

**Doc. 10900**  
13 April 2006

## Women in prison

Motion for a recommendation  
presented by Mrs Ahlqvist and others

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

1. The number of women in prison in Europe is growing. For example, in Finland the number of women prisoners increased from 122 in 1994 to 205 in 2003 (a 68% increase), in the Netherlands from 385 to 1025 (a 166% increase) and in Cyprus from 20 to 102 (a 410% increase) over the same period. This is partly due to the fact that more crimes carry a penal sentence despite the low level of violent crimes committed by women.
2. As a result of the increase in the number of women in prison, more children are being separated from their mothers or are growing up in prison. However, due to the fact that the overwhelming majority of prisoners are still male, there is a lack of data and information available on issues surrounding women in prison.
3. Because of the relatively small number of women prisoners and women on remand there are fewer prisons which hold women and even fewer places for women in pre-trial detention. Fewer women's prisons and remand centres mean women are held further away from home, cutting family ties. In fact, in some European countries there is only one single-sex women's prison (e.g. in Austria, Bulgaria and Croatia), meaning that women prisoners may be placed a long way from their homes and families.
4. The incarceration of an adult should not violate the rights of the child. As women prisoners are more likely to be sole carers of children, separation from their children is likely to be more traumatic than if the father is incarcerated. If family ties are maintained, the chances of women prisoners re-offending upon release are lowered.
5. In addition, because of their small number, women with diverse needs and offending histories are held together which means unsuitable security classifications and regimes may be used and women on remand may be held with women who have been convicted. For these reasons it is especially hard for female minority groups such as juveniles and foreign nationals to have their specific needs addressed.
6. The Assembly considers that the reform of prisons and criminal justice policies is necessary to ensure a more humane and effective application of justice for women.
7. The Assembly thus recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge member states of the Council of Europe to:

- i. to fully apply the revised European Prison rules;
- ii. to collect relevant and comparable information on crime and imprisonment broken down by gender; the resulting statistics should be in the public domain;
- iii. to verify that their criminal justice and social policies do not impact unfairly on women;
- iv. to ensure that pre-trial detention and imprisonment are used only as measures of last resort, especially for mothers;
- v. to record the number, ages and location of women prisoner's children and the children's carer immediately on arrival of the prisoner at the prison;
- vi. to ensure that prison regimes and facilities are designed specifically for women, are appropriate for the security classification of each prisoner and are flexible enough to meet the requirements of breastfeeding prisoners, pregnant prisoners and prisoners with children;
- vii. to make sure that prison policies and programmes are specifically tailored to the needs of women, particularly those in the areas of substance abuse, mental health, family contact and resettlement.

*Signed*<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> SOC: Socialist Group  
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party  
ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe  
EDG: European Democratic Group  
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left  
NR: not registered in a group