

EPSU Action Plan on Working and Living Conditions in Prison services

EPSU ACTION PLAN ON WORKING AND LIVING CONDITIONS IN PRISON SERVICES

12 December 2006, Prague

Adopted by the Executive Committee meeting of 4 June 2007

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Introduction

There are many reasons why we need to coordinate trade union work in prisons at European level:

- Common trends and concerns in Europe's prisons;
- Impact of EU social legislation, EU Charter of Fundamental rights and EU liberalisation agenda of public services (e.g. Public-Private Partnerships; pending initiatives on concessions and in the area of social and health services; Services directive) and developments in home and justice affairs including consultation process on alternatives to pre-trial detention;
- Impact of Council of Europe's prison rules.

35 trade union delegates organising workers in prison (related) services from 13 European countries and representatives from Penal Reform International and the Council of Europe met in Prague on 9-12 December 2006. They discussed common trends, challenges, priority demands. They agreed a number of future action points at national and European levels to strengthen cooperation between EPSU affiliates, improve working and living conditions in Europe's prisons and support sound alternatives to imprisonment.

Common key trends & challenges:

- Increasing prison population due to tougher sentencing regimes and criminalization of new groups of the population, e.g. undocumented migrants (also growth of detention/removal centres with living conditions often even below “regular” prison standards);
- Prison overcrowding is a key issue in many countries which impacts on the quality of working and living conditions in prison services;
- Increase of detainees with mental illness, drug and alcohol addiction;
- Poor health and safety in many countries including contagious diseases (HIV; TB; Hepatitis);
- Lack of resources and/or budget priorities go to imprisonment rather than treatment;
- Increased risks of privatization;
- Negative image of prison work, and often lower working conditions compared to other public services;
- Isolation of prison officers, lack of management support, lack of training, threatening and violent work environment (between staff, between staff and prisoners, and among prisoners), high rate of absenteeism, in some cases shorter life expectancy (e.g. 57 in the UK);
- Isolation of detainees, lack of compliance with human rights and needs;
- Growing number and influence of prisoners/human rights and penal reform organisations - opportunities for cooperation.

Policy principles

- Social justice and respect of human rights and human dignity should be central to the criminal justice system;
- Integrated offenders' programmes should be encouraged, i.e.. social, health care, probation & security staff need to team up. This implies trade union cooperation between different services involved in prisons;
- The increase of prison population should be stopped as a matter of emergency- Imprisonment is the last resort measure and priority should be on crime prevention and social rehabilitation;
- Responsibility for prison services should lie with the state, preferably with Ministry of Justice, with due recognition of the rehabilitation objectives of prisons in terms of

ministerial cooperation, checks and balances and resources.;

- Decency agenda for both prison workers and prisoners: improving working conditions and living conditions is mutually beneficial;
- Prison workers are entitled to decent pay, terms of employment, training, and a safe and healthy work environment;
- Common collective bargaining framework for prison workers;
- Trade union rights should be fully recognized and complied with (linked to “demilitarising” prison services in some countries);
- Detention conditions should, at least, comply with the Council of Europe's prison rules.

What can we do as EPSU?

1. Raising awareness on shared agenda on prisons and developing European standards on training and ethics through:

- Using existing EPSU networks, e.g. national administration, health and social services, national coordinators of EPSU quality public services-quality of life campaign, collective bargaining (EPSUCOB@), and training workshops such as on organising workers in trade unions;
- EU social dialogue at sectoral and cross-sectoral levels (e.g. ongoing negotiations on violence at work);
- Consulting and feeding into the ETUI/REHS-EPSU prison network webpage; enclosing workshop report; background research; policy statement; news updates; EPSU network contact list; good practices (e.g Nordic ethical prison standards; UK and Czech integrated offenders' programme ...);
- Disseminating workshop discussions in national trade unions;
- Developing bilateral, cross-border trade union activities and reporting back to EPSU (e.g. plans to organise a meeting between Czech, Austrian and German trade unions; between RCN and POA-Scotland in the UK) ;
- Organising awareness raising activities e.g. a European Action day on prison services (with focus on overcrowding/better services).
- Promoting compliance with Council of Europe's prison rules

2. Challenging privatisation and liberalisation at EU and national level through:

- Factual research on negative effects and companies' strategies towards governments through mainly Prison Privatisation Report International www.psiru.org/justice, to organise specific meetings on this issue;

- Establishing quality performance evaluation criteria;
- campaigning for exemption of prison services from EC competition rules.

3. Organising an EPSU prison network meeting before 2009. An evaluation of the implementation of the action plan will be carried out second half of 2008.

Follow-up

EPSU will send the workshop report to participants, list of participants and questionnaire on trade union density. Report and adoption of action plan by HSS and NEA standing committees on 27 March 2007 and 16 April 2007 respectively and Executive committee on 4 June 2007.

Checklist of EPSU key demands for

Better working conditions of prison staff

- Fewer prisoners and more resources in crime prevention and social rehabilitation of offenders;
- Improved health and safety standards (both physical and mental);
- minimum staff/detainee ratio, meaning at least more than 1 worker per detainee, to carry out the work and increased numbers of psycho-social workers;
- improved initial recruitment training and vocational training, lifelong learning, conflict prevention training (deescalating skills);
- Discrimination-free work place and gender balanced prison staff;
- maximum working time (incl. on-call duties);
- clearer managerial responsibilities;
- civil-service status, common framework on terms of employment;
- more opportunities for occupational mobility and social mobility;
- full exercise of trade-union rights.

Better living conditions of detainees

- Fewer prisoners and more resources in crime prevention and social rehabilitation of offenders;
- Sufficient attention and resources for basic needs (food, hygiene, security, proximity to family and friends);

- Right to training, education, a healthy environment, meaningful activities to prepare rehabilitation;
- Privacy - single clean cells;
- Suicide prevention;
- Right to a living income;
- Freedom of speech and right to set up prisoners' councils in prison.

Better criminal justice systems

- Many concerns related to working and living conditions in prison services require improvements or reforms of criminal justice systems;
- Well-resourced alternatives to imprisonment;
- Maximum time-limits on pre-trial detention period;
- Specific measures for young offenders;
- Independent inspection prison authority (including consultation of prison trade unions);
- Evaluation of both public and private prisons' performance in terms of recidivism rate, social rehabilitation, working and living conditions;
- Better integration of different prison objectives and coherence of different social, economic and home and justice policies affecting prison regimes.

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Networks

