# #WeApplaud: a campaign of support and recognition for prison workers




(14 May 2020) As people around the world show their support and appreciation for workers on the frontline of the COVID 19 pandemic,  one group of key workers is rarely seen by the public eye. The #WeApplaud campaign is a show of appreciation for the vital public services provided by prison workers.

Situated on the margins of society, in the EU some 300,000 correctional staff are working hard to prevent, manage and mitigate the spread of coronavirus in prisons. In many countries, places of detention are seriously overcrowded and physical distancing is impossible to comply with.

The outbreak of coronavirus in prisons makes already difficult working and detention conditions even harder. From the very start of the pandemic, trade unions organising prison staff have raised the alarm about the lack of personal protective equipment. In some countries, such as France, there was a ban on wearing masks at work, which has since been removed thanks to union protests.

The EPSU prison services network met on 27 April and reported that a total of 10 prison staff (security and healthcare) and 9 inmates died in Italy, Spain, France, the Netherlands and the UK. In addition, thousands of prison officers were on sick leave or in quarantine resulting, in massive understaffing.

Hundreds of thousands of inmates are confined 24 hours a day with limited or no visits and limited access to online alternatives. Self-isolation is often not possible. These conditions put the physical and mental health of both inmates and prison staff at high risk, and aggravate tensions.

EPSU will continue to monitor the situation in prisons, where society's inequalities are exacerbated. Transparent, reliable data collection on the consequences of the coronavirus in prisons could be crucial for workers' compensation. It may also help with prevention and efforts to ensure Covid-19 is recognised as an occupational disease across Europe.

EPSU general secretary, Jan Willem Goudriaan noted: *" EPSU has signed up to the #WeApplaud campaign, supported by unions, UN agencies as well as Europris, that represent many prison administrations in the EU.*

*This global campaign is very timely as many prison workers have risked or lost their life due to the coronavirus. It seeks to bring visibility to prison workers and recognition for their dedication, commitment and professionalism in extremely difficult, stressful circumstances.*

*The public must be made aware about these key workers who are often unseen and undervalued, yet who play a pivotal role in the daily work of keeping inmates safe and helping them back into society."*

As many governments have reduced prison population as part of covid19 contingency plans, the campaign might also trigger a debate on issues surrounding jail sentences for different types of offense, safety and security in prisons, public

investment in rehabilitation and alternatives to detention.

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