

# Women in Prison: Cyprus

Analysis from the National Preventive Mechanism

| September 2024



# Cyprus



UNCAT Ratification	OPCAT Ratification
18 July 1991	29 April 2009
National Preventive Mechanism (NPM)	
Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights	
NPM legal framework	NPM operationalisation
Law 2 (III)/2009 ratifying the OPCAT and designating the Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights as the NPM (27 March 2009) and its amending Law L. 3(III)/2021 (5 February 2021)	Since March 2009
NPM structure	NPM composition
Separate unit within the Ombudsman office	5 staff members (3 women)

## I. Facts and Figures<sup>1</sup>

Prison population	Women in prison - Characteristics	Prisons for women	Prison staff
Total prison population	Women foreigners	Total number of women's prisons	Prison staff total
1,006	73.84%	1	330
Women in prison (total)	Women with disabilities	Mixed prisons with smaller units for women <sup>2</sup>	Women prison staff
65   6.46%	0	1	57
Women serving a sentence	Pregnant women		
41	0		
Women in pre-trial detention	Women with children in prison		
24	0		
Source: Directorate of Nicosia Central Prison, February 2024			

<sup>1</sup> Information provided by the Directorate of Nicosia Central Prison on 7 February 2024, upon request by the NPM.

<sup>2</sup> Nicosia Central Prison

## II. Recommendations

### Solitary confinement, isolation

- + When a decision is taken to place women prisoners in solitary confinement in their cell (as a last resort), their gynaecological needs should also be taken into account in advance.

### Access to mental healthcare

- + The monitoring of women, especially those identified as vulnerable due to their mental health conditions, should be continuous throughout the whole duration of their detention.

## III. Detention Issues

### Solitary confinement, isolation

#### a. Legal and regulatory framework

According to the relevant Prisons (General) Regulations<sup>3</sup>, which apply to both men and women without any distinction, women can also be placed in solitary confinement/isolation. According to the Regulations, women are placed in isolation/restriction to protect themselves or other prisoners.

#### b. The use of solitary confinement in practice

When it comes to pregnant women, nursing or breastfeeding women, women detained with young children and women with psychosocial disabilities who are placed in confinement or isolation, the staff of the Prisons Department are especially careful to take into account their special circumstances, monitoring their needs and attend to them directly (medical, pharmaceutical, psychological, psychiatric). In addition, there is also cooperation with the Mental Health Services and the Clinic of the Prison Department. There is no special isolation/restriction cell in the women's wing of the Nicosia Central Prison nor is there a separate record kept for women placed in solitary confinement/restriction.

### Access to mental healthcare

#### a. Mental health screening upon admission

When women are admitted to the Prison Department, their mental state is assessed to determine their needs, including the determination of post-traumatic stress disorder and risk of suicide or self-harm, and this assessment continues on a regular basis throughout their incarceration. In addition to their examination by a general practitioner (pathologist), upon their admission, an examination is carried out by the Mental Health Services of the Prisons Department and they are evaluated by a psychiatrist and a psychologist.

Depending on the case, if it is deemed necessary or whenever a prisoner requests it, women can visit all the specialties of doctors and officials and, if necessary, they are put on medication, carry out sessions and are closely monitored by the specialists for possible urgent intervention.

#### b. Mental healthcare and psychological support

Measures are taken for women prisoners to have access to special mental healthcare and psychological

<sup>3</sup> Regulation 151 of the Nicosia Central Prison (General) Regulations, available in Greek [here](#) and shortly mentioned also in the [NPM visit report \(May 2023\)](#) in English, pages 6-7.



support. These measures include cooperation with the Mental Health Services, the Social Welfare Services and the Office of Psychosocial Inmate Support of the Department of Prisons. Detainees have the possibility, through their collaboration with these Services, to attend sessions, receive medication, as well as psychological/psychiatric support. Efforts are also made for women prisoners to maintain contact with their families, for positive impact on their mental health.

Mental Health Services offer specialized interventions to address and meet the needs of a vulnerable population with mental health conditions that often lead them to commit crimes. The Mental Health Center of the Prisons Department covers the needs of a vulnerable population with particular psychopathology such as personality disorders, psychotic and emotional disorders, self-destructive behaviour, problems of alcoholism, use and dependence on illegal substances.

#### c. Staff training to respond to mental health needs

Training is provided to Prison Department staff so that they are able to identify and recognize when women prisoners are under pressure to refer them for specialist support. At the Correctional Officers Academy, staff members are trained in various aspects of prisoner management and special attention is paid to their psychological status and risk assessment so that they are able to identify when prisoners need psychological intervention and support to refer them to the appropriate authorities.

Staff members attend seminars, conferences and programs in Cyprus, abroad and online that have to do, inter alia, with prisoners with mental health conditions, substance use, and suicide prevention. Staff of Department of Prisons also maintain close cooperation with the Mental Health Services, the Social Welfare Services and the Office of Psychosocial Support for Prisoners and anything that comes to their attention is immediately reported to the authorities.

#### d. Additional psychological support for women detainees

The Office of Psychosocial Support for Prisoners also pays special attention to the psychosocial condition of all prisoners and their smooth living in prison, as well as their reintegration into society. In addition, primary counseling is provided on an individual level by specialized members of the Staff. Groups of experiential workshops are also created, depending on the psychosocial needs of the prisoners, and lectures are organized on issues that concern the aforementioned population. The Office also networks with other Services of the Department, where it can inform, direct and take care of the correct channeling of prisoners to the competent and more specialized existing Services.

The Prison Department employs a Social Welfare Officer who acts as a liaison between prisoners and local Social Services Offices for socio-economic issues concerning themselves and their families. In addition, the Social Welfare Services Officer studies the cases of prisoners and prepares relevant reports for the information of the Courts, the Department of Prisons and other bodies that have a relationship with the prisoners. The Social Welfare Services Officer also participates in the Classification Committee and the Committee of the Guidance Center for Extra-Institutional Employment and Rehabilitation of Prisoners, where decisions are made for the reintegration of prisoners into society.

## IV. Other Relevant NPM Information on Women in Prison

- + [NPM annual reports](#)
- + [NPM Visit Report for Nicosia Central Prison, 2022](#)