

Justice system redesign must not fail women – new report out today, published by NWJC and CCJS

Women's centres and a public health approach must be at the heart of a bold agenda to deliver a justice system that works for women. This is the overarching call from [Breaking out of the Justice Loop](#), a new report co-published today (March 10, 2025) by the [National Women's Justice Coalition](#) and the [Centre for Crime and Justice Studies](#).

Co-authored by Naomi Delap, Director of Birth Companions and Liz Hogarth OBE, former policy lead on women's justice at the Ministry of Justice and independent consultant, *Breaking out of the Justice Loop* argues that the criminal justice system, designed for men, has consistently failed women for years.

Recent history has been littered with false starts and promising initiatives that have lacked government commitment to see them through.

- The momentum generated by Baroness Jean Corston's landmark Corston Report on women in the criminal justice system, published in 2007, quickly dissipated.
- After years of inaction, the underpowered Female Offender Strategy, published in 2018, was, the report argues, *"doomed to be ineffectual"*.
- Following the publication of a further delivery plan in 2022, progress *"has been glacially slow and superficial"*.

The latest fresh start was signalled by the Justice Secretary Shabana Mahmood in her speech to the Labour Party conference last September in which she said that *"Prison isn't working"* for women, before announcing the formation of a Women's Justice Board with the goal *"to reduce the number of women going to prison, with the ultimate ambition of having fewer women's prisons"*.

Welcoming this announcement, *Breaking out of the Justice Loop* makes four key recommendations to ensure that the ambition for transformational change for women is finally realised.

1. The Women's Justice Board should more clearly be modelled on the Youth Justice Board, with a ring-fenced budget and independence from direct ministerial control.
2. Sentencing should reflect the specific needs and vulnerabilities of women, with a presumption against imprisonment and a central role for effective probation practice.
3. Women's centres and specialist organisations should be *"at the heart of a holistic, woman-centred and integrated approach"*, with sustainable funding underpinning this work.
4. A public health approach, emphasising prevention over punishment, should be implemented *"to address the root causes of women's criminalisation"*.

Naomi Delap, the report's co-author, said:

“The stakes are high. The formation of the Women’s Justice Board and its new strategy offers a once in a generation opportunity to close the majority of women’s prisons, save money, reduce reoffending and improve the lives of women, their families and communities. We cannot afford for this to fail”.

Abbi Ayers, Director of Strategic Development for National Women’s Justice Coalition, said:

“Since it was first established in 2021, the National Women’s Justice Coalition has been calling for critical reforms to justice policy to reduce the female prison population and better utilise community sentences for women. Our partners are proud to support and champion the solutions-led thinking and key recommendations in this report.”

Helen Mills, Head of Programmes at the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies, said:

“With the new Women’s Justice Board, the government has made a welcome commitment to a fresh start for criminalised women and girls. Given the disappointments of the past, there is a real concern that the fine words will not be matched by action, resulting in another lost decade. Breaking out of the Justice Loop offers a compelling account of what has gone wrong in the past and practical recommendations to avoid repeating the same mistakes again.”

Notes for Editors

1. *Breaking out of the Justice Loop*, by Naomi Delap and Liz Hogarth, is published jointly on 10 March 2025 by the National Women’s Justice Coalition and the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies.
2. The National Women’s Justice Coalition is an alliance of 26 women’s organisations from across England and Wales that share a collective mission to drive systemic change to reduce the stigmatisation of women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system and improve outcomes for them.
3. The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies stands for a fair, effective and accountable justice system, in a society less dominated by criminalisation and punishment. It creates lively spaces for collaboration and learning, where conventional criminal justice policy agendas are scrutinised and challenged, fresh knowledge and ideas are discussed, and transformational solutions are developed

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