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.

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.

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.
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.