

## *Transforming Lives:* reducing women's imprisonment



### Why women?

About 13,500 women are sent to prison in the UK every year, twice as many as twenty years ago, many on remand or to serve short sentences for non-violent crimes, often for a first offence. Although women are less than 5% of those in prison, they account for over 25% of self harm incidents, an indication of the traumatic impact of imprisonment on many.

Women's offending is commonly linked to underlying mental health needs, drug and alcohol problems, coercive relationships, financial difficulties and debt. Over half the women in prison report having suffered domestic violence and one in three has experienced sexual abuse. Many of them have dependent children – an estimated 17,240 children are separated from their mothers by imprisonment every year.

*I am keen to intervene earlier in women's offending journey to make sure that the right wrap-around services are put in place to try and divert as many people as possible away from ending up in prison.*

Caroline Dinenage Parliamentary-Under Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Family Justice, January 2016

*Scotland already has the second highest female prison population in Northern Europe, doubling between 2002 and 2012. This is completely unacceptable and does not fit with my vision of how a modern and progressive society should deal with female offenders.*

Michael Matheson MSP, Scottish Justice Secretary, June 2015

*I want us to find alternative ways of dealing with women offenders with babies, including through tagging, problem-solving courts and alternative resettlement units.*

Prime Minister David Cameron, February 2016

## **Aim and outcomes**

*Transforming Lives* has a single aim: to reduce the number of women sent to prison. To achieve this we seek to:

- improve the governance of women's justice across the UK, which requires dedicated leadership and cross-government co-ordination informed by a robust economic case
- strengthen the pathways into mental health and social care services for vulnerable women caught in the criminal justice system
- increase awareness of the links between women's experience of domestic abuse and their offending
- reduce the use of custodial remand unless the seriousness of the offence or the protection of the public demands it
- promote non-custodial options for mothers of dependent children
- reduce the number of foreign national and black and ethnic minority women in custody
- work intensively in selected local areas to foster greater use of early intervention and community orders for women.

Our report with the Soroptimists, *Transforming Lives*, recommends action to rebalance criminal justice responses in favour of effective, integrated local community measures.

*The number of women offenders is comparatively small but the impact is not and it is obvious that within the criminal justice system we cannot simply replicate what we provide for men and hope it will work for women.*

David Ford MLA, Northern Ireland Minister of Justice, November 2013

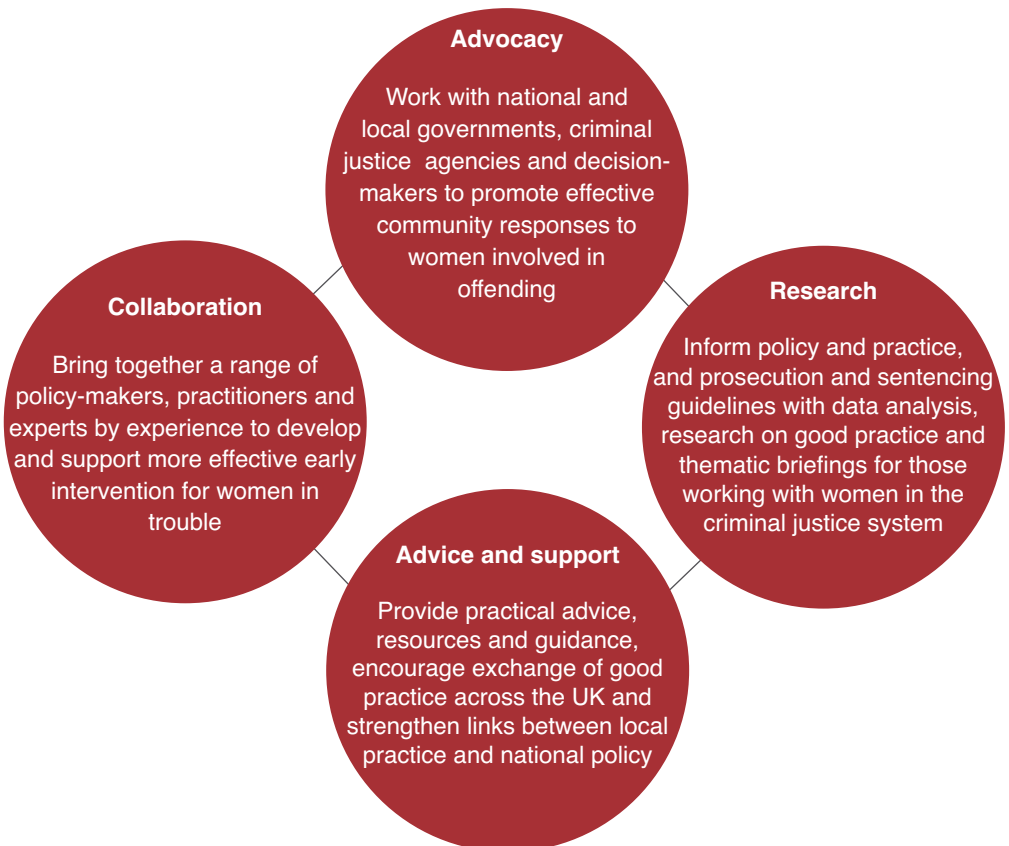
Gender specific options for diversionary measures and pre-trial and sentencing alternatives shall be developed within Member States' legal systems, taking account of the history of victimisation of many women offenders and their caretaking responsibilities.

*The UN Bangkok Rules, Resolution 2010/16 Rule 57*

## How we will achieve our objectives

Our three year strategy has a strong emphasis on local practice and engaging with women with first-hand experience of the criminal justice system. It will develop distinct approaches in each of the UK nations, tackling particular drivers to imprisonment, consulting with key stakeholders and seizing opportunities for reform.

Working with partners and supporters, we will target our efforts where we think *Transforming Lives* can make the biggest difference and build momentum for change.



*Many women who offend are victims themselves and need help and support. By providing positive alternatives we can help people to move away from a pattern of repeat offending, and become empowered to improve their own life situations.*

Leighton Andrews, Welsh Government Minister for Public Services, 2015

For more information about our work to reduce women's imprisonment, and to access our briefings and reports on women in the criminal justice system, visit our website: [www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women](http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/women)

*The judge gave me this three months to work with the women's group. So, then I actually asked for another three months because I like to go and meet with [my key worker and mentor] and going up for a cup of tea and somebody to speak to. The help is there.*

Morag, women's service user, September 2015

## Get in touch



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*We want to see more effective provision for women offenders, making it possible for there to be a substantial fall in the women's prison population in the coming months and years.*

House of Commons Justice Committee, March 2015

In partnership with



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[www.familiesoutside.org.uk](http://www.familiesoutside.org.uk)