

# COVID-19: WHAT IS HAPPENING IN EUROPEAN PRISONS?

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EUROPEAN  
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## WHAT DOES THE "NEW NORMALITY" LOOK LIKE IN PRISON?

During the Covid-19 emergency, the European Prison Observatory has released [weekly updates](#) on the situation of prisons around Europe. Most European prison systems took several actions to face the virus, such as the introduction of restrictions to the entrance of family members, staff, and volunteers, decarceration measures to facilitate social distancing hence lowering the chances to spread the virus in prisons, or more phone and video calls to favour contacts with family members who were not allowed anymore to visit their detained relatives.

After the first emergency phase, restrictions started to be lifted. However, the situation is not back to a complete normality because the risk of contracting the virus is still very real; therefore, the partners of the European Prison Observatory have decided to publish new issues of the series [Covid-19: what is happening in European prisons?](#) to try to depict the "new normality" in prison systems around Europe.

The following information on **Romania** prisons has been collected in the last few weeks thanks to the work of EPO's member the **Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Romania – the Helsinki Committee (APADOR)** and is updated to 24 September 2020. The information published here and the upcoming updates will be available on the [European Prison Observatory website](#).

Other information can be found on the following websites.

The **Association for the Prevention of Torture (APT)** has launched an [information hub](#) of news and resources, including on how different actors in the criminal justice, penitentiary, healthcare and oversight spaces are responding to the COVID-19 situation around the world.

The **European Organization of Prison and Correctional Services (EUOPRIS)** has set up a [webpage](#) where it gathers and shares all regulations/protocols/approaches European Prison Services or related organisations have drafted or taken in order to deal with the Covid-19 virus.

**Prison Insider** collected in a [webpage](#) the measures that countries around the world are taking to guarantee the safety of all prisoners and prison staff and the consequences of the pandemic on the living conditions in prisons.

**World Prison Brief** is compiling a [list](#) of news articles from around the world on COVID-19 and prisons which will be updated regularly.

**Fair Trials** has launched the [COVID-19 Justice project](#) to monitor how criminal justice systems are being affected by the pandemic and their response.

## **WHICH COVID-19 RULES STILL CURRENTLY APPLY TO PRISONS?**

Theoretically the emergency measures have been lifted and things have resumed to “normal” with special measures in place but there is no way at the moment to assess what is happening.

## **HAVE IN PERSON FAMILY VISITS RESUMED?**

Yes, from mid-May family visits have been resumed with special rules in place.

## **HAVE ACTIVITIES PREVIOUSLY CARRIED OUT VIA VIDEOCONFERENCING RESUMED IN PERSON?**

There is no information concerning activities carried out via videoconferencing.

## **ARE OTHER PERSONNEL (NOT BELONGING TO PRISON STAFF) ALLOWED TO ENTER IN PRISONS?**

There is no information about whether there have been any volunteers visiting, theoretically it is possible to visit; the Ombudsman has done approximately 6 visits since the march until today.



## **IS TECHNOLOGY (E.G. PHONE CALLS, VIDEO CALLS, EMAILS) STILL USED TO MAINTAIN CONTACTS WITH THE FAMILY AND/OR FOR OTHER ACTIVITIES? WHICH ONES?**

Yes, detainees are entitled to free of charge daily phone calls conversations (45 minutes closed regimes, 75 minutes open and semi open regimes). They theoretically have access to video calls as well, in practice it is not known how often they are used; some penitentiaries have used video calls to attend court hearings.

## **DO PRISON ADMINISTRATIONS INTEND TO KEEP USING THESE TECHNOLOGIES OR WILL THE PRISON SYSTEM STOP USING THEM AS SOON AS THEY ARE NOT NEEDED ANYMORE?**

There has been no official response on this issue but many people working in the system (also lawyers) say that continuing to use the video conference for court hearings would be very beneficial and would save a lot of resources.

## **CURRENTLY ARE THERE INMATES POSITIVE TO COVID-19?**

There is no official data about inmates positive to Covid-19. There are reasons to believe that there are no positive cases in the penitentiary system.



## **HOW MANY INMATES HAVE BEEN POSITIVE TO COVID-19 SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC?**

According to information that APADOR obtained following a FOIA request, there have been no positive inmates since the beginning of the pandemic. At the beginning of March, there have been 3 people in pre-trial detention who were confirmed positive.

## **WHAT DOES THE "NEW NORMAL" LOOK LIKE IN PRISON?**

APADOR hasn't had the possibility to resume prison visits. It is safe to assume that the limitations on visits and contacts with the families and friends and the suspension on education and activities have had a negative impact on the inmates, mental health problems have intensified.



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