been driven by collaboration with countries like Iceland, the Netherlands, and Finland. Key improvements include local prevention models for bullying and gang activity and the development of residential care facilities as alternatives to traditional prisons. These facilities offer staff training, social programs like Aggression Replacement Training, restorative justice training, and study visits to Norway and the Netherlands.