



# POLICY BRIEF

## YOUNG ADULTS (18–25) IN DETENTION

Towards small-scale, differentiated and  
community-integrated detention houses



## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Across Europe, young adults (18–25) remain structurally overlooked:

- Legally treated as adults
- Despite ongoing neurological and social development
- With high levels of vulnerability (mental health, poverty, unstable life contexts)

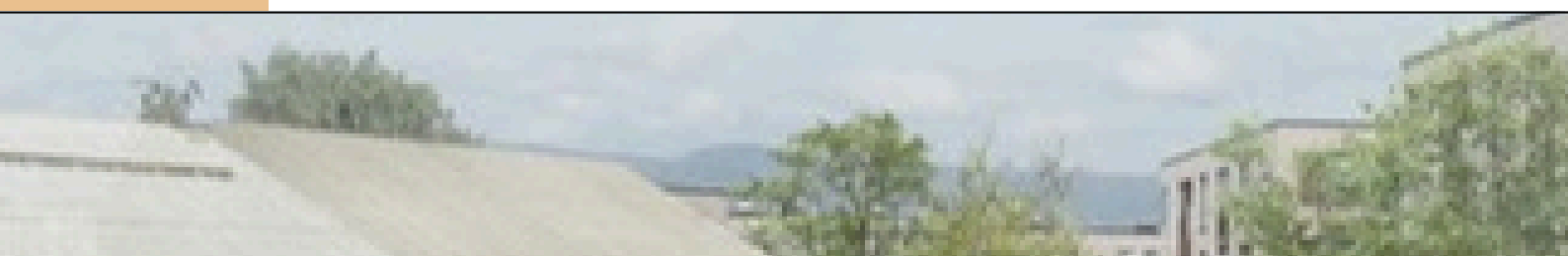
Large-scale prison systems fail to respond to these needs and risk reinforcing reoffending.



## CORE MESSAGE

**Make small-scale, differentiated, and community-integrated detention houses the European standard for young adults.**

→ Shift from punishment to development, from isolation to reintegration.



# EU-LEVEL PRIORITIES



## Recognise young adults as a distinct target group

- Promote EU-wide acknowledgment of 18–25 as a **transition phase**
- Encourage flexible legal frameworks (e.g. extended juvenile approaches)



## Set standards for detention houses

- Integrate **small-scale, differentiated, and community-based detention** into EU recommendations and funding priorities
- Promote models with:
  - max. 10–20 residents
  - local embedding (housing, work, education)



## Invest through EU funding instruments

- Use EU funds (e.g. ESF+, Justice Programme) to:
  - pilot small-scale detention houses
  - support reintegration pathways
  - strengthen community services



## Improve data and monitoring

- Develop EU indicators specifically for **young adults in detention**
- Support comparative research and data collection across Member States



## Promote knowledge exchange

- Facilitate exchange of promising practices (e.g. NL, NO models)
- Support networks such as RESCALED

# NATIONAL-LEVEL PRIORITIES (IMPLEMENTATION)

# 1

## Develop a dedicated policy framework

- Recognise 18–25 as a distinct group in legislation and policy
- Enable development-oriented sentencing and detention pathways

# 2

## Scale up small-scale detention houses

- Transition from large prisons to:
  - community-based houses
  - small living units

Make this the **default model**, not a pilot

# 3

## Build a differentiated network

- Create tailored facilities:
  - transition houses
  - care-focused houses
  - work/education houses
  - small-scale secure units

# 4

## Organise continuous pathways

- Ensure progression:
  - closed → open → transition housing → independent living
- Guarantee continuity in guidance and support

# 5

## Strengthen community integration

- Embed detention in local ecosystems:
  - education, employment, healthcare
- Involve families and social networks
- Expand restorative justice practices

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## Invest in specialised staff

- Mandatory training on young adult development
- Multidisciplinary teams (care, education, employment)

Shift focus from control → guidance

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## Align funding and governance

- Reduce fragmentation between justice, welfare, and local authorities
- Enable integrated, long-term trajectories

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## Ensure inclusive and gender-sensitive approaches

- Develop tailored responses for young women and vulnerable groups
- Address specific needs (trauma, caregiving roles)

## Expected Impact

- ✓ Reduced reoffending
- ✓ More effective reintegration
- ✓ Better use of public resources
- ✓ Increased societal safety

## Conclusion

Young adults are not fully adults, nor juveniles — they are **in transition**.

A modern European detention policy must reflect this reality.



**Small-scale, differentiated, and community-integrated detention houses should become the new standard across Europe.**