Contribution of the Council of Europe to the UNODC meeting on Reducing reoffending (IGOs) – Summary of promising practices

(Department of Police, Detention, Drugs and Addiction)

Persons deprived of their liberty are a particular category of beneficiaries of the Council of Europe’s (CoE) work in promoting more humane and socially effective penal sanctions through prison reform.

An ample body of its ‘hard’ (conventions) and ‘soft’ (recommendations and resolutions of the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly) law provide member states with overall guidance on the objectives to be achieved.

The European Prison Rules provide that the regime for sentenced prisoners shall be designed to enable them to lead a responsible and crime-free life. The Rules require that measures be put in place facilitating reintegration of former prisoners into free society, including with the help of outside social services and civil society, so that they can re-establish themselves in the community, including as regards employment, and thus to prevent reoffending.

Fostering the shift from punitive to rehabilitative approach in the treatment of sentenced prisoners is a cornerstone of the targeted assistance the CoE’s cooperation ‘arm’ provides to member states in achieving these objectives.

Within the EU/CoE programmatic framework “Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey”, the CoE implements a series of actions aimed at enhancing human rights protection for detained and sentenced persons in Montenegro.

During the first action (October 2016 – January 2019) reintegration of prisoners was addressed through five programmes implemented in cooperation with national NGOs. These programmes supported vulnerable groups (Roma, persons with substance use disorders and women) focusing on their education and psycho-social and psycho-therapeutic support. Relevant staff have been encouraged to develop skills needed to run reintegration programmes independently, and have developed two offender behaviour programmes; they have also strengthened their skills on individual sentence planning, delivering cognitive behaviour therapy and working with sex offenders.

During the second action (May 2019 – December 2022) an NGO had been selected that received a grant and is currently developing activities aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration of prisoners through enhanced occupational/work therapy.

Another joint programme between the EU and the CoE designed to support the penitentiary reform in Azerbaijan (February 2019 – October 2021) addressed the need for a better reintegration of ex-offenders through multi-sector assistance, so that they can receive relevant services both from the penitentiary and civil society actors. In particular, three national NGOs were engaged through grants to develop and implement reintegration programmes for released prisoners, including vocational training, business mentoring, legal aid, psychological and psycho-social support.
The Criminal Justice and Prison Programme implemented by the Pompidou Group within the Department supports governments in developing human rights-based criminal justice policies and comprehensive drug treatment systems in prisons. It aims to contribute to better protecting the human rights of people with substance use disorders, and reducing reoffending and the burden on the public health system through their treatment and rehabilitation. The first prison-based therapeutic community (TC) introduced in the Republic of Moldova with technical assistance of the Programme was designed with these aims in mind. A multipoint monitoring process has recently been incorporated in the TC project which also measures reoffending rates. Initial findings have shown an overwhelmingly positive effect on reoffending and successful reintegration by those who completed the TC programme, as well as strengthened physical and psycho-emotional wellbeing with an increased sense of community responsibility.

A grant project planned for implementation by the NGO Initiativa Pozitiva with support of the Pompidou Group aims to reduce reoffending through better preparing prisoners for life outside prison in the Republic of Moldova. A group of detained people (men and women) who have a history of drug use and addiction from three prisons will receive individualised and case management assistance as part of this reinsertion programme and a guide will be prepared based on the experiment and latest research for the use of penitentiaries.