

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

**UPDATE #8**  
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The following information on prisons in different European countries has been collected in the last few weeks thanks to the work of the European Prison Observatory members. Please note that the situation is constantly changing and that this information might already be out of date.

The information published here and the upcoming updates will be available on the [European Prison Observatory website](#).

**WHO/Europe** has published an interim guidance on how to deal with the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) in prisons and other places of detention, entitled "Preparedness, prevention and control of COVID-19 in prisons and other places of detention". The guidance can be found on the WHO page: [Preventing COVID-19 outbreak in prisons: a challenging but essential task for authorities](#)

**The CPT** has [published a statement](#) of principles relating to the treatment of persons deprived of their liberty in the context of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

**Penal Reform International** has issued a briefing note on the situation of the outbreak of a novel form of Coronavirus (COVID-19) and prevention measures in prisons and wider impacts of responses to

governments on people in criminal justice systems: Coronavirus: [Healthcare and human rights of people in prison](#)

Other information can be found on the following websites.

**OHCHR, WHO, UNAIDS and UNODC** issued a [joint statement](#) to urgently draw the attention of political leaders to the heightened vulnerability of prisoners and other people deprived of liberty during the COVID-19 pandemic, and urge them to take all appropriate public health measures in respect of this vulnerable population. The joint statement is also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#).

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 (EUROPRIS)** 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.

## FRANCE

Update: 15/05/20

As of May 15, 120 inmates and 302 prison staff members have tested positive for Coronavirus in French prisons. It has been confirmed that **a 17-year-old detainee** housed in the Porcheville juvenile prison was diagnosed with COVID-19 as well as two guards. This case has induced the authorities to make tests among the 58 young prisoners. The teenager has not developed any symptoms and, according to the doctor, he was infected a week ago.

For more updates see <https://oip.org/covid19-en-prison-lessentiel/>.

## NETHERLANDS

12/05/2020

At the end of April, **a 70-year-old detainee** from the Limburg prison, in Sittard, has tested positive for COVID-19, while another one showed several mild symptoms and has been isolated. In Roermond prison, the virus has been diagnosed to a security guard earlier in April. Sources stated that in the whole country there are about ten prisoners infected. In the past few days, there has also been a protest in the Sittard prison when a shortened outdoor time because the cause of a **riot among prisoners**. Inmates housed in Section B were allowed to go outside for an hour but, during their break, smoke bombs were thrown over the wall from the outside. The smoke bombs were thrown about ten minutes after the outdoor time had started and accordingly, the protocol to be followed includes the interruption of the outdoor break. Apparently, a group of detainees refused to return in their cells. Inmates started to complain about the canceled activities, the visits ban and the fact that video calls that are not always possible due to technical problems. The management of the prison has announced that it will engage in conversation with nineteen prisoners to decide sanctions and solutions.





LIBRETTI

## POLAND

14/05/2020

The Polish Ministry of Justice and the Prison Service have decided to cooperate for a good cause: prisoners from the Katowice region will be engaged, if they want to, to sew protective masks. The prison of Przemyśl has been the last to join the initiative that will provide the reusable **protective masks sewed by prisoners to orphans** in the local nursing institution. Inmates will sew the masks as part of a rehabilitation program.

## PORTUGAL

19/05/2020

After returning from a short permit, **two prisoners have tested positive for COVID-19**. When they got back to prison, they have been put into prophylactic isolation and soon showed several Coronavirus symptoms. They are the first

inmates in Portugal to test positive to the virus. At the moment the two inmates are hospitalised in Caxias Prison Hospital and the people with whom they were in contact are in isolation and under surveillance, waiting to be tested.



## ROMANIA

Update: 07/05/20

Romania has dealt with the Coronavirus by issuing several emergency decrees that provided for several measures on prison issues. First of all, in the execution of sentences and custodial measures, the exercise of the right to receive visits, the exercise of the right to intimate visit, the exercise of the right to receive goods through the visiting sector, as well as the rewards consisting in permission to leave the penitentiary were suspended. In order to maintain the connection with the support environment, the duration and number of calls were increased for the convicted persons in the maximum security regime, to a maximum of 45 minutes per day, and for the convicted persons in closed, semi-open, open regime, provisional regime or for those they do not have the established regime, at a maximum of 75 minutes a day. The right of detainees to online communications, regardless of the disciplinary situation and the periodicity of the connection with the family was supplemented according to the number of visits to which they are entitled according to the enforcement regime. Also, activities outside the place of detention were suspended. Detainees were informed on the necessity of the measures taken to prevent the pandemic thanks to flyers, information posters, internal radio and television circuits, and individual counseling activities.

Prison units were also called upon to pay more attention to persons deprived of their liberty known as former drug users or those undergoing treatment, as well as to provide individual psychological and social assistance in order to prevent situations of risk.

Finally, in order to reduce the movement of persons deprived of their liberty, following the transfer to other places of detention for presentation to the Courts, the High Court of Cassation and Justice, Courts of Appeal and other Courts were asked to analyze the possibility of hearing the persons deprived of liberty by videoconference or to consider changing the dates.

Also, a **Plan of measures** was implemented to prevent illness and spread of COVID-19 infection among staff and persons deprived of their liberty, which included:

**General prevention measures:**

- Enhancement of epidemiological triage, both for persons deprived of liberty and for staff and visitors;
- Enhancement of activities regarding the cleaning and disinfection of spaces and means of transport;
- Training of staff and persons deprived of liberty on the prevention of COVID-19 disease.
- Intervention measures specific to detainees extradited from areas with COVID-19 epidemiological:
- Measures regarding the extension of the observation/quarantine period up to 27 days;
- Designation of a penitentiary unit, with the special purpose of implementing the measure of quarantine of extradited detainees.

**Crisis intervention measures (confirmed or suspected case):**

- Establishing the norms for equipping the staff, as well as the patient/suspect;
- Establishing rules for direct interaction with COVID-19 patients;
- Additional measures regarding the observance of separate circuits and of the stages regarding the management of the infected person (communication with the institutions of the public health network, cleaning, disinfection of the personal belongings of the detainee, participation of the detainee in various activities and healthcare).

On 07.05.2020, there was no confirmed or suspicious case of COVID-19 among persons deprived of liberty from penitentiary units while there were 22 confirmed cases of COVID-19 infection among the employed staff, one of them being assigned to a medical staff.

All employees confirmed positively follow the conduct established by the public health network and did not return to work.



## SPAIN

Update: 18/05/20

As of May 18, Penitentiary Institutions has confirmed 60 infections among detainees and 258 among prison staff, even though 15 inmates and 157 prison staff members have already received medical discharge. On May 13, an internal regulation of Penitentiary Institutions has stated that inmates whose prisons are located in territories that have gone through phase 1 of confinement will start to receive again visits from relatives and lawyers, but measures to prevent the spread of the virus will be significantly strengthened. Visitors must wear their own **face masks and gloves**, which are mandatory to enter the facilities. Visits to inmates will only be carried out in booths with partitions and will require that the relatives' place of residence is in the same province as the prison. This measure will change as territories

progress to new phases, while physical contact between prisoners and visitors is still prohibited. The 43 facilities located in phase 1 areas will be able to start applying the measures shortly while the remaining 28 will have to wait for the moment. In Catalonia, the Generalitat will decide autonomously which measures are the most suitable for the 8 prisons located in phase 0 areas.

The service of video calls will be maintained for prisoners still isolated, while exit permits can only be enjoyed if the province where the facility is located is at least in phase 1 and as long as the detainee does not leave that territory. Inmates who access both daily permits and extraordinary permits - due to illness or death of a relative, or the birth of a child - must sign a written consent to remain in prison for 14 days in isolation when they return to jail. To these prisoners, the institute will provide a mask to use on public transportation when they travel to their relatives. The transfers of prisoners will also be resumed by the judicial authorities if requested and motivated for sanitary reasons or for detainees who have caused

serious regimental incidents and a change of prison for security reasons is considered appropriate. The Civil Guard will be responsible for the transfers and the relative sanitary measures. As soon as they arrive to the new destination, the prisoners will be subjected to a 14-day quarantine. Those with symptoms of Covid-19 or in isolation because another inmate from the same module has tested positive, will not be transferred from prison. More than 120 inmates housed in the Cáceres Penitentiary Center are now **servicing their sentences at home** with different control systems due to the Coronavirus pandemic; the majority of them will be able to continue to serve their sentence in this way. According to the General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions data, the measure has been taken for about 5,300 inmates throughout Spain. Detainees were sent home where they continue to serve their sentence, in accordance with article 86.4 of the Regulations, monitored by telematic controls, electronic monitoring devices, telephone calls or visits to their homes by the police.

## UNITED KINGDOM

Update: 18/05/20

The Minister of Justice has confirmed that, as of May 18, 422 inmates across 74 English and Welsh facilities and 542 prison staff members across 72 different penal institutions have tested positive for COVID-19. There are about **1,000 people infected in the British prison system** if we consider also the Scottish positive inmates and guards. On May 15, it has been declared that the MoJ has **purchased 2,000** electronic monitoring tags for detainees released early during the Coronavirus crisis but that only 57 are in use. The ministry said its End of custody temporary release (ECTR) scheme is still going ahead and that alternative uses are being found for the surplus tags. At the moment prison visits are still banned. The prison service has also announced that in 10 prison and youth offender institutions (YOIs), detainees will be able to make secure video calls to their relatives. Authorities have stated that, as of May 15, **six prisoners have died after contracting Coronavirus in Scottish penal facilities**, while 21 inmates are currently self-isolating in Scotland and 24 across England and Wales. The Scottish Justice Secretary, Humza Yousaf, has stated that 154 inmates have been granted early releases by the Scottish prison Service to contain the spread of the virus. The first early releases took place on May 6 and none of the prisoners released showed symptoms of Covid-19, while a governor's veto was used in 23 cases. A total of 445 prisoners are considered eligible for the release scheme and this will be dealt in three phases up to June 1. According to statistics, since the start of the pandemic, a total of 532 prison staff members were absent from work due to Covid-19 and this includes those who are symptomatic, self-isolating and caring for family members. About 40 of these staff, which represents 0.9% of the prison system total workforce, are reported to be showing several symptoms.





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