

# Highlighted themes

## **PATHWAYS AND ALTERNATIVES TO WOMEN'S INCARCERATION**

### **WHAT WE FOUND**

The rise in women's imprisonment reflects punitive responses to cases involving non-violent, low-grade offences driven by poverty, marginalisation and drug-related acts. While some jurisdictions show increased use of alternatives to detention for women offenders, especially pregnant women and mothers of young children, significant barriers remain, including punitive drug policies, lack of consideration of gender-based factors beyond women's reproductive and caregiver roles, and challenges in accessing suitable housing and legal support.

### **WHAT WE ADVOCATE**

Reform drug laws, decriminalise offences targeting women, such as sex work and abortion, and prioritise gender-responsive alternatives to pre-trial detention and prison sentences, while strengthening social supports to address the socio-economic factors and marginalisation that can lead to offending and imprisonment.

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## **RISKY DETENTION PRACTICES: BODY SEARCHES, SOLITARY CONFINEMENT AND RESTRAINTS**

### **WHAT WE FOUND**

Body searches, solitary confinement and the use of means of restraint are widely conducted, often without individual assessment, exposing women to high risk of abuse or violence and causing particular harm on women in special situations of vulnerability, including pregnant women, women with disabilities and mental health conditions, LGBTIQ+ women, indigenous women, women with histories of sexual and gender-based violence. Current practices frequently lack proper regulation and safeguards, including documentation and effective complaint systems, leading to violations that can amount to ill-treatment.

### **WHAT WE ADVOCATE**

Replace routine body searches, solitary confinement and use of restraints with alternatives, such as body scans (for body searches), preventive measures and conflict resolution approaches. Ensure that these practices are conducted only when necessary and by trained staff, are strictly regulated and effective safeguards are provided. Body cavity searches should be prohibited by law and solitary confinement and restraints should be prohibited on pregnant and postpartum women, and women with disabilities and mental health conditions.