



UNODC

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

Penitentiary reform in Ukraine and the role of the UNODC in 2023

A summary

Since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022, the Penitentiary Service in Ukraine has been confronted with unprecedented challenges. Disruptions have put prisoners' security and basic needs at risk and created an exceptionally challenging environment for prison staff, all of which has jeopardized Ukraine's ambitious reform plans for its penitentiary service.

“
Ukraine's prisons have been badly affected by the war, with extensive damage and severe disruptions to prison management and conditions.

”
Ms. Denise Brown,
United Nations Resident
Coordinator and
Humanitarian Coordinator
in Ukraine



At the request of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) of Ukraine, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) conducted an assessment to determine what kind of emergency assistance was needed in Ukraine, and how to support prison and penal reform in Ukraine in the longer term. Following consultations with the Ukrainian Ministry of Justice, the Penitentiary Service and the Probation Service, and civil society organizations, international cooperation, capacity building and knowledge-exchange were highlighted as key areas for support.

More international cooperation

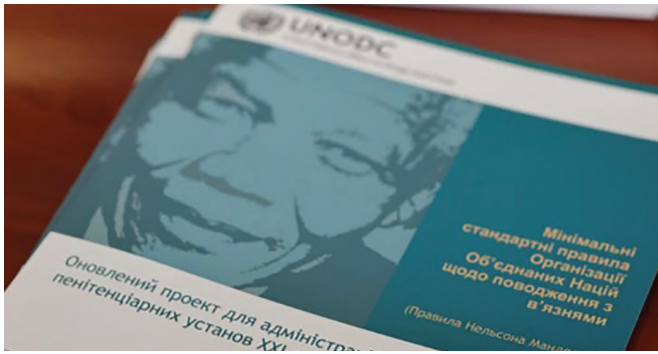
In June, the MoJ, supported by UNODC, hosted the **International Penitentiary Forum** in Kyiv. Representatives of prisons and probation services from 18 Member States, civil society organizations and international partners, came together to help prioritize Ukraine's emergency needs while discussing ways to enhance its crisis response capacity and recovery planning.



“
This Forum proved to Ukrainians and the world that the Ukrainian Penitentiary system is changing. We have travelled a difficult path from the Soviet past to observing prisoners' rights according to international standards, but we have made important progress.

”
Mr. Denis Malyuska,
Minister of Justice
of Ukraine

Much discussion focused on a proposal developed by the MoJ and UNODC – **Penitentiary Assistance in response to the Armed Conflict and Emergency Needs in Ukraine** (PACE.UA) – the purpose of which is to improve prison and offender management in Ukraine; enhance the country's emergency response and crisis preparedness; and support longer-term institutional reform efforts in the MoJ.



Building capacity

In May, Ukraine joined the Vienna-based **Group of Friends of the Nelson Mandela Rules**, comprising 40 Member States and other entities committed to promoting the practical application of this universally recognized blueprint for prison management. UNODC supported the translation of the **Nelson Mandela Rules** into Ukrainian and, in December, launched its **e-Learning course on the Rules in Ukrainian**.

Knowledge exchange

Knowledge exchange between Ukraine and other countries was seen as vital to support Ukraine's mission, and the following events are examples of how powerful this proved to be:

- As a follow up to the International Penitentiary Forum, the Moldovan National Administration of Penitentiaries of the Ministry of Justice hosted a visit of the Ukrainian officials to Moldova in October 2023 to share experience and knowledge.
- **A study visit to Croatia:** In partnership with the MoJ of Ukraine and Public Administration of the Republic of Croatia, UNODC organized a study visit of senior Ukrainian officials from the MoJ and State Penitentiary Service to Croatia in September. They exchanged best practices with their Croatian counterparts, and visited prisons across the country. Both parties agreed to continue to share knowledge and expertise going forward.



- **Ukraine at the 25th Annual Conference of the International Corrections and Prisons Association (ICPA)**

In 2023, UNODC facilitated the participation of Mr. Serhii Hrechaniuk, Head of the State Penitentiary Service in Ukraine, at the ICPA, where more than 800 participants from 79 countries discussed latest developments in the field. With the support of UNODC, the Ukrainian delegation organized a workshop on enhancing the resilience of prison management during times of war and appealed to the international partners to join efforts to address existing challenges.

Next steps

UNODC continues to support Ukraine as it navigates these complex challenges. The knowledge and expertise of international partners will be essential to help develop and implement the new PACE.UA programme, which aims to address emergency needs and facilitate institutional change in the prison service in Ukraine.

Other useful resources



Penitentiary Assistance in response to the Armed Conflict and Emergency Needs in Ukraine



e-Learning course on the Nelson Mandela Rules in Ukrainian

Beneficiary country



Implementing organization



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