

Improving Prison Conditions by Strengthening Infectious Disease Monitoring

A project by Harm Reduction International

(with co-funding from the European Union Criminal Justice Programme)

While there are several international, regional and national human rights mechanisms in place to monitor and inspect prison conditions – including under the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention against Torture (OPCAT) with National Preventive Mechanisms (NPM), as well as within the Committee for the Prevention of Torture of the Council of Europe (CPT) - issues relating to healthcare, and specifically infectious diseases, are currently not monitoring priorities. Considering prisons represent high-risk environments for the transmission of infectious diseases - especially HIV, Hepatitis C and tuberculosis - this denotes a serious lacuna in human rights-based prison monitoring.

“Improving Prison Conditions by Strengthening Infectious Disease Monitoring” is an EU co-funded project, led by Harm Reduction International, with partners in 7 European countries, aimed at addressing this important gap in prison monitoring practices. The project endeavours to reduce ill-treatment of persons in detention and improve prison conditions through enhanced and standardised monitoring and inspection mechanisms on infectious diseases (TB, HIV and HCV).

The project will map infectious diseases in prisons and current monitoring practices for prisoners’ health and human rights in Greece, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the UK, as well as existing regional and international public health and human rights standards relating to infectious diseases in prisons.

In addition to raising awareness, this mapping will be used to develop a user-friendly tool, including a set of key indicators, to generate better informed, more consistent, and sustained monitoring of infectious diseases in prisons by national, regional and international human rights monitoring mechanisms. Following the tool’s promotion and dissemination at national, regional and international levels, it is hoped that it will be widely adopted by human rights-based prison inspection bodies, leading to sustained improvements in prison conditions and overall health in prisons.

Organisations involved in the project are: Harm Reduction International (UK), in partnership with Antigone Onlus Associazione (Italy), Praxis Association (Greece), Latvian Centre for Human Rights (Latvia), Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights (Poland), University Institute of Lisbon (ISCTE-IUL) (Portugal), Observatorio del Sistema Penal y Los Derechos Humanos de la Universidad de Barcelona (Spain), and the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies (UK).

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