

Women Beyond Walls Podcast, Season 2 Fact Sheets Women's incarceration in Kenya

This factsheet with compiled by Laura Osinde, Kenyan lawyer, in July 2025

Number of Women in Prison

- Women make up around [5% of the prison population](#).
- The daily average number of women in prison increased from 2,915 in 2023 to 4,592 in 2024, according to the [Kenya National Bureau of Statistics](#).
- Around [11% of women](#) are re-arrested after being released from prison (compared to 2% of men), due to [difficulties women face](#) after being released from prison due to stigma and societal rejection.
- The [Kenya Prison Service](#) has 108 prison facilities, of which 18 are specifically for women.

Poverty and Marginalisation as Drivers Behind Women's Imprisonment

- Most incarcerated women come from [disadvantaged backgrounds](#). This results in challenges accessing legal aid and being able to obtain bail, resulting in prolonged [pre-trial detention](#).
- Many women are arrested for minor, [petty offences](#). These laws criminalise poverty, [penalising](#) women who are trying to support themselves and their families for acts such as “hawking” (selling food on the street) or brewing illegal alcohol.

Gender-based violence as a driver in Women's Incarceration

- Many women in prison have [histories of abuse](#), such as physical or sexual abuse in childhood or adulthood.

Prison Conditions

- Kenyan [prisons](#), like most across the world, were designed by men for men and overlook the gender-specific needs of women, such as access to menstrual products or gender-specific health care.
- Many [prisons](#) also suffer from overcrowding and lack of adequate sanitation facilities
- [Reports](#) indicate that women have also been subject to cruel, degrading and inhumane treatment.

Women on Death Row

- As of February 2024, there were [2 women on death row](#). In 2022, there were 22 women on death row.
- The death penalty still exists in Kenya's laws for offences such as murder, robbery with violence, treason, and mutiny, though there have been no executions since 1987.
- Most women on [death row](#) are convicted of murder, often committed in response to gender-based violence by male partners. However, this context is rarely considered during sentencing, and systemic gender biases in the justice system lead to unfair trials and increased trauma for women. Pro bono lawyers appointed are poorly compensated and often overwhelmed with high caseloads, which can lead to inadequate legal representation.
- Read further about [Ayuma's](#) painful experience of life on death row

Mothers in Prison

- About [61% of women](#) in prison have children under the age of 18, and 58% are the main income earners for their families, resulting in prison having a devastating impact on children.
- The Kenya Prison Service has allowed children under 4-years-old to accompany their mothers to prison. After the age of 4, the child is either taken in by a family member or a government-run children's home. Children are at risk of trauma or [psychological](#) damage due to separation.
- In [Lang'ata Women's Maximum Prison](#), reports indicate that children who are either born in prison or who accompany their mothers are subjected to a harsh and often harmful environment marked by food shortages, overcrowding, poor sanitation, and limited access to clean water and clothing, all of which pose serious risks to their health and development. Educational opportunities are also severely constrained due to the lack of trained teachers and inadequate learning materials.

Organisations and Links to Find Out More

[Clean Start Africa](#)
[Justice Defenders](#)
[Faraja Foundation](#)
[Wakilisha Initiative](#)
[Nafisika Trust](#)
[Next Generation Lawyers](#)
[Eldoret Women for Development \(ELWOFOD\)](#)
[ICJ-Kenya](#)
[Law Society of Kenya](#)
[Beyond Kenyan Bars](#)