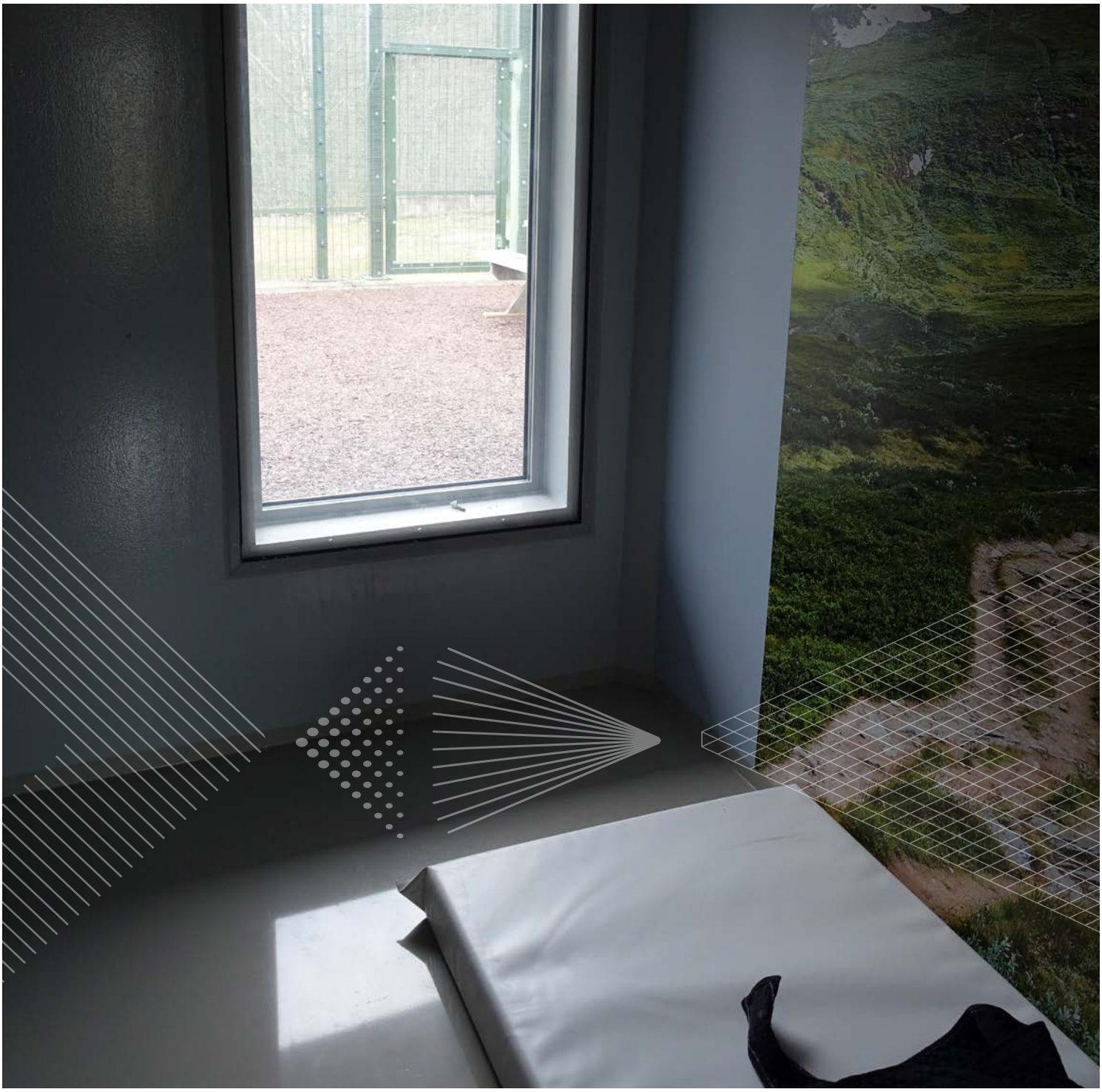
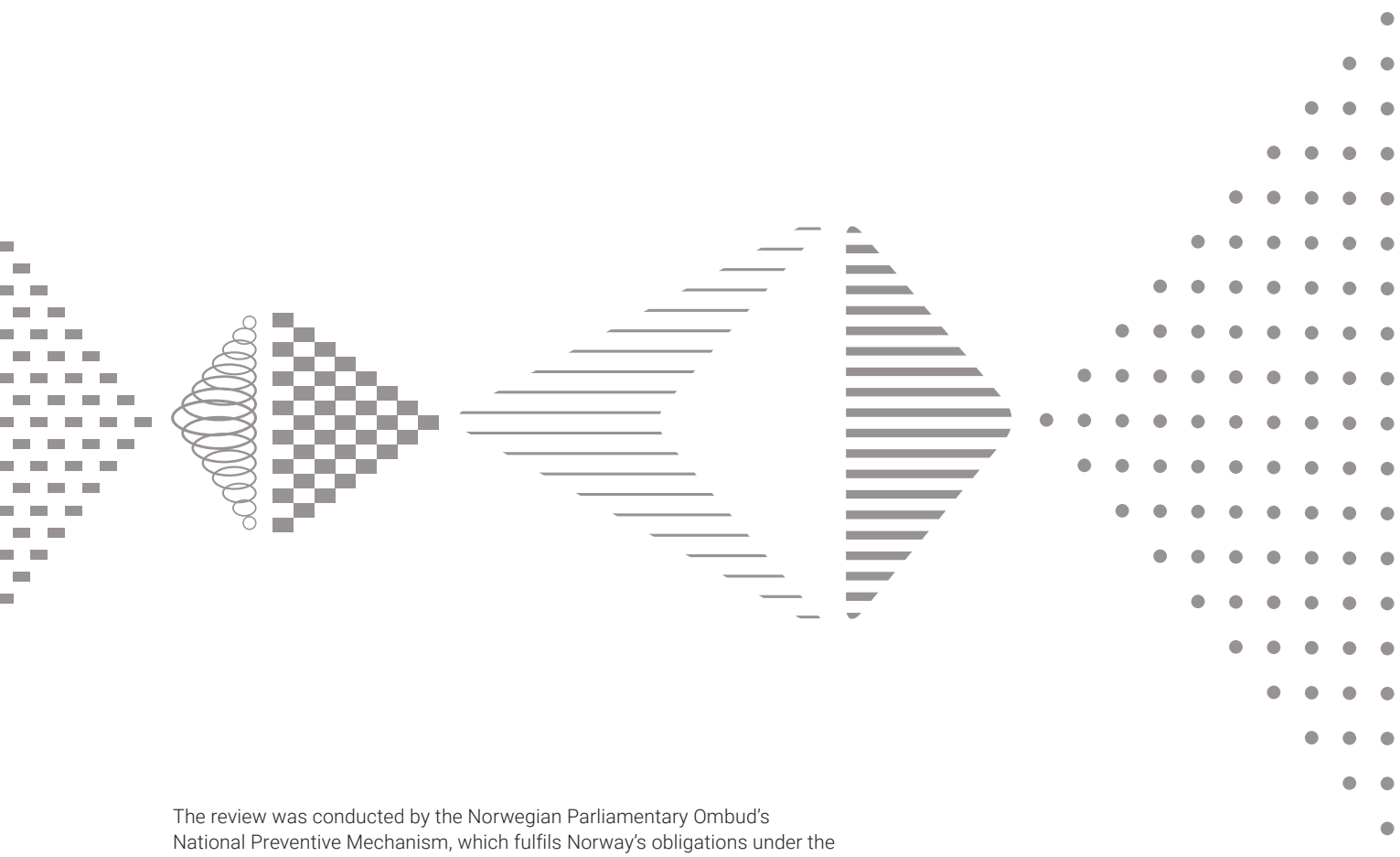


SIVILOMBUDET
Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud

CHILDREN IN SECURITY CELLS AND RESTRAINT BEDS IN NORWEGIAN PRISONS 2016-2025




Luftegård



The review was conducted by the Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud's National Preventive Mechanism, which fulfils Norway's obligations under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT). The unit visits places where people are deprived of their liberty to prevent torture and inhuman or degrading treatment.

Cover photo: Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud
Graphic production: Aksell

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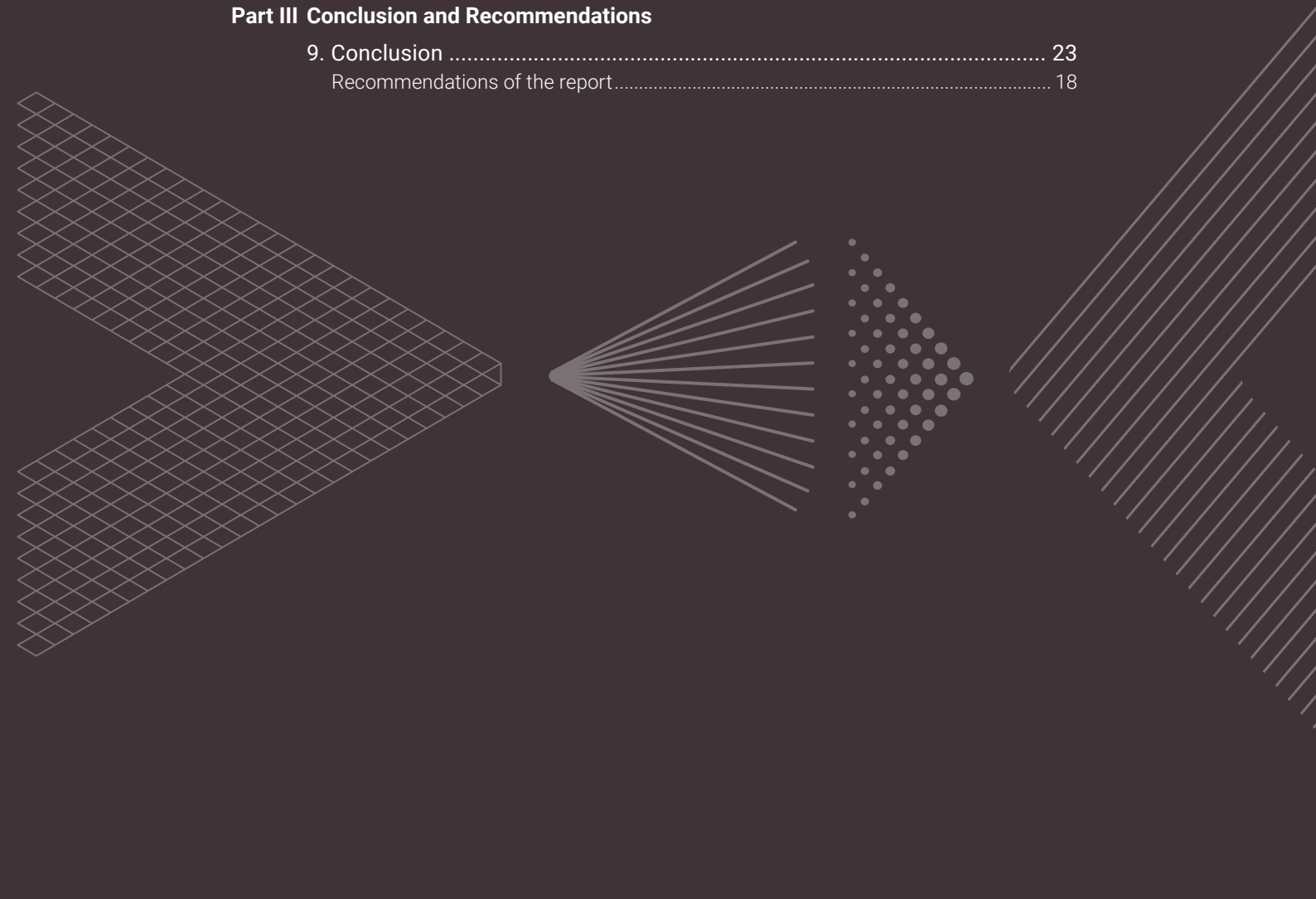
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Summary

The Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud has examined decisions concerning the use of security cells and restraint beds for children in all Norwegian prisons during the period 2016–2025.

Placement in a security cell involves being isolated from other people in a completely stripped-down room with minimal sensory stimulation. This is particularly harmful to children's health. The Execution of Sentences Act therefore imposes even stricter requirements for justifying the placement of minors in security cells than adults.

Lack of oversight and control
We received 70 decisions concerning security cells and two decisions concerning restraint beds from the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service. In addition, we received information about three cases in which children had been unlawfully isolated in security cells without a formal decision. Our work on this report has revealed that the Norwegian Correctional Service does not have an overview of the use of security cells and restraint beds for children over the past ten years. It is therefore reasonable to assume that there may have been additional placements of children in security cells during this period.

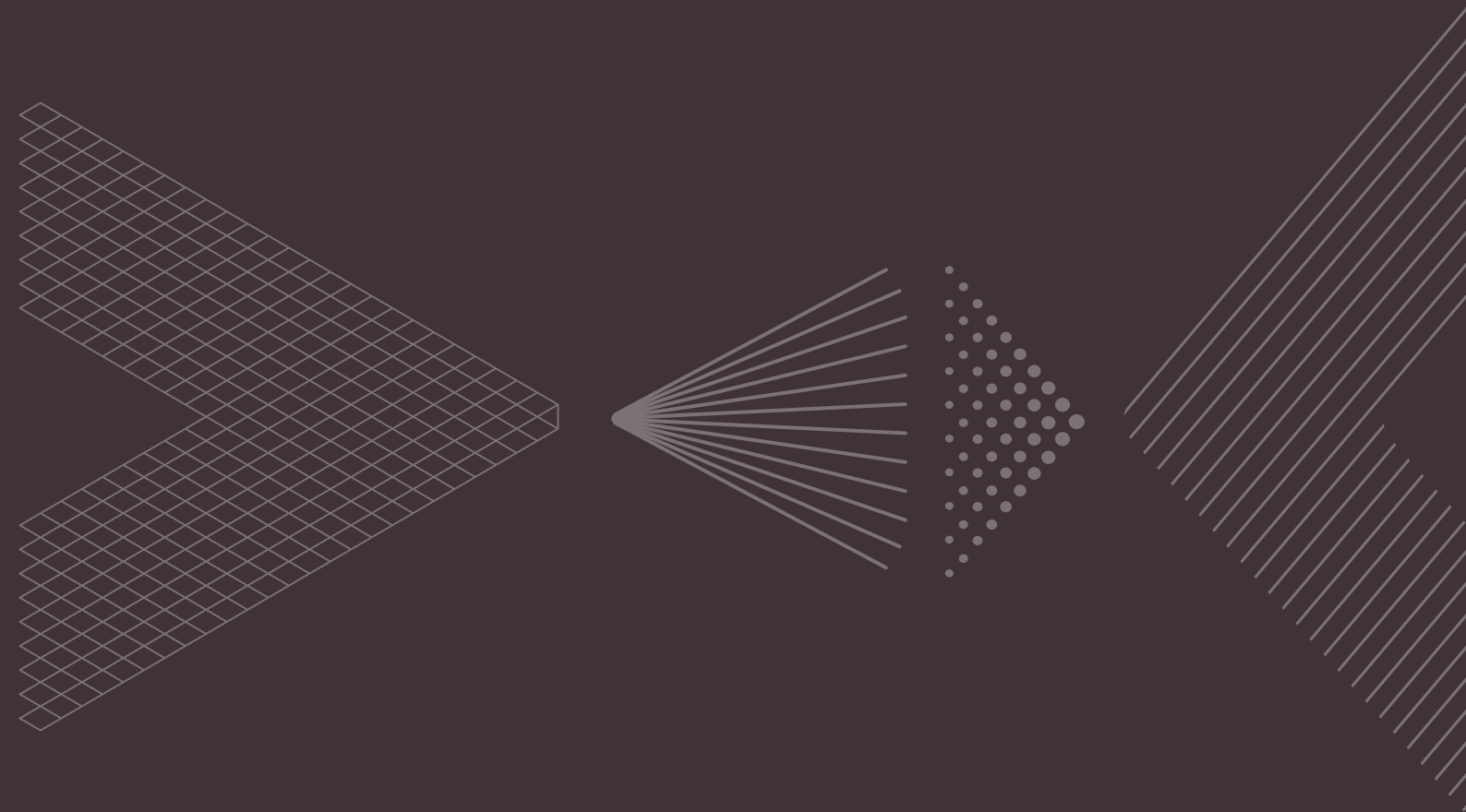
Unlawful use of security cells
In 43 of the 70 decisions, the prisons referred to the statutory conditions applicable to adults, thereby applying a lower threshold than required by law. In 32 of the 70 decisions, it was not possible to establish from the information provided that the person placed in the security cell was a child. More than half of the decisions to place children in security cells contained no assessment of whether the coercive measure was proportionate in relation to the child concerned or of the best interests of the child.

Particularly vulnerable children
In 21 of the 70 decisions, the risk of self-harm was cited as a reason for placing children in security cells. It is deeply concerning that a child who has just attempted to harm themselves or take their own life should be placed alone in a security cell. Isolation can increase the risk of self-harm, suicide and mental disorders.

Use of restraint beds
Being placed in a restraint bed means having one's arms and legs strapped to a bed with belts. The report describes two cases of unlawful use of restraint beds for children.

PART I

BASIS FOR THE INVESTIGATION



1. Background to the report

In 2025, the Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud published a thematic report on the use of security cells in Norwegian prisons. The report highlighted how the design of security cells deprives prisoners of autonomy and sensory stimulation, contributing to situations of helplessness and humiliation. The Ombud concluded that the design of security cells exposes prisoners to conditions that in themselves posea high risk of violating the prohibition of inhuman and degrading treatment under Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). [1]

That same year, the Ombud's National Preventive Mechanism visited the Juvenile Unit, Ungdomsenhet vest, at Bjørgvin Prison and found that the security cell was being used in breach of the law. The decisions concerning the use of security cells at the juvenile unit raised concerns that the Norwegian Correctional Service may have applied too low a threshold for placing children in security cells at other prisons as well.

Against this background, we requested access to all decisions concerning the use of security cells and restraint beds for children in all Norwegian prisons during the period 2016–2025 from the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service. We have limited our investigation to the decisions themselves. The decisions must provide a specific account demonstrating that the statutory conditions for using security cells for children have been met. This means that the correct threshold has been applied, less intrusive measures have been attempted, and assessments have been made of whether the placement is proportionate and in the best interests of the child. We have not obtained information about how long the minors remained in security cells or how they were treated while there.

The report was submitted to the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service for fact-checking prior to publication.

1 Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud, Security Cells in Prisons, thematic report 2025.

2. Security cells are particularly harmful to children

The UN Special Rapporteur on Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment has established that children deprived of their liberty face a higher risk of being subjected to torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, and that even short periods of deprivation of liberty can undermine a child's mental and physical health and adversely affect cognitive development.[2] In other words, minors in prison are particularly vulnerable because of their age and stage of development.

Placement in a security cell involves being isolated from other people in a completely stripped-down room with minimal sensory stimulation. Isolation is harmful to health, and particularly harmful to children. The longer the isolation lasts, the greater the strain and the potential for harm. Isolation can impair attention, concentration and planning abilities. Periods without social contact or activities, and with limited sensory stimulation, can lead to confusion, passivity and helplessness. Isolation entails a loss of predictability and control. In such a situation, the minor becomes entirely dependent on prison staff. This can cause a person to lose confidence in their ability to influence their own situation, which in turn can lead to anxiety and depression. Isolation can also increase the risk of suicide, self-harm and the development of serious mental disorders. In a security cell, all the harmful effects of isolation are intensified.

Children and young people are constantly developing, neurologically, socially and psychologically. Normal development includes the fact that the brain does not fully mature until well into a person's twenties.[3] The development of a sense of security and attachment to others is closely linked to having good caregivers and predictable, safe surroundings. Many minors in prison come from difficult backgrounds and have been in contact with health services before imprisonment.[4] When children with this kind of background are placed in security cells, there is an increased risk that they will experience the placement as traumatic or be retraumatised. This means that the experience triggers painful memories and often intrusive sensory experiences (involving smells, sounds, sights and physical reliving) associated with previous trauma, such as violence and abuse. Placement in a security cell therefore entails a clear risk of psychological and developmental harm, both in the short and long term. [5]

What is a security cell?

Security cells are bare cells with empty walls, a plastic mattress as the only furnishing and a hole in the floor serving as a toilet. In adult prisons, the cells are generally made of concrete. Most cells have a door with a hatch near the floor, a hatch at chest or hip height and an observation window. Security cells differ from other forms of isolation in that their design severely restricts sensory stimulation and deprives prisoners of the ability to meet their own needs.

2 United Nations General Assembly. 5 March 2015. Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Juan E. Méndez. A/HRC/28/68, paragraphs 16 and 33.

3 Lee, J. (2016). Lonely Too Long – Redefining and Reforming Juvenile Solitary Confinement. Fordham Law Review, 85, pages 846–870. See also Popovac, Z. (2025). Barn som utøver vold. Fra normalpsykologi til patologi. Fagbokforlaget, Chapter 1 on children's developmental psychological needs.

4 Norwegian Ombudsperson for Children (2021). Funn etter gjennomgang av saker der barn er fengslet i perioden 2016–2019. Letter to the Ministry of Justice and Public Security dated 4 June 2021; Fransson, E., Gaarder, S. and Lundeberg, I.R. (eds.). (2025). Barn, unge og straffegjennomføring. Cappelen Damm Forskning, page 142.

5 British Medical Association (BMA) (2018). Joint position statement on solitary confinement of children and young people. Available at: https://www.bma.org.uk/media/1859/bma-solitary-confinement-in-youth-detention-joint-statement-2018.pdf.

3. Legal framework for the use of security cells for children

The prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment imposes strict limits on the treatment of children in prison. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has established that particular consideration must be given to children's vulnerability when assessing what constitutes inhuman or degrading treatment, and that degrading treatment may have a greater impact on children, particularly psychologically.[6]

Separating a child deprived of their liberty from others is permissible only for the shortest possible period and as a last resort to protect the child or others.[7] In 2025, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child expressed concern about the excessive use of force against children in Norway, including physical restraint and immobilisation techniques to restrict movement.[8] The Committee recommended that the Norwegian authorities ensure that isolation is avoided to the greatest extent possible, and that decisions concerning the use of isolation and coercion against children explicitly state how the best interests of the child are safeguarded and how the child is heard.[9] The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) has emphasised that minors may only be isolated from others to prevent actions in wholly exceptional circumstances where no other solutions are available.[10]

The Execution of Sentences Act stipulates that the use of a security cell for a minor must be "imperatively necessary".[11] This represents a higher threshold than that applicable to the use of security cells for adults and was introduced through a legislative amendment in October 2015. In the preparatory works to the amendment, the Ministry stated that coercive measures should only be permitted in "certain extreme situations" and that this should constitute a "very narrowly defined exception". The Ministry cited Norway's international human rights obligations as the justification for this and pointed out that, according to the Committee on the Rights of the Child's interpretation of the Convention, any use of coercive measures should "be under close and direct control of a medical and/or psychological professional. It must never be used as a means of punishment", cf. the Committee's General Comment No. 10, paragraph 89. The Ministry also emphasised the need for shorter reporting deadlines when such coercion is used.[12]

Less intrusive measures must either have been attempted or be clearly insufficient. The use of a security cell must also be proportionate. [13] The best interests of the child must always be a primary consideration.[14]

6 ECtHR, Grand Chamber, Bouyid v. Belgium, 28 September 2015, paragraph 109.

7 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2019), CRC/C/GC/24, paragraph 95(h).

8 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2025), Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Norway, CRC/C/NOR/CO/7, paragraph 41(e).

9 UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2025), Concluding observations on the seventh periodic report of Norway, CRC/C/NOR/CO/7, paragraph 42(e).

10 CPT (2014). General Report of the CPT, 2013–2014, page 56; CPT (2015). Juveniles deprived of their liberty under criminal legislation, CPT/Inf(2015)1-part rev1.

11 Execution of Sentences Act, Section 38, fourth paragraph, cf. first paragraph.

12 Prop. 135 L (2010–2011), page 153.

13 Prop. 143 L (2019–2020), Chapter 5.8.4; European Prison Rules, Rule 53A(b); ECtHR, Babar Ahmad and Others v. the United Kingdom, application no. 24027/07 et al., 10 April 2012, paragraph 212; ECtHR, Ramishvili and Kokhreidze v. Georgia, application no. 1704/06, 27 January 2009, paragraph 83; Mæhlumshagen, M.S. and Storvik, B.L. (2024). Menneskerettigheter i fengsel. Cappelen Damm Akademisk, page 165.

14 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3; Constitution of Norway, Section 104.



Security cell at the juvenile unit Ungdomsenhet vest. Photo: Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud

4. The duty to provide reasons for decisions

Strict requirements apply to the reasons given for using security cells. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has established that decisions concerning isolation must be reasoned in a way that demonstrates that the prisoner's circumstances, situation and behaviour have been taken into account.[15] Inadequate reasoning increases the risk of violating the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment.[16]

The duty to provide reasons also follows from the Public Administration Act and is a key safeguard of legal rights.[17] The duty to provide reasons for a decision to use a security cell ensures that genuine assessments are made of whether the conditions for its use are actually met in the circumstances. This is particularly important when children are placed in security cells, as the law sets a high threshold and imposes additional conditions.

Prisoners' ability to appeal and the appeal body's ability to review the prison's assessments depend on those assessments being documented.[18] Adequate reasoning is also essential to enable prisoners to understand a decision and consider whether to accept it or appeal against it. Understanding the decision can also strengthen prisoners' trust in the prison's decisions and contribute to a sense that the process has been fair.

Providing reasons for decisions is also a prerequisite for effective internal control within the prison. If decisions do not contain sufficient reasons for the use of security cells, it will be difficult for prison management and higher levels of the Norwegian Correctional Service to monitor prison practices and the use of security cells. Inadequate reasoning will also make it more difficult to learn from mistakes and carry out improvement work.

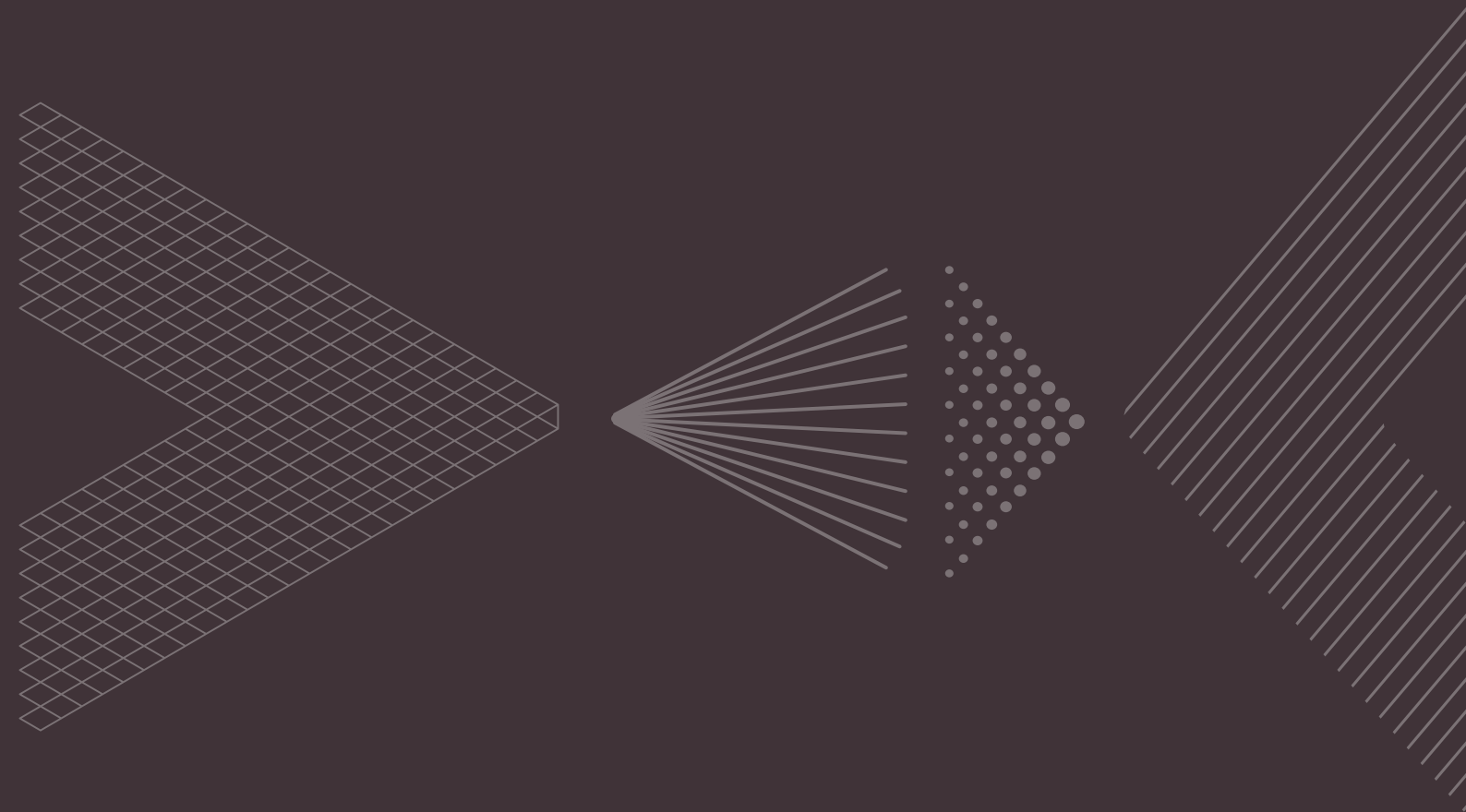
15 See, inter alia, ECtHR, Babar Ahmad and Others v. the United Kingdom, application no. 24027/07, 10 April 2012, paragraph 212.

16 ECtHR, Khodorkovskiy and Lebedev v. Russia, application no. 11082/06 et al., 25 July 2013, paragraph 470.

17 Public Administration Act, Sections 24 and 25, cf. Execution of Sentences Act, Section 7.

18 HR-2008-88-A, paragraph 58.

PART II
OUR FINDINGS

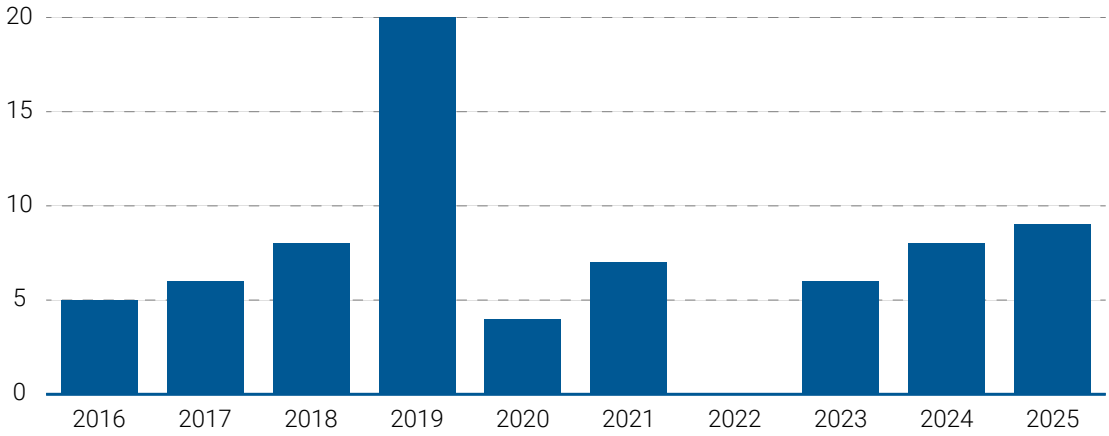


5. Incomplete overview of children placed in security cells in 2016–2025

Our work on this report has revealed that the Norwegian Correctional Service does not have an overview of all placements of children in security cells and restraint beds during the period 2016–2025. There has been no annual reporting on the use of security cells and restraint beds for children in Norwegian prisons, and the Norwegian Correctional Service's systems have not made it possible to retrieve a complete overview of all such decisions. The Directorate has stated that it cannot confirm that the overview we have received is complete. It must therefore be assumed that there may have been more placements of children in security cells during this period than those described in this report. These shortcomings are discussed in more detail in **Chapter 8**.

We have received information about 73 placements in security cells and two placements in restraint beds. These 75 placements involved 28 children. For three of the placements in security cells, we have not received a formal decision, only other documentation showing that the minors were placed in security cells. Placements in restraint beds are discussed in **Chapter 7**.

The placements in security cells were distributed as follows over the ten-year period:



The average age of the children covered by the security cell decisions was 16 years and 11 months.[19] Ten of the placements involved children aged 15.

Norway currently has three juvenile prisons:

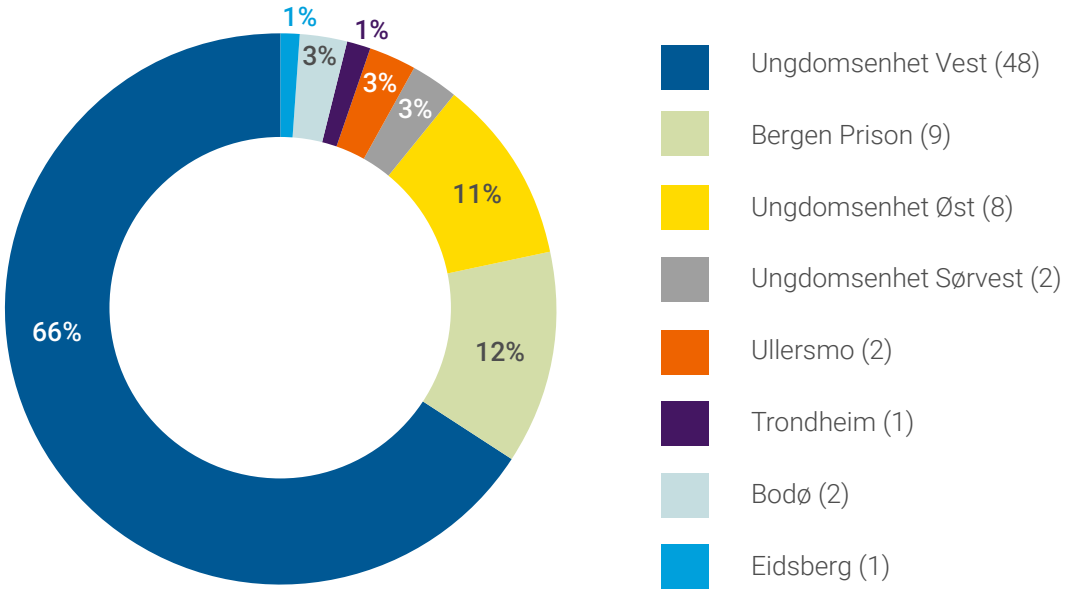
- The juvenile Unit, Ungdomsenhet vest, in Bergen opened in 2009 and has four places.
- The juvenile unit, Ungdomsenhet øst in Eidsvoll opened in April 2016 and increased its capacity from four to six places during the period covered by our investigation.
- The juvenile unit, Ungdomsenhet sørvest in Evje was established in 2025 and had four places at the end of 2025.

Most of the placements in security cells took place in the juvenile units (58 out of 73), but a significant number took place in adult prisons (15 out of 73). In a thematic report from 2024, the Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud recommended that immediate measures be taken to ensure that minors are not placed in adult prisons without an assessment of whether this is in the best interests of the child. [20]

19 This figure is the average of 69 decisions, as it was not possible to establish the age in all cases.

20 Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud, Children in Eidsberg Prison, an investigation under the OPCAT mandate, 2024.

Security cell placements by prison



The figures provided by the Norwegian Correctional Service may be incomplete.

A large majority of the placements of children in security cells took place at the juvenile unit in Bjørgvin Prison, Undomsenhet vest (48 out of 73). The adult prison with by far the highest number of placements during the period was Bergen Prison (9 out of 73), which works closely with thejuvenile unit in Bergen. In total, 57 of the 73 placements in security cells (78%) took place at thejuvenile unit, Ungdomsenhet vest, and Bergen Prison, both of which fall under the Western Region of the Norwegian Correctional Service. We can see no obvious reason why such a large proportion of placements in security cells occurred in the Western Region.

5: KEY FINDINGS

- There is no complete overview of the number of placements of children in security cells during the period.
- Documentation from the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service shows that a large majority of the placements took place in one of the juvenile prisons.

6. Most decisions do not meet the requirements of the law

Use of security cells without a formal decision

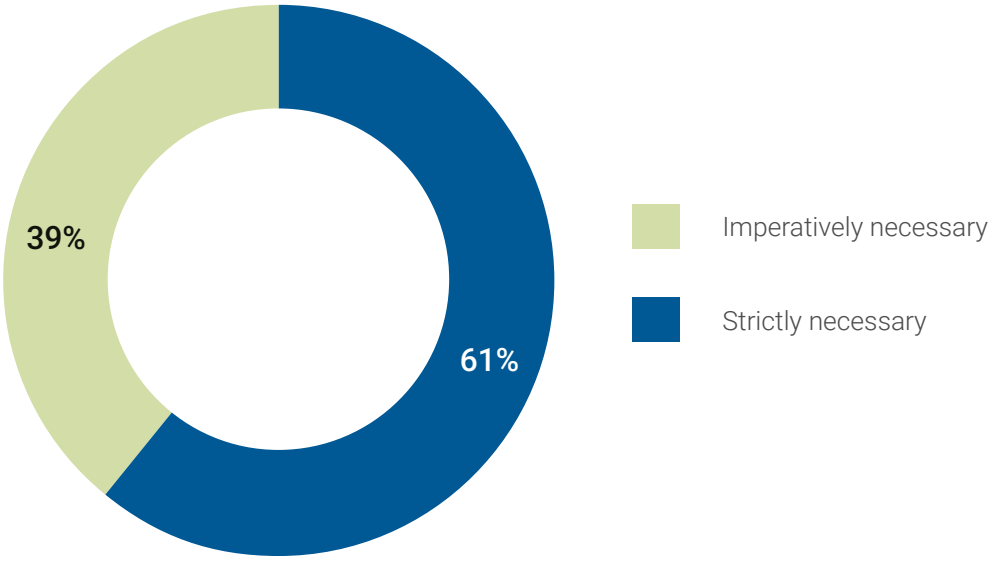
In at least three cases, children were placed in security cells without a formal decision setting out the reasons for using the coercive measure. Failure to issue a formal decision when using coercive measures is unlawful and also makes it extremely difficult to determine whether the use of the measure was justified in the circumstances. The absence of a formal decision also deprives the child of the opportunity to appeal against the decision to use coercion. As the written material documenting these placements does not meet any of the statutory requirements, we do not examine them further in this report.

Too low a threshold for the use of security cells

In 43 of the 70 decisions concerning the use of security cells, reference was made only to the statutory threshold applicable to adults ("strictly necessary"), rather than the higher threshold applicable to children ("imperatively necessary"). The higher threshold for the use of security cells for children is based on the fact that the coercive measure may be even more harmful to children than to adults. In 32 of the 70 decisions, it was not possible to establish that the person to be placed in a security cell was a child. The requirement that the best interests of the child must always be assessed and treated as a primary consideration has clearly not been met when it is not possible to establish that the decision concerns a child.

This finding shows that the Norwegian Correctional Service has been issuing decisions in breach of the law for many years. Too low a threshold was applied throughout the ten-year period we examined, including in four decisions from 2023, five from 2024 and two from 2025.

Threshold cited for the use of security cells



Inadequate reasoning and unlawful purposes

Many of the decisions did not adequately explain why the prison considered it necessary to place the minor in a security cell in the specific circumstances. One example is a decision in which the reason given for placing a child in a security cell was that they had put their arms through the hatch of a reinforced cell and refused to withdraw them. The decision did not explain why this situation required any action to be taken, nor why the use of a security cell was imperatively necessary.

In three decisions, the placement in a security cell was partly justified by low staffing levels. In another case, the reason given for placing a minor in a security cell was the need to conduct body searches of prisoners. These are not lawful considerations when assessing whether a security cell should be used.

Inadequate descriptions of less intrusive measures attempted or considered

A condition closely linked to the threshold for using security cells is that less intrusive measures must have been attempted or be clearly insufficient in the circumstances. If there has been no adequate assessment of whether the situation could be managed using less intrusive measures, there will rarely be grounds for concluding that the measure was imperatively necessary.

Some decisions did not identify any specific alternatives to the use of a security cell, and it was unclear whether this condition had been assessed. In a number of decisions, it was difficult to understand why excluding the young person from contact with others in their own cell or a reinforced cell would not have been sufficient to prevent, for example, further incidents of violence against staff. Some of these decisions raised concerns that security cells were being used to punish the juveniles. The use of security cells as punishment is prohibited.

In some decisions, it was unclear whether the measures described by the prisons had been attempted or considered in the situation that led to placement in a security cell, or during previous incidents. The requirement to consider less intrusive measures applies to the specific situation. Previous behaviour or incidents are relevant only if it can be specifically demonstrated that they have a bearing on the situation at the time of the new decision.

In our review of the decisions, we found no examples of prisons describing less intrusive measures to resolve the situation. Examples of such measures could include spending time outdoors, telephone or video calls with family members or other close contacts or support organisations, visits or spending time with staff. It is particularly serious that less intrusive measures do not appear to have been considered in decisions where the use of a security cell was wholly or partly justified by the risk of self-harm.

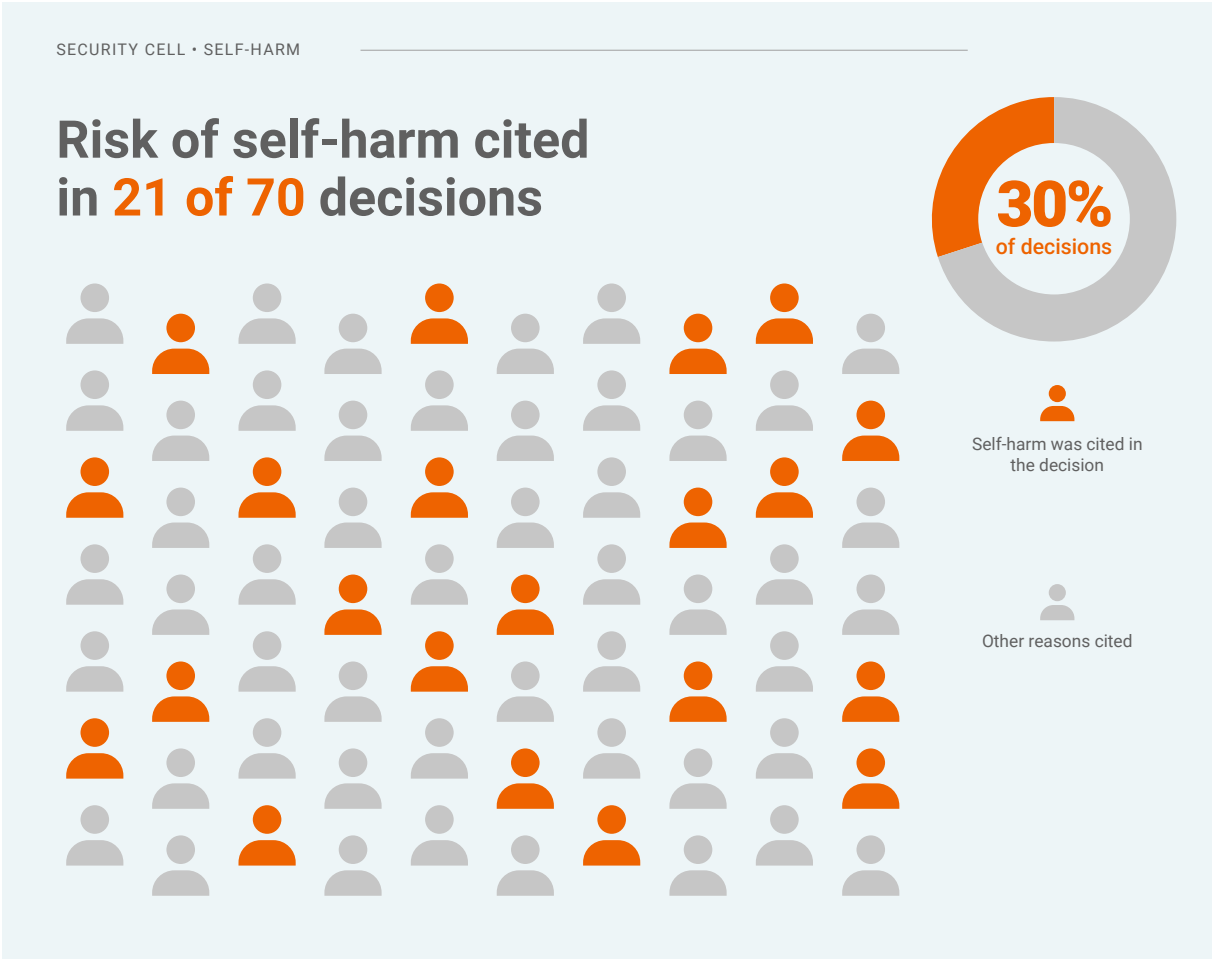
Placements in security cells justified by the risk of self-harm

In 21 of the 70 decisions concerning the use of security cells, the placement was wholly or partly justified by the risk of self-harm. One example of such reasoning is: "While in [cell], you attempted to strangle yourself with a piece of fabric. You were therefore transferred to a security cell to prevent you from harming yourself further." It is deeply concerning that a child who has just attempted to harm themselves or take their own life should be placed alone in a security cell.

Isolation can increase the risk of suicide, self-harm and the development of serious mental disorders. Following its visit in 2024, the CPT criticised Norwegian prisons for responding to prisoners' self-harm by using isolation and security cells. The Committee pointed out that self-harm often reflects mental health problems that should be addressed through increased healthcare provision. The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) has established that prisons must exercise particular caution when using isolation where there is a risk of suicide.[21] The Court's case law shows that the use of isolation or security cells for prisoners in such situations may result in a violation of the prohibition of inhuman or degrading treatment.

What is known about children's particular vulnerability and the risk of trauma and developmental harm makes it especially concerning that security cells are used for children who are considered at risk of harming themselves.

21 ECtHR, Jeanty v. Belgium, 31 March 2020, application no. 82284/17, paragraphs 119–120; ECtHR, Keenan v. the United Kingdom, 3 April 2001, application no. 27229/95, paragraph 116; and ECtHR, Renolde v. France, 16 October 2008, application no. 5608/05, paragraphs 128–129.



Failure to assess proportionality

Placing prisoners in security cells must be proportionate. This means that the prison's need for the placement must be weighed against how burdensome or harmful it may be for the child. Particular weight must be given to children's vulnerability, as well as to individual circumstances such as their health, previous trauma, maturity and cognitive development. An assessment of proportionality must also consider other intrusive measures to which the child is subjected, such as preceding periods of isolation or the use of physical force, body searches, handcuffs, pepper spray or similar measures. The potential negative consequences of placement in a security cell may render the measure unlawful even if the other conditions are met.

In relation to children, there is also a general requirement that the best interests of the child must be a primary consideration in all decisions affecting them.[22] This means that the best interests of the child must be given greater weight than other relevant considerations. If the best interests of the child conflict with other considerations, the seriousness of the consequences of the decision for the child must be assessed.[23]

There is no clear distinction between assessments of proportionality and the best interests of the child. Many of the same factors are relevant. What matters is that the prison assesses and gives weight to what is in the child's best interests, including the potential negative consequences of placing the child in a security cell, and explains how these are weighed against other considerations.

22 Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 3(1).

23 Prop. 165 L (2024–2025), page 29.



Security cell at Romerike Prison, Ullersmo Unit. Photo: Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud

More than half of the decisions to place children in security cells contained no assessment or discussion of either proportionality or the best interests of the child. This includes four decisions involving prisoners who were 15 years old at the time of placement. This finding is serious.

In decisions where the best interests of the child were mentioned, this was often merely a reference to the legal requirement, with no specific assessment or balancing of interests. Almost none of the decisions described or assessed the individual circumstances of the child concerned or the potential harmful effects of the placement. These findings also applied to cases where minors were placed in security cells wholly or partly to prevent serious self-harm. None of the decisions took into account other uses of force against the children, even though in several cases they had been subjected to extensive isolation or coercion.[24] In one case, a bodycuff was used after the police were called, and in another case a 15-year-old was placed in a bodycuff in connection with placement in a security cell. A bodycuff consists of handcuffs and straps fastened around the ankles and wrists, enabling staff to exercise complete control over the prisoner.[25] In a third case, a 15-year-old was handcuffed and subjected to pepper spray.[26] The use of pepper spray can be dangerous, and the ECtHR has relied on statements by the CPT that pepper spray should not be used in confined spaces.[27]

6: KEY FINDINGS

- Children have been placed in security cells without a formal decision being issued.
- Prisons have applied too low a threshold for the use of security cells, applying the statutory threshold for adults rather than the higher threshold applicable to children.
- A high proportion of placements in security cells were justified by the risk of self-harm.
- In almost half of the decisions, it was not possible to establish that the decision concerned a child.
- More than half of the decisions to place children in security cells contained no assessment or discussion of either proportionality or the best interests of the child.
- None of the decisions assessed the potential harmful effects of placement in a security cell on the child.
- None of the decisions assessed the cumulative use of coercion against children placed in security cells.

24 In the report from our visit to the juvenile unit Ungdomsenhet vest in 2025, we found that body searches were routinely carried out when young people were placed in security cells, without sufficient documentation, and that young people were routinely not allowed to wear their own clothes in security cells.

25 A bodycuff is a system of straps with a waist belt fitted to the prisoner. The straps are fastened around the wrists and ankles and can be tightened.

26 Pepper spray can cause severe pain in the eyes and airways. It is therefore important that anyone exposed to it is promptly given the opportunity to rinse their eyes and wash any skin and clothing affected by the spray.

27 ECtHR, El-Asmar v. Denmark, 3 October 2023, application no. 27753/19; Tali v. Estonia, 13 February 2014, application no. 66393/10, paragraph 78.

7. Restraint beds



Restraint bed at Bergen Prison. Photo: The Parliamentary Ombud

Being placed in a restraint bed means having one's arms and legs strapped to a bed that is fixed in place inside a security cell. Placement in a restraint bed is the most intrusive coercive measure available to Norwegian prisons, and the measure may only be used to prevent a prisoner from harming themselves.[28] The threshold for using restraint beds for children is the same as for using security cells: it must be imperatively necessary in the specific circumstances. In the 2020 thematic report *The Use of Restraint Beds in Norwegian Prisons*, the Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud concluded that the use of restraint beds entails a high risk of inhuman treatment and recommended that restraint beds be abolished in prisons.

We have received documentation of two cases in which children were placed in restraint beds during the period 2016–2025. Both placements took place in adult prisons in 2016, and both decisions referred to the wrong threshold for the use of restraint beds for children. The reasons given for the placements in restraint beds were very brief, and it was not possible to establish that the coercive measure was being used against children. The decisions did not comply with the requirements of the law.

The use of a restraint bed for a child must be reported immediately to the regional level of the Norwegian Correctional Service, which decides whether the measure should be continued.[29] In both cases involving restraint beds, a decision should therefore have been issued at regional level. This did not happen in either case. We do not know whether the prisons' unlawful use of restraint beds in these cases was subsequently followed up by a higher authority.

7: KEY FINDINGS

- Two children were subjected to the unlawful use of restraint beds.

28 Guidelines to the Execution of Sentences Act, Section 38, paragraph 38.7.

29 Execution of Sentences Act, Section 38, fifth paragraph.

8. Lack of oversight and control at regional and directorate levels

Our work on this report has made it clear that the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service does not have an overview of how many children have been placed in security cells or restraint beds over the past ten years, or how long the coercive measures were used. The Directorate has explained that their computer systems made it difficult to retrieve the information we requested, and that they had to conduct manual searches to identify decisions concerning the use of security cells and restraint beds for children. It is extremely serious that no one within the Norwegian Correctional Service has had an overview of the most intrusive forms of coercion used against children deprived of their liberty over the past ten years.

If a prison considers it necessary to keep a child in a security cell for more than 24 hours, the regional level of the Norwegian Correctional Service must decide whether its use should continue.[30] The regional level may authorise continued use of a security cell for periods of 24 hours at a time.[31] If a child may remain in a security cell for more than 72 hours, the regional level must notify the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service.[32] These time limits are shorter than those applicable to adults and are intended to help ensure that security cells are used for children only in "certain extreme situations".[33]

In preparing this report, we asked the Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service to provide us with all decisions made by the regions to extend placements and all notifications received by the Directorate. Despite extensive dialogue with the Directorate, we do not have a reliable figure for the number of extension decisions issued by the regions.

Given that the higher threshold for the use of coercive measures against children came into force in October 2015 and that the juvenile unit in Romerike prison, Ungdomsenhet øst, opened in April 2016, it is difficult to understand why procedures for issuing decisions on the use of coercive measures and reporting their use were not in place during this period. The Directorate of the Norwegian Correctional Service has confirmed that there was no template for decisions concerning the use of coercive measures against children during the period we examined. A template to guide those responsible for making decisions on the use of security cells has still not been completed.

The Norwegian Parliamentary Ombud considers the Norwegian Correctional Service's lack of oversight and internal control concerning the use of coercive measures against children to be a serious matter.

8: KEY FINDINGS

- There are serious shortcomings in the Norwegian Correctional Service's oversight and internal control concerning the use of coercive measures against children.

30 Execution of Sentences Act, Section 38, final paragraph.

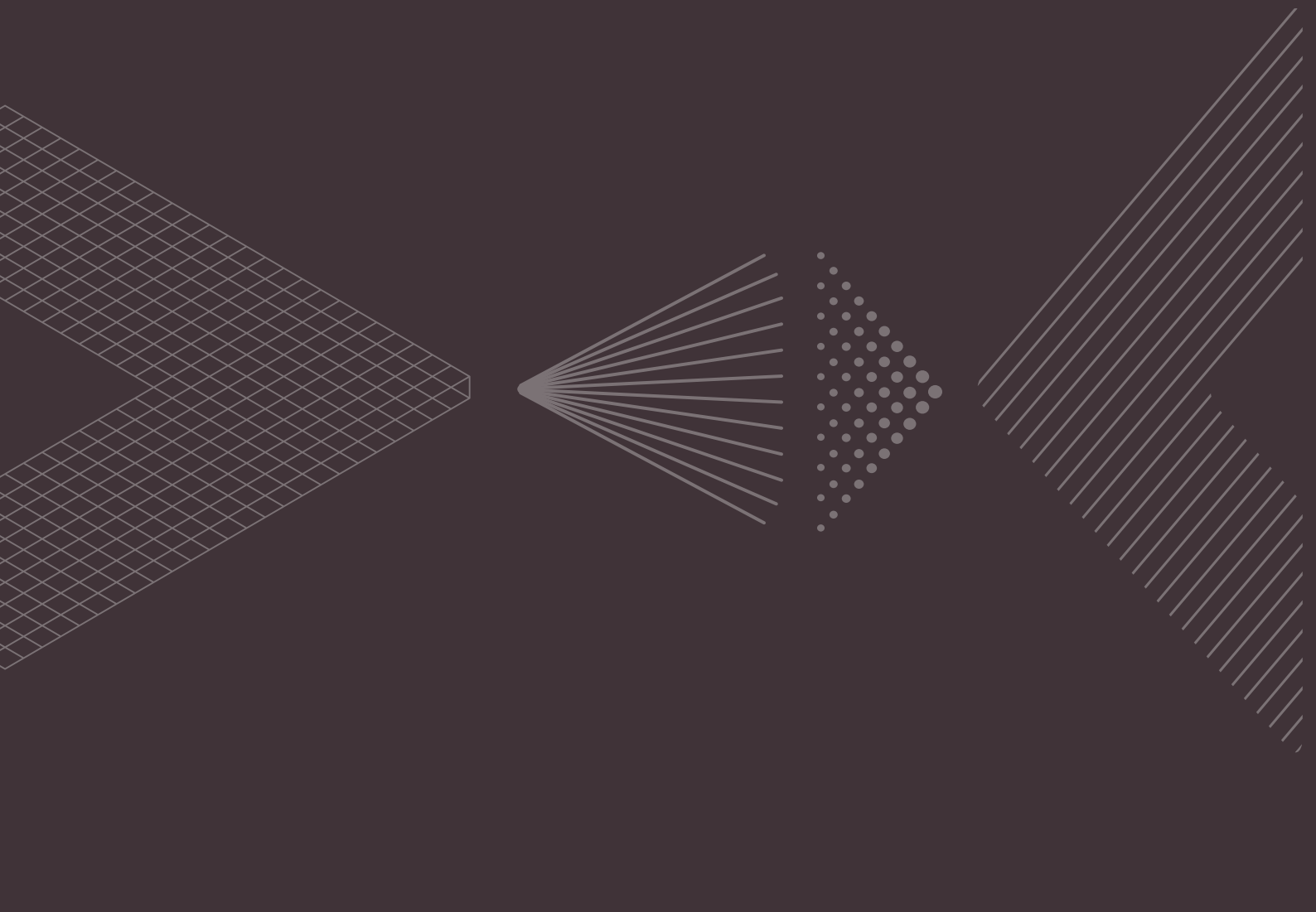
31 Guidelines to the Execution of Sentences Act, paragraph 38.7.5.

32 Execution of Sentences Act, Section 38, final paragraph.

33 Prop. 135 L (2010–2011), paragraph 11.9.4, page 154.

PART III

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS



9. Conclusion

The findings in this report confirm our concern that the Norwegian Correctional Service has, largely and over many years, applied a lower threshold for the use of coercive measures against children than required by law, thereby issuing unlawful decisions. Our review has also revealed major shortcomings in compliance with the duty to consider less intrusive measures and to assess whether each placement of a child in a security cell is proportionate.

In addition, our work on this report has revealed that there has been insufficient oversight and control of the most intrusive coercive measures available to the Norwegian Correctional Service for many years.

It is highly reprehensible that such widespread failings, with serious consequences for children, have been allowed to continue for many years.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE REPORT:

- The Ministry of Justice and Public Security must immediately ensure that the Norwegian Correctional Service complies with the strict conditions for the use of security cells and restraint beds for children.
- The Ministry of Justice and Public Security should ensure that statistics are kept on the use of coercive measures against children in prison and that these statistics are made publicly available.



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