

Country Report: Norway

The information below comes mainly from research conducted by Juridisk Rådgivning for Kvinner (JURK), a Norwegian NGO working to improve the legal status of women. In 2005, the organisation surveyed sixty-four women across eight women's and mixed prisons and published their results.¹

It should be made clear that the JURK report is made by law students that are not experts in statistical methods, although all numbers used in the report are correct. The report has received some criticism for asking the women in prison too many questions. The motivation to explore all aspects of the women's lives in prison, rather than focus questioning on a specific area, has led to some difficulty in establishing clear results in certain areas. Despite this, the report is of great interest when examining the lives of women in prison in Norway.

Unless otherwise stated, the information below comes from the JURK report.

1. Introduction

In 2005, there were 3,167 prison places and occupancy levels were at 97.1 per cent. In 2005, foreign nationals made up 17.7 per cent of the prison population. The prison population rate was sixty-eight per 100,000 (based on an estimated national population of 4.63 million).²

2. Women prisoners in Norway

In September 2005, women comprised 5.2 per cent of the prison population.³

Prisons

There are three correctional facilities exclusively for women. An additional four have permanent capacity reserved for women and a few other prisons will accept women as needed. In 2004, there were on average 135 female prisoners at any given time in a total of fourteen prisons.⁴

- The biggest prison for women only is Bredtveit with forty-five places for women. It takes both remand and sentenced prisoners, and prisoners with long sentences.
- The second largest women's prison is Ravneberget with sixteen places.
- The joint third largest women's prisons are Sandefjord and Bergen; the former is an open prison with thirteen places; Bergen is a mixed sex prison holding prisoners with short, medium and long sentences including both remand and sentenced prisoners.
- The fifth largest is Stavanger, a new, mixed prison with thirteen places for women, both sentenced and remand; the sexes are mostly divided but come together for joint activities.

¹ *Kvinneres Soningsforhold*, En fengselsundersøkelse utført av Juridisk Rådgivning for Kvinner JURK, 2005 [on-line], accessed on 16 April 2007, available at http://www.jurk.no/rapporter/kvinneres_soningsforhold.pdf (in Norwegian)

² *International Centre for Prison Studies*, World Prison Brief, Prison Brief for Norway [on-line], accessed 15 March 2007, available at <http://www.prisonstudies.org/>

³ *ibid.*

⁴ Short Version of Report No. 27 to the Storting (2004-2005), *Educational and Training in the Correctional Services*, 'Another Spring', p. 11 [on-line], accessed 20 October 2006, available at http://www.odin.no/filarkiv/266236/engelsk_versjon_av_St_meld_om_fengselsundervisning.pdf

- The next largest are Bredtveit avd Østensjø and Bergen avd Osterøy (departments of Bredtveit and Bergen respectively). The latter is an open mixed prison with four places for women; in the former the prisoners have usually served part of their sentence elsewhere and there is an opportunity for work and education outside the prison.

Women were asked their opinions about single sex and mixed sex prisons. Fifty-five per cent of women had negative thoughts about single sex prisons, saying there was too much gossip and ‘intrigue’, and that women’s prisons were unnatural. 44.3 per cent of female prisoners were positive about single sex prisons, saying that there was a better, friendlier atmosphere and that women’s needs and interests were met. Reasons for a negative attitude to mixed prisons, found in 29.9 per cent of respondents, included fears of abuse and that men’s needs would dictate conditions; also, that although the work may be better, women would be excluded and have poor activity provision.

Profile of women prisoners

Age distribution of female prisoners in Norway, 2003

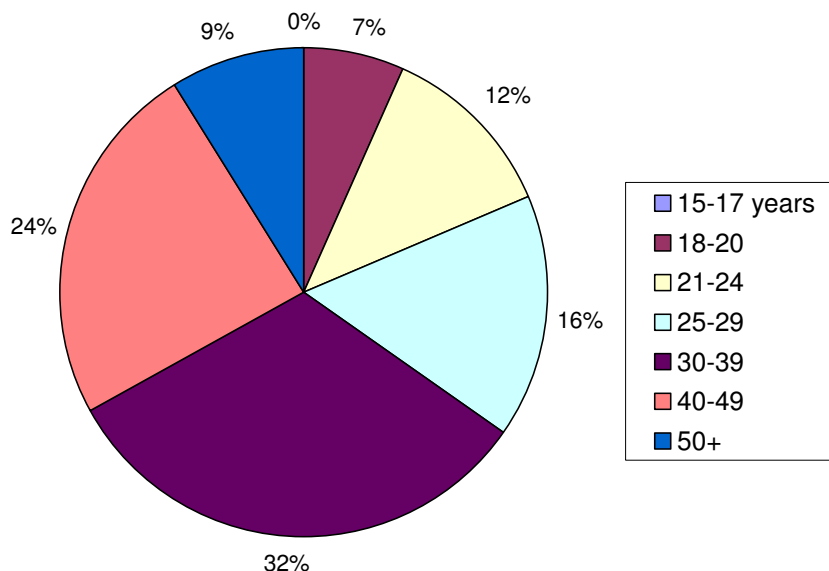


Figure 1: Age distribution of 564 women in prison in Norway in 2003. Statistics from Statistics Norway, Table 50, available at http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/03/05/straff_en/

82.8 per cent of the women surveyed by JURK were from Norway, the vast majority from Eastern Norway. 7.8 per cent of the women surveyed were from other European countries. None were citizens of any African country, although 3.1 per cent identified Africa as their country of origin.

Crimes

Out of 504 women imprisoned for Crimes against the Penal Code in 2003, some of the most common crimes were:⁵

- Crime involving public danger (including serious narcotics crime): 173 women
- Larceny: 108 women.
- Fraud and breach of trust: 54 women
- Crime of violence against the person (including wounding or inflicting bodily harm, murder and manslaughter): 38 women
- Blackmail and robbery: 20 women

Length of sentences

The most common sentence length is between six months and two years (29.7 per cent of women surveyed by JURK were serving a sentence of this length). This was closely followed by a sentence length of between two years to twelve years (28.1 per cent of women), and fourteen days to six months (twenty-five per cent of women). Generally, women serve two thirds of their sentences.⁶

Crime statistics for 2000 show that about ninety per cent of women sentenced to unconditional imprisonment received sentences of less than a year.⁷

Women on remand

Remand prisoners accounted for nineteen per cent of the total prisoner population in September 2005.⁸ According to the 2005 report by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), during the first half of 2005, there were 1,533 persons remanded in custody in Norway. 548 of these persons had restrictions imposed upon them by a court, 205 of whom were placed in complete solitary confinement (possibly with other restrictions), and twenty-one of whom were placed in partial solitary confinement (possibly with other restrictions).⁹

During their visit, the CPT delegation met remand prisoners who were locked in their cells for twenty-two or twenty-three hours per day and having little human contact inside the prison (whether with staff or other prisoners), sometimes for several weeks or even several months. In addition, confinement was often associated with restrictions on reading newspapers, listening to the radio and/or watching television, visits and correspondence. The CPT recommended that the 'Norwegian authorities pursue their efforts to provide activities and appropriate human contact for remand prisoners held in solitary confinement and/or under restrictions.'¹⁰

⁵ *Statistics Norway*, Sanctions 2005, Table 51 [on-line], accessed on 16 April 2007, available at http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/03/05/straff_en/

⁶ *Kvinneres Soningsforhold*, pp. 27 and 28, available at http://www.jurk.no/rapporter/kvinneres_soningsforhold.pdf

⁷ *Educational and Training in the Correctional Services*, p. 17, available at http://www.odin.no/filarkiv/266236/engelsk_versjon_av_St_meld_om_fengselsundervisning.pdf

⁸ *International Centre for Prison Studies*, available at <http://www.prisonstudies.org/>

⁹ *Report to the Norwegian Government on the visit to Norway* carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), 3-10 October 2005, Strasbourg, April 2006.

¹⁰ *ibid.*

On a visit to Bredtveit prison in 2001, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights spoke to a woman who had been denied the right to see her husband and young children for six weeks; her sole human contact throughout this time had been with her guards. Although prisons may contact the authorities requesting a hastening of the judicial process if mental deterioration occurs, the Commissioner wrote that 'it seems to me preferable, rather than to reach this stage, to ensure that in each individual case the restrictions in question are imposed only for so long as they are strictly necessary for an adequate investigation.'¹¹

Visits

By law, prisons can only refuse to grant visits if the visit would be used to carry out a criminal act or disturb the order or safety of the prison. Prisoners have to apply for their visits one week in advance. Their visitor has to have a security check before permission is granted and permission is then valid for a year. On their first visit, visitors will be searched and a guard will sit in on the visit. Visits are usually for an hour unless the visitor lives more than 400 kilometres away. Women are sometimes strip searched before and after visits, 'it puts a damper on the whole visit' one prisoner said. JURK writes that women prisoners have often been sexually abused in the past and the training of guards should make sure they are aware and are sensitive towards this. An apartment for overnight visits has recently been built in Bredtveit prison which is being used by prisoners and their children. There is a big difference in facilities between prisons.

- 23.4% of women surveyed by JURK were dissatisfied with visiting facilities. Those with children were especially dissatisfied and most of those who were dissatisfied were imprisoned at Bredtveit.
- 31.3% of women thought that visiting facilities were OK.
- 15.6% were pleased with the facilities.
- 12.2% of women receive visits from a partner.
- 12.2% of women receive visits from children.
- 31.7% of women receive visits from other family members.
- 13.4% of women receive no visits.

There are prison chaplains, and as the system is run by the state, the chaplains are Lutheran. There are also prison visitors who are politically and religiously neutral and provide confidential conversation and companionship for women. 6.1 per cent of women prisoners receive visits from such visitors.

Leave

Prisoners can leave prison under escort, for example to visit their family at home, so mothers can visit their children. Prisoners serving long sentences can apply to go out of the prison for leisure activities with a prison officer, to go to the cinema for example.

3. Motherhood in prison

In Norway, children and babies do not stay with their mother in prison.¹² They are usually cared for by their father or other relatives, or by foster carers.¹³

¹¹ Report by Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights, on his visit to Norway, 2-4 April 2001, Strasbourg, 19 September 2001, paragraph 2.1.

¹² QCEA questionnaire, question 24, returned from The Royal Ministry of Justice and Police, Norway

Children on the outside

37.5 per cent of women surveyed by JURK had children less than eighteen years of age and eight per cent of the women said that their child did not know she was in prison. The children of twenty-five per cent of the women were living with foster families. 33.4 per cent of the women said that their children were not living with her (the mother's) relatives, and that most of them lived with their father.

Women were asked about their children's reactions to their imprisonment; sixteen per cent of the women said that their children are fine with the imprisonment, twelve per cent said that their child/children experience some stress as a result of the imprisonment and twenty-nine per cent said that they experience severe stress. Four per cent of children did not want to visit their mother in prison, and it was reported that children were distressed at the end of visits.

4. Health

General

Access to health care in prisons was problematic. Only twenty-seven per cent of women said they were able to see the health worker they needed when they needed it. Conditions for seeing the doctor in prison were too strict and they could not always access external health care professionals, such as psychologists, because officers were not available to escort them. Only eleven per cent of women thought they had adequate health information.

Substance addiction

One woman prisoner, interviewed by JURK, said that women should have the opportunity to see a psychologist from day one due to drug problems. One prisoner said it is difficult for women to be on the same drug programme as men because women take drugs for different reasons. Women complained about the lack of drug rehabilitation programmes and said that women were not always offered treatment.

5. Education, work and training

When asked about the positive features of prison, 20.6 per cent of women said education and work.

Education

Women do not receive the same services because of the small number of female prisoners and their short sentences.¹⁴

JURK is concerned about the low levels of education amongst prisoners and the lack of access to education in prisons. Education, it suggests, should be prioritised. 26.6 per cent of women in prison have completed compulsory education (up until sixteen years old). 51.6 per cent have completed further education, and 10.9 per cent have completed higher education. For the general population, the figure for the latter is twenty-four per cent.

¹³ *ibid.* question 28.

¹⁴ *Educational and Training in the Correctional Services*, p. 17, available at http://www.odin.no/filarkiv/266236/engelsk_versjon_av_St_meld_om_fengselsundervisning.pdf

In 2003, 36.2 per cent of female prisoners took part in education or training compared to 29.3 per cent of men. Since the mid-1990s there has been an increase in the number of women prisoners who participate in education or training; the percentage of men has remained steady. Older female prisoners and those who already have education, or who are already employed, are less likely to take up education in prison.¹⁵

One study showed that the school programme for women in four prisons was ‘invisible’ and rather inaccessible to many female prisoners. In some of the four prisons self-study was widespread, which is more demanding for many of the prisoners.¹⁶ One prisoner, who took part in the JURK report, said that course options were good for men but not for women.

There are few opportunities for women to pursue vocational education in prison; women are not always allowed into the workshops. This is especially serious as many of the women come from disadvantaged backgrounds with little work experience, or experience in low paid sectors, and some have had to work as prostitutes.¹⁷

Although women have often come from ‘deprived social backgrounds with little education beyond lower-secondary school’, there is ‘not a significant difference between male and female educational levels on entering prison, in fact, somewhat more women have passed individual subjects or have college or university degrees’.¹⁸

In 2004, the Group nominated to monitor the evaluation of education in Norwegian prisons proposed measures to support and strengthen the education of women prisoners. They said that:

- 1) More subjects leading to qualifications, particularly vocational, must be offered.
- 2) The educational range on offer must be expanded.
- 3) ICT (Information and Communications Technology) instruction must be expanded and increased, including access to the Internet. ICT skills must be a tool which students take back to the community after release from prison.
- 4) Cooperation between the education unit and the work unit, particularly the kitchen, must be developed and practice places established.¹⁹

6. Minority groups

Juveniles

Juveniles accounted for 0.2 per cent of the total prison population in September 2005.²⁰

Juveniles are sometimes held with adults in Norway. Although separating pre-trial adults and juveniles in prison happens in the majority of European countries, the Norwegian penitentiary authorities maintain that given the small number of juvenile detainees, and the fact that they serve such short sentences, holding juveniles separately would entail a *de facto* isolation.²¹

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 18.

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ Recommendations from the Group Nominated to Monitor the Evaluation of Education in Norwegian Prisons, Country Governor of Hordaland, Department of Education, March 2004, Report No. 1(05), p. 23.

²⁰ *International Centre for Prison Studies*, available at <http://www.prisonstudies.org/>

²¹ Report by Mr. Alvaro Gil-Robles, Commissioner for Human Rights

7. Security and punishment

The writers of the JURK report are of the opinion that there is a lack of knowledge or understanding of security regimes which examine women's lack of confidence in their personal officer. Most women did not have any opinions on security regimes used. 13.2 per cent of women thought security 'was extreme and not thought through'. 11.8 per cent of women think the security level is free enough. There are very different security regimes in different prisons.

Half of the women have been in a security or isolation cell. These are bare cells with just a hole in the floor serving as a toilet. One prisoner said that being locked in such cells increases anxiety and violence, creating a vicious cycle.²²

8. Staff and management

One in five women said they did not have confidence in their personal officer while half said that they did have such confidence. Criticisms included staff being inadequately trained for their role. However, prisoners said they understood that the role was a challenging one.

Although every prisoner in Norway should have a personal officer, only 57.8 per cent of the women surveyed by JURK had one. 57.6 per cent of female prisoners said they had confidence in their personal officer, seventy per cent were positive about the system and ten per cent thought it was very good. 20.3 per cent of the women did not have confidence in their personal officer and fourteen per cent thought the system did not function well. Some women thought that personal officers had too much to do and not enough time to do it in, as there were too few officers on shift. This left some women feeling as though they were being a nuisance if they asked for help. 'The negative of the system is that one minute they're your friend and the next minute they're your boss' said one prisoner. Most women did not think the sex of their personal officer made any difference.

9. Additional information

Release

The handbook 'Winning' (VINN in Norwegian) is written for facilitators leading Focused Support Groups for women in prison and probation. The primary objective of the groups is to build up the women's ability to make more adequate choices leading to a better life in general with, for example, less abuse of alcohol and drugs and a reduction in crime and violence. A concurrent objective of these groups is to increase the women's awareness of the relation between drug abuse, violence and crime.

The content of VINN reflects the basic view of humanistic psychology, implying an encouraging attitude to people's ability to change. People can change their lives if and when they are ready for it. Individual resources and possibilities are focused upon in the groups. Methodologically, the guide is based upon the theoretical principles of Motivational Interviewing.²³ JURK reported that the VINN programme received high praise from women prisoners.

²² *Kvinner Soningsforhold*, p. 61, available at

http://www.jurk.no/rapporter/kvinner_soningsforhold.pdf

²³ Torunn Højdaahl, personal correspondence, November 2006. Torunn Højdaahl is co-author of the Winning handbook. See also *QCEA questionnaire*, returned from the Royal Ministry of Justice and Police, Norway

Prisoners were of the view that it is important to follow up released prisoners. 'Officers who believe in me are the most motivating thing' wrote one woman. Some women were dreading release: 'I'm going home with two plastic bags, five Kroner (= 0.54 euros) and the hope of starting a new life. There's so much I have to fight against and so little to fight for' writes one woman. But most women were positive about life after release and wanted a fresh start. JURK recommends that the chances of this are more likely if women are given assistance with accommodation and employment; and if substance-abusing women have access to substitute drugs. Prisoners are of the same opinion: 'I need help on the outside for continuity' writes one. Another said that rehabilitation programmes in prison 'help while I'm sitting here but it's so different when I get out.'