



The Women in Prison Project

In recent years, the number of women behind bars has increased dramatically around the world. Yet little is known about the causes, conditions, and consequences of women's incarceration. To address this knowledge gap, in 2017, the [Vance Center's Human Rights and Access to Justice Program](#) launched a project to promote global collaboration on improving conditions of women's imprisonment. The **Women in Prison Project** ("the Project") convenes women prisoners' rights advocates from across the globe to 1) share information about conditions of women's incarceration in their respective countries or regions; and 2) build capacity for improved monitoring and reporting of conditions in women's prisons. Examples of initiatives under the Project include:

- Convening in Bogota, Colombia, the first international [conference](#) of women prisoners' rights advocates. The Vance Center, in partnership with Penal Reform International, brought together 49 advocates from 23 countries, including nine formerly incarcerated women. Out of this conference was created the first-ever global network of advocates for women prisoners: the **Women in Prison Network**. Connected via an online platform, the Network includes 45 individual advocates and 34 organizations from a total of 21 countries representing every continent. It is a safe space for advocates to share information and best practices, seek collaborations, and build capacity for improved monitoring and reporting of conditions in women's prisons worldwide.
- Conducting a [pilot research on women's incarceration in Sierra Leone](#). The project, which the Vance Center is implementing jointly with the NGO AdvocAid of Sierra Leone, assesses the causes and consequences of women's imprisonment in the country. Moreover, it serves as a blueprint for similar research that other organizations can conduct in their respective countries.
- The [report "Women in Prison: Africa Regional Initiative"](#), developed in collaboration with NGOs and law firms in Nigeria, The Gambia, Malawi, Kenya, and Tanzania and launched at a panel discussion at the Africa NGO Forum preceding the African Commission's ordinary session in Banjul, The Gambia in the Fall of 2019. The report surveys what is currently known about women's incarceration in these five African countries, both in law and practice. It provides a detailed analysis of these countries' compliance with domestic, regional, and international standards on women's incarceration.
- Mobilizing the Women in Prison Network and conducting [research](#) on government responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in detention centers for women in the Global South. The research focused on six key areas: healthcare, prison protocols and rules, children in prison with their mothers, rehabilitation and release, the criminal justice system, and prison staff and covered 17 Global South countries.