

Follow-up of the situation of women in prisons

Introduction

Background

The Committee on Justice has pointed out on a number of occasions that the situation of women in the prison service warrants special attention. The Committee has, for example, stated that increased knowledge of the general situation of, and criminality among, women is vital if the measures taken by the prison service are to be adapted to the needs of women prisoners.

As part of the Committee on Justice's work under the Riksdag Act to consider matters relating to follow-up and evaluation of decisions taken by the Riksdag and to prepare a better basis for decisions on topical issues falling within the Committee's area of responsibility, the Committee decided on 31 May 2007 to follow up the situation of women in prison. The follow-up was carried out by the Committee's follow-up group, comprising the following members: Elisebeht Markström (Social Democratic Party), Chair, Johan Linander (Centre Party), Helena Bouveng (Moderate Party), Lena Olsson (Left Party), Otto von Arnold (Christian Democrats), Mehmet Kaplan (Green Party), Camilla Lindberg (Liberal Party) until 12 November 2008 and Helena Bargholtz (Liberal Party) as of 13 November 2008.

At the request of the group, the background materials for the follow-up were been prepared in the Riksdag Administration by the Secretariat of the Committee on Justice, in cooperation with the Evaluation and Research Function at the Riksdag Research Service.

The follow-up was presented to the Committee in May 2009. The report of the follow-up group has been published in the series Reports from the Riksdag (Report 2008/08:RFR9, in Swedish).

Purpose and delimitations

The main purpose of the follow-up has been to obtain increased knowledge of the situation of women prisoners and to highlight the practical impact of the Committee's statements, and ascertain whether measures taken by the Prison and Probation Service are adapted to the needs of women prisoners. The follow-up has focused on the situation of women in prisons. In cases where other parts of the prison service are affected, such as remand centres and non-institutional care, this has only been examined briefly and only where they have been connected with measures taken in prisons. According to the Prison and Probation Service's objectives, the number of repeat offences is to be reduced and each prisoner should be held in a way that meets his or her need for rehabilitation during the various stages of the period of internment and that can gradually prepare them for release. The remit of the Committee on Justice's follow-up did not include highlighting or showing to what extent measures taken have a causal link with, for example, readjustment or repeat offences after the completion of a sentence.

Focus

The group has based its follow-up on a number of questions. These questions have focused on highlighting whether there are any differences in the measures taken by the Prison and Probation Service to meet the needs of women and men prisoners for:

- support and help in combating abuse problems or stopping destructive patterns of behaviour;
- work, education and training, and leisure activities;
- mental or somatic care;
- contacts with family etc.

The follow-up has also included highlighting whether there are any differences in opportunities to conclude the prison sentence with gradual release measures.

Summary

The follow-up group's assessments in brief

The objective of the Government's criminal policy is to reduce crime and increase public security. Penalties should be enforced in a secure, humane and efficient manner, and measures taken with the aim of reducing the number of repeat offences. All prisoners should be held in way that meets their need for security and rehabilitation during the various stages of imprisonment and that gradually prepares them for release.

The Prison and Probation Service should take special measures to prevent criminality during the enforcement of sanctions, to prepare for release and to combat drug abuse. The period of enforcement should be adapted to the individual's specific needs. Establishments should be organised so as to meet various needs for security, prisoners' need for work, education and training and special treatment programmes, and to enable appropriate planning of the prisoners' release.

The follow-up group presents its observations below. It also makes a number of assessments of how the prison service can be better adapted to the needs of women. These assessments are made with the aim of achieving the above-mentioned objectives for the activities of the prison service.

Developments in the Prison and Probation Service's work for women in prison

The follow-up shows that the situation of women in the prison service has received greater attention in recent years. A number of major steps have been taken to make the prison service better adapted to the needs of these women. In the opinion of the follow-up group, however, these measures are not sufficient. Furthermore, the follow-up group considers that a holistic approach is needed to ensure that the prison service can meet the women's needs in all respects. In order to better adapt the prison service to the needs of women, the situation of these women must have greater priority than has hitherto been the case.

Research on the needs and situation of women in prison

In the follow-up it has emerged that there is limited research on the subject of women prisoners. In the opinion of the follow-up group, research and development concerning women prisoners need to be strengthened and the issue highlighted among the relevant authorities and research bodies. International research findings on the subject should be made use of. The Prison and Probation Service also has an important task in encouraging and initiating research on women prisoners.

The placement of women in prisons

The follow-up reveals differences in the way women and men are placed during their prison sentences. This concerns, for example, the number of establishments, security class and type of placement. In the opinion of the follow-up group, it is natural for the number of women's prisons to reflect the number of women prisoners. Even if geographical distance from the home may be of significance as regards rehabilitation, prison placements must always be made on the basis that the available programmes of activities must meet the specific need for treatment of individual prisoners.

The placement of young women in prisons

The follow-up reveals that there are no dedicated units for young women, as there are for young men. In the opinion of the follow-up group, women under the age of 21 who are sentenced to prison should be offered special activities adapted to younger prisoners in the same way as men. Even if few women up to the age of 21 are sentenced to prison and there are insufficient numbers to set up special units for young women, it is important that alternative solutions are found to fulfil the needs of the individuals in this group.

Review and planning of enforcement

In the follow-up it has emerged that there are qualitative problems with the drawing up of enforcement plans. In the opinion of the follow-up group it is important these problems are addressed. It would be of value if the results of measures taken also were examined in depth. Enforcement plans could then also be used for more refined analyses of repeat offences.

Occupational activities and education opportunities

The Committee on Justice has, on several occasions, expressed concern about the falling rate of occupational activities among prisoners. In the follow-up it has emerged that approximately one-fourth of the paid working hours in 2007 consisted of lack of occupational activities for women in prisons, compared with approximately 31% for men. The

follow-up also shows that many prisoners have relatively low education levels and that in 2006, almost 40 % had compulsory school as their highest completed level of education.

In the opinion of the follow-up group, occupational activities in prisons need to be enhanced. Further, the Prison and Probation Service should take measures to make it possible to establish how levels of occupational activities among prisoners develop over time. The occupational activities offered to women in prison must have a content that encourages work and other employment after completion of their prison sentence. In the opinion of the follow-up group, further measures are essential to enable more women in prison to participate in employment training so as to increase their opportunities to work and support themselves after completing their term in prison. At the same time, the follow-up group wants to point out that the development of teaching centres in prisons is valuable to be able to offer prisoners high-quality training and education, while also taking into account security aspects.

Treatment programmes and repeat offences

In the follow-up it has emerged that an increasing number of women in prison take part in treatment programmes. The follow-up group is positive to the fact that the Prison and Probation Service has put a greater focus on developing and adapting its treatment programmes to the needs of women. Well-adapted treatment programmes as a part of rehabilitation are a precondition for reducing the proportion of repeat offences. Studies of repeat offences undertaken by the Prison and Probation Service are an important means of achieving quality assurance of programme activities. These need to be carried out so that the results also show when there are differences in the occurrence of repeat offences between women and men in the various programmes. This is in order to ensure that the programmes offered are designed to meet the women's needs, as is the case for men.

Self-management

The Committee on Justice has, on various occasions, emphasised the importance of continuing to establish more places with self-management initiatives. In the follow-up it has emerged that self-management is increasing at the prisons. In the opinion of the follow-up group, the progress made in this field is a valuable development in the prison services, and it is important that this development continues.

Security in prisons

The Riksdag has taken decisions designed to increase security in prisons. Among other things, the decisions mean simplified and more consistent regulations as regards prisoners' right to have personal property, examination of letters and the holding of prisoners in isolation. In the follow-up it has emerged that these measures for increased security in the prison services were implemented in 2008. It has also emerged that it is not possible to derive specific data that show over time when and to what extent prisoners are kept in isolation. In the opinion of the follow-up group, the measures taken by the prison services to increase security are important. At the same time it is crucial that these measures are followed up and continuously evaluated. The measures must also always be seen in relation to the restrictions they imply for the women, both at group and at individual level. Security-enhancing measures must never become greater than necessary at each establishment or unit or for the individual. Finally, it must be possible to follow developments as regards holding in isolation in prisons for women and men over time.

Parenthood among prisoners

In the follow-up it has emerged that a number of measures have been taken in recent years to bring greater attention to the best interests of the child in the prison service. It has also emerged that some of the measures taken in 2008 to increase security in prisons have made it more difficult for children of prisoners to maintain contact with their parents. It has emerged that there is a need for better adaptation of prisons for women living with children. The follow-up group wants to emphasise how important it is that the children of prisoners are given opportunities to maintain contact with their parents. The group therefore considers it especially important to follow up whether the children's perspective is always taken into account when security is increased. If it emerges that it is difficult to incorporate a children's perspective, a higher level of differentiation between establishments or units should be considered. In the opinion of the follow-up group, the newly-established children's representatives could serve as an important resource in the Prison and Probation Service's work with a greater focus on the children's perspective. For this reason it is vital that the duties of the children's representatives are highlighted and given sufficient time in relation to their ordinary responsibilities at each establishment.

In the opinion of the follow-up group it is positive that, in the most recent increase in the number of places in prisons for women, the need to achieve a good environment for children that live with their mothers for a longer period has been taken into account. It is also important that this issue continues to receive attention.

Collaboration with non-governmental organisations

In the follow-up it has emerged that collaboration between the Prison and Probation Service and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) works well for the most part. In the opinion of the follow-up group it is important that the Prison and Probation Service makes use of the valuable knowledge and skills among NGOs in all respects. Already at the planning stage of activities, the competence and commitment of the NGOs should be viewed as an important asset.

Health and healthcare

In the follow-up it has emerged that many women in prison have been the victims of physical, mental and/or sexual abuse and that many of the women are in poor physical and mental health. In the opinion of the follow-up group, this means that high demands must be made on access to adequate health and medical care so that the various needs of the women can be met.

Transition

In the follow-up it has emerged that the aims of the transition reform adopted by the Riksdag and introduced in January 2007 have not yet been achieved. In the opinion of the follow-up group, it is important that the intentions of this reform are met. In the light of the fact that a greater proportion of women prisoners were released without any transition measures in 2007 compared with men, the follow-up group wants to bring attention to the reasons for the current differences. Measures need to be taken to increase the proportion of women receiving transition measures. In this context, the follow-up group wants to stress that placement in halfway houses could also be offered to women as a transition option.

As many women prisoners have long-standing problems with drug abuse etc., combined with the fact that they are serving relatively short sentences, the follow-up group emphasises how important it is that the prison services collaborate with other relevant authorities so that treatment measures can continue even after completion of their prison sentence.

The prison services should also make use of and encourage opportunities for cooperation with other authorities and actors such as Moa/Kvinnokrami.

The quality of data on the prison service

In the follow-up it has emerged that, in a number of areas, there are problems with the quality of data from the Prison and Probation Service. In the opinion of the follow-up group it is important that there is a reliable system for obtaining data about the prison service, inter alia, as a basis for the Riksdag decisions on matters concerning the prison services. The group therefore wants to point out how important it is that measures are taken to address the problems associated with obtaining correct and unambiguous data. Further, the problems with the quality of data etc. should also be the subject of a more in-depth examination in the future.

Reports to the Riksdag

In the follow-up it has emerged that the Riksdag has not yet requested any particular account from the Government of the results of central government measures in the prison service regarding women prisoners. In the opinion of the follow-up group, it would be of value if the Government, in a suitable context, were to get back to the Riksdag with a report of the results of continued efforts to adapt the prison service to the needs of women.

A brief summary of the various sections of the report

The following section gives a brief summary of the various sections of the report.

Background (Section 1)

The Riksdag considers questions connected with the situation of women and men in penal institutions in various contexts. On a number of occasions, the Committee on Justice has pointed out that the situation of women in the prison service needs to be highlighted, in particular, and that greater knowledge about women's criminality and their general situation is crucial if the measures taken by the prison service are to be adapted to their specific needs. In view of this, the Committee on Justice has carried out a follow-up with the aim of acquiring better knowledge of the situation of women in prisons and the extent to which the prison service have been adapted to the needs of these women.

Control of the prison service (Section 2)

The overall objective of the Government's criminal policy is to reduce crime and increase public security. Penalties should be enforced in a secure, humane and efficient manner and the number of repeat offences should be reduced.

Each prisoner should be held in a way that meets their need for security and rehabilitation during the various stages of their period of internment and that gradually prepares them for release.

The Prison and Probation Service shall take special measures to prevent criminality during the enforcement of sanctions, to prepare prisoners for release and to combat drug abuse. The period of enforcement should be adapted to the individual's specific needs. Establishments should be organised so as to meet various needs for security, prisoners' need for work, education and training, and special treatment and to enable appropriate planning of the prisoners' release. The Prison Treatment Act contains special provisions on women prisoners with reference to childbirth, on the possibilities of having an infant in prison and on body searches.

In 2008, the Governing Board of the Prison and Probation Service was replaced by a monitoring body with the task of monitoring activities and providing advice to the Head of the authority. The task of the Parliamentary Ombudsmen is to ensure that public authorities and public officials comply with existing laws and other regulations in the performance of their tasks. See Section 7 below.

According to Act on the Central Government Budget (1996:1059), the Government is to present objectives and results in various areas to the Riksdag. This is done annually, for example in the annual accounts contained in the Budget Bill. The Riksdag can also demand a special communication giving an in-depth presentation of results from the Government. In the follow-up it has emerged that the Riksdag has not yet requested any particular account from the Government of the results of central government measures in the prison service regarding women prisoners.

Prisoners (Section 3)

In the last decade there has been an increase, both in number and as a proportion of all prisoners, of women held in penal institutions. In 2007, just under 7% of all prisoners were women. Women had a higher average age than men: just over half of the women were 40 years old, or older, which can be compared with 39% of the men. According to statistics from the Prison and Probation Service (cross-section 1 October 2007) the median age of all first-time women prisoners was 38, compared with 35 for men.

A large proportion of the prisoners had been sentenced to short terms of imprisonment. Just over 50% of the newly admitted women had sentences of up to three months in 2007, compared with 40% of the men.

Substance abuse, criminality and the situation of women prisoners (Section 4)

Surveys and research on the situation of women prisoners indicate that women have, to some extent, a more vulnerable and problematic situation than men. In research from the 1990s on prisoners describing, for example, their childhood and living conditions, it can be noted that the home and childhood conditions of women and men prisoners did not differ greatly. One difference was, however, that almost half of the women prisoners, compared with one third of the men, had experienced substance abuse in their own family during childhood. It was further noted that the women prisoners had a notably more difficult situation as regards accommodation, employment, economy and abuse.

Of all women prisoners included in surveys by the Prison and Probation Service ASI in 2003-2008, 28% said that they lived with a partner who was involved in crime. The corresponding figure among men was 4%. As regards drug abuse, 31% of the women and 8% of the men live with a partner who uses drugs.

Until 2003, the proportion of women who had been sentenced to prison and who abused drugs was considerably higher than the percentage of men. However, this difference has levelled out and in 2007, 64% of the women and 61% of the men were drug abusers. It has also emerged that there are differences in how the women prisoners and men prisoners finance their drug abuse.

Women who are sentenced to prison are more often sentenced for drug offences than men. As regards criminality among women prisoners, just over half had committed a drug/smuggling offence and/or larceny offence, compared with 42% of the men. In the latest five-year period (2003-2007) the share of both women and men who have been sentenced to prison without any previous enforcement of sanctions has continued to increase.

Research on criminality etc. among women prisoners (Section 5.2)

Within the Prison and Probation Service there is considerable empirical knowledge of women prisoners and their needs. Access to research-based knowledge of the situation of and criminality among women prisoners has, however, hitherto been limited. Much of the research highlighting the various aspects of the situation of prisoners concerns men. One of the reasons for this is that there are few women prisoners in relation to the number of men. This means that in some cases they are not included in the surveyed prison populations or that they are included but that the results are not presented according to gender. During the follow-up, the need for more research on women prisoners was pointed out by staff in the Prison and Probation Service, other authorities and researchers.

Incidents and measures for greater security in penal institutions (Section 5.3)

Problems such as escapes, major disturbances and the forming of criminal gangs are occurrences that, with a few exceptions, occur in prisons for men. However incidents do nevertheless occur in women's prisons, and in 2007 three cases of threats and violence against staff and two cases of violence between inmates were reported. This can be compared with reports of a total of 147 incidents in men's prisons the same year. According to the Prison and Probation Service, conditions are calmer and more normalised in women's prisons in general. The Riksdag approved a number of amendments to legislation concerning the prison service which came into force in April 2008, and are designed to maintain order and security in prisons. These amendments include the right of prisoners to personal possessions. During 2008, new regulations have also been introduced concerning prisoners' right to use telephones. According to the follow-up, women prisoners have maintained that they consider it unjust that the stricter regulations have the same application even though order and security are different in women's and men's prisons. There are no statistics for either the women's or the men's prisons showing the extent to which the Prison and Probation Service holds prisoners in isolation.

Developments in the Prison and Probation Service's work for women in prison (Section 5.4)

In recent years the Prison and Probation Service has started to pay more active attention to the situation and needs of women in prison. A number of steps have also been taken to achieve improvements in various areas. An important aspect of the Prison and Probation Service's efforts to improve the situation of women prisoners is the establishment of a women's network including the heads of women's prisons which, on the basis of the women's needs, will work together to adapt the prison service. Other measures taken include the introduction in 2007 of internal basic training for staff working with women and the development of a special treatment programme directed at women prisoners, which has started to be applied. During 2008, new prison clothing for women was presented on behalf of the Prison and Probation Service. For the last few decades prison uniforms have been the same for women and men.

Pilot projects with benefit systems (Section 5.5)

During parts of 2007-2008, the Prison and Probation Service has carried out a pilot project at the request of the Government, involving benefit systems at Hinseberg and three men's prisons with the aim of increasing opportunities to encourage and reinforce positive behaviour during the serving of sentences. The evaluation of the pilot project revealed that the desired effects were not achieved. The project produced no real results at Hinseberg. The women at Hinseberg behaved well in general even before the pilot project, which is why no great differences could be seen.

Placements and women's prisons (Section 6.1)

According to the Prison Treatment Act, a woman should normally be held in a prison intended solely for women. At present there are five prisons for women, spread across the country. Of the total number of places intended for women, approximately one third are open places and the rest are closed. The follow-up reveals that women express the wish to serve their sentence close to home to a greater extent than men. As there are few prisons for women, this can mean that it is more difficult to satisfy the women's wishes in this respect. There are also differences as regards types of place in prisons. For women prisoners there are 5 different kinds of place, compared with 14 for men.

For young men, i.e. up to the age of 20, who are sentenced to prison there are special units for young offenders. As the number of women up to the age of 20 are so few, there is an insufficient basis to establish units for young women offenders. The young women are therefore placed together with older prisoners in women's prisons.

Review and planning of enforcement (Section 6.2)

According to the Prison Treatment Ordinance, a plan (enforcement plan) is to be established for each prisoner. The Committee on Justice has earlier noted (Report 2007/08:JuU1) that it is unsatisfactory that the enforcement plans are, in many places, marred by quality problems. The National Audit Office has also drawn attention to the qualitative problems associated with the enforcement plans on a number of occasions. It has emerged in the follow-up that the Prison and Probation Service has taken a number of measures, including education measures, to address the qualitative problems that have been identified. It has not been possible to assess whether the measures taken hitherto have been sufficient to address the problems associated with the enforcement plans.

For women who have been sentenced to prison for two years or more, the Prison and Probation Service applies a procedure for examination at the national reception centre at Hinseberg. Placement at the national reception centre means that a more in-depth needs and risk examination is made before the final placement. Men who have been sentenced to four years' prison or more are placed at the national reception centre.

Work in prisons (Section 6.3.4)

Prisons offer inmates various work opportunities. The work that is offered varies between different prisons. The follow-up shows that there are two types of work operation units at the women's prisons (assembly and packing and the textile and clothing industry), compared with twelve at the men's prisons. It should, however, be noted that there are normally one or two different types of work operation unit at each prison. In 2007 work, including services such as kitchen work and internal maintenance, made up approximately 38% of all compensated working hours for women prisoners compared with approximately 45% for men.

Education and training in prisons (Section 6.3.5)

Attention has been paid in various contexts to the fact that many prisoners, both women and men, have a relatively low level of education and that many have not completed upper secondary school. The prisons provide compulsory and upper secondary school education, formal adult education in the form of Swedish language training for immigrants and certain kinds of vocational training. Approximately 7% of all prisoners taking part in adult education classes in 2007 were women. The number of prisoners pursuing further education has decreased in recent years. In 2007, a total of 11 women and 195 men in prison were taking further education courses. In the same year a total of 1,146 prisoners, including 75 women, were taking vocational courses, which represents a decrease compared with 2006, when 1604 prisoners, including 81 women, were taking vocational courses. In the follow-up it has emerged that the Prison and Probation Service intends to invest slightly greater resources in vocational training for women in 2009.

Treatment programmes (Section 6.3.6)

In recent years the Prison and Probation Service has made special investments to enable more prisoners to be offered the opportunity to take part in various national treatment programmes. These treatment programmes may be designed to combat criminality in general, to encourage greater motivation, to address problems with aggression and violence, to combat drug abuse or to deal with sex offenders. Most programmes that are offered can be targeted at both women and men. Since the Prison and Probation Service has previously highlighted the lack of national treatment programmes designed for women, measures have been taken since 2006 to develop and introduce a motivation programme for this purpose ("Vinn"). So far this programme appears to have been well-received by women who have taken part and by staff at the women's prisons. Even if total participation in various treatment programmes has increased over the years, data from the Prison and Probation Service show that many prisoners do not take part in any programme activities. Of the women released between December 2006 and November 2007, 75% had not taken part in any programme activities, compared with 84% among the men. One of the main purposes of the measures to increase prisoners' participation in treatment programmes is to reduce the number of repeat offences. As the number of women that has participated in the programmes is small so far, it has been difficult to conduct any studies of repeat offences with statistically reliable results. The results of the few studies of repeat offences with figures for the number of women and men who have participated in the treatment programmes indicate that there can be differences between women and men that may need further examination.

Self-management (Section 6.3.7)

The Committee has previously stated that it is very positive to the work being carried out in the prison service to increase self-management initiatives in prisons. The purpose of self-management initiatives is to give prisoners knowledge and experience of such everyday tasks that are needed to manage life outside prison. The content and organisation can vary from prison to prison. The follow-up shows that self-management initiatives have so far been practised to a greater extent in women's prisons. An issue that has been highlighted by staff in the Prison and Probation Service is that there are preconceived ideas about it being easier to carry out the self-management tasks in the women's prisons than in the men's prisons. One experience so far is, however, that it can often be easier to activate men prisoners with self-management than women. One reason may be that there are feelings of guilt and shame among women prisoners to admit that to shortcomings in the basics of caring for their own everyday household tasks.

Visits, relationships and parenthood (Section 6.4)

In the follow-up it has emerged that women receive fewer visits than men during their time in prison and that they are more often forgotten by their surroundings. The reasons for this may be that it is common for women prisoners to have a weak social network or that the geographical distance between the place of residence and the prison has an impact.

As regards parenthood and prisoners, it has emerged in the follow-up that the situation is often extra difficult for children whose mother's are sentenced to prison as these children rarely have a father who looks after them when their

mothers are serving their sentences. This means that the situation for these children is different to that of men in prison, since these often have a mother who tries to restore order and create secure everyday conditions for them. The Prison and Probation Service offers parental courses for both women and men in prison but differences have emerged in how these groups take in the information. In general it appears that women find it more difficult to admit their lack of knowledge in this field, which is given as one of the reasons why it is more difficult to hold parental courses for women.

The Children's Ombudsman has previously pointed to the need to better highlight the best interests of the child in the prison service. Development measures are therefore being taken to appoint special children's representatives among prison staff with the task of ensuring that the children's perspective is taken into account. According to the Children's Ombudsman, the awareness of children of prisoners has increased in recent years, and important measures have been initiated in the Prison and Probation Service. At the same time there are a number of areas requiring further development, e.g. opportunities for telephone contacts between children and parents in prison, more flexible visiting times and further amendments to rules on leave for prisoners to spend time with their children.

Non-governmental organisations (Section 6.5)

According to the Prison and Probation Service's guidelines, the authority strives to establish well-developed collaboration with non-governmental organisations as a supplement to its own measures, with a focus on a more everyday contact with individuals with a non-authority perspective. In 2007 and 2008 the Prison and Probation Service approved grants of a total of SEK 8 million to various organisations working in the field, with the National Association of Voluntary Workers, Criminals Return into Society and Bryggan receiving the largest grants. During the follow-up, the NGOs have not pointed to any major differences in conditions for their work at women's or men's prisons. It has however been mentioned that it is sometimes easier to carry out work in women's prisons as the security arrangements are perceived as less extensive than they are at men's prisons. It has also been mentioned that cooperation with the Prison and Probation Service could be better, although there is no distinction between the women's and men's prisons.

Leisure time in prisons (Section 6.6)

The regulations of the Prison and Probation Service state that prisons are to provide a varied range of leisure activities. The activities offered depends on the security level of the prison or unit. Many prisons have libraries and it is also common to offer such leisure activities as film viewings, courses, physical training and sports, as well as various events organised by NGOs and churches. Changes have been introduced in equipment for physical training, to promote all-round physical training and to avoid excessive body-building. For prisoners serving longer sentences who observe regulations, it is possible to spend short periods at the Gruvberget establishment, where it is possible to participate in open courses and spend time with family. For many years, male inmates have been offered the opportunity to take part in monastery retreats. This opportunity was also made open to women from 2007.

Health and healthcare at women's prisons (Section 6.7)

According to a summary of the results of the ASI surveys of prisoners between 2003-2008, women prisoners have poorer physical and mental health than men. Compared with the men, more women prisoners say that they suffer from physical injuries that affect their everyday lives. Hepatitis B and C are also more prevalent among women prisoners. A high proportion of the women say that they have previously experienced physical, mental and/or sexual abuse. Even if it is also common among the male prisoners, according to the follow-up, to have experienced physical and mental abuse, a higher proportion of the women still have experience of this or sexual abuse. Of the women prisoners included in the survey between 2003-2008, 35% said that they had attempted suicide once or more in their lives, compared with just under one fifth of the men. According to prison staff estimates, 75% of the women and 60% of the men needed help for mental or emotional problems. The existing needs mean that there is a great demand for the various therapeutic resources available for women prisoners. However the follow-up has been unable to show whether the current resources cover the existing needs. One development in the Prison and Probation Service is that there are midwives among the available teams of nurses.

Transition measures (Section 6.8)

With the aim of reducing the risk of repeat offences and also to facilitate prisoners' transition into society, a transition reform was introduced in January 2007, whereby the Prison and Probation Service can provide four kinds of transition measures. These measures include parole, a stay in care, a stay in a halfway house or extended parole. The transition reform means greater transition opportunities. At the request of the Government, the National Council for Crime Prevention is currently evaluating the transition reform. According to the interim report presented in September 2008, the results show that gender distribution for these transition measures largely corresponds to gender distribution among

the prison population in general. According to the National Council for Crime Prevention's estimates, approximately one third of the prisoners released in 2007 received some kind of transition help. The follow-up reveals that the number of women who started parole fell from 21 in 2006 to 7 in 2007. The number of women who started a stay in care fell from 44 in 2006 to 42 in 2007. 31 women started extended parole in 2007. The three halfway houses only offer transition for men at present. So far, the view has been that there are too few women to establish a halfway house for them, instead these women can be offered transition measures through placements similar to halfway house placements. During the follow-up, attention was drawn to the fact that there are differences in the coordination of transition measures in the social services of various municipalities, and that this can involve difficulties in implementing transition measures.

Reports from prisoners to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen (Section 7)

An overview of the reports regarding conditions in prisons received by the Parliamentary Ombudsmen during 2007, and which have led to criticism, do not indicate any major differences in the contents of reports from women's and men's prisons. In its official report for 2008, the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsmen has drawn attention to the increasing number of reports regarding the Prison and Probation Service and that the authority, on account of the large number of reports, is unable to undertake certain inspections. The Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsmen would also like to see a review focusing on the possibility of establishing an independent, regular inspection of the treatment of individuals who have been deprived of their freedom.

Limitations in interpreting cases of repeat offences (Sections 3 and 8)

One of the tasks of the Prison and Probation Service is to reduce the proportion of repeat offences. There are, however, several factors, including the fact that women prisoners are a small group, that make it more difficult to conduct studies of repeat offences. These difficulties have also been highlighted by various authorities. According to the Prison and Probation Service's report on repeat offences from 2005, the percentage of repeat offences within a year among women is slightly lower than that among men, with the exception of 2001. In the 2009 Budget Bill, the Government underlines the importance of improving the Prison and Probation Service's statistics on repeat offences so that they can serve as a basis for an assessment of the fulfilment of objectives.

Overall observations and the assessments of the follow-up group (Section 9)

Section 9 presents the overall observations of the follow-up as well as the follow-up group's assessments, as presented above.