

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The main objective of the fifth periodic visit to Armenia was to review the measures taken by the Armenian authorities in response to the recommendations made by the CPT after previous visits. In this connection, particular attention was paid to the safeguards against ill-treatment of persons in police custody and the material conditions, regime and health care service in prisons. The delegation also examined the treatment, conditions and legal safeguards offered to psychiatric patients and residents of social care institutions.

### Police establishments

The great majority of the persons interviewed by the delegation, who were or had recently been in police custody, stated that they had been treated by the police in a correct manner.

Unfortunately, the delegation's findings suggest that the practice of "informal talks" (i.e. persons being "invited" (usually by telephone) to come to the police, prior to being officially declared a suspect and prior to drawing up the protocol of detention), criticised by the CPT many times in the past, has not been fully eliminated, especially outside Yerevan.

The situation with respect to the legal safeguards against ill-treatment (and, in particular, notification of custody, access to a lawyer – including *ex officio* legal assistance – and information on the aforementioned rights) has remained unchanged since the 2015, i.e. these safeguards were operating on the whole satisfactorily in practice, but only as from the moment when the police custody was formalised (by drawing up a protocol of detention) and duly recorded.

Material conditions in cells of police establishments continued to be generally satisfactory. Cells were of an adequate size, suitably equipped, generally well-lit and ventilated and in a good state of repair and cleanliness.

### Prisons

The CPT's delegation carried out follow-up visits to Armavir, Goris, Nubarashen, Sevan and Yerevan-Kentron prisons, as well as to the Central Prison Hospital. The Committee welcomes the plans of the Armenian authorities to close down, by the end of 2022, several old prisons (Goris, Hrazdan, Nubarashen, Yerevan-Kentron, as well as the Central Prison Hospital) where material conditions vary from very poor to just about acceptable and to replace them with new prisons (or units) built from scratch according to contemporary international standards.

The delegation did not receive any credible allegations of recent physical ill-treatment by staff in the penitentiary establishments visited; it is also noteworthy that staff-prisoner relations were generally relaxed.

By contrast, inter-prisoner violence, intimidation and extortion remained a problem in most of the establishments visited and it was clearly related to the persistent influence of the informal prisoner hierarchy. The Committee calls upon the Armenian authorities to step up their efforts to combat inter-prisoner violence and intimidation. Resolute steps must be taken to put an end to the existence of the informal prisoner hierarchy.

The delegation was very concerned to observe that, as had been the case during the 2015 periodic visit, none of the prisons visited offered anything remotely resembling a regime of organised constructive out-of-cell activities; furthermore, there was still no individual risk and needs assessment, no individual sentence planning and hardly any preparation for release, and the lack of work opportunities for inmates meant that most of them could not qualify for early release.

In all the prisons visited, the delegation again received complaints about access to specialised health care. Furthermore, as in 2015, inmates told the delegation that they were expected to pay for necessary prescribed medication from their own pocket, or have these medicines sent to them by their relatives. The CPT has called upon the Armenian authorities to ensure that all prisons are supplied with appropriate medication, free of charge for the inmates.

Turning to the Central Prison Hospital, what struck the delegation was that while many – if not most – sick prisoners had to live in poor conditions not befitting a health-care facility, some prisoners – who generally did not appear ill at all and who tended to stay at the establishment for a very long time (up to 6 years) – obviously enjoyed very comfortable conditions. The delegation’s distinct impression was that for those prisoners (clearly belonging to the higher echelons of the informal prisoner hierarchy) the Central Prison Hospital was in fact akin to a “luxurious hotel” rather than a place where they would be treated for any ailments. The Committee requested the Armenian authorities to provide their explanation as to how this striking situation has been allowed to develop and persist at the Central Prison Hospital.

### **Psychiatric establishments**

The delegation carried out a follow-up visit to the Forensic Psychiatric Unit of the National Centre for Mental Health Care in Yerevan and visited, for the first time, Syunik Psychiatric-Neurological Dispensary in Kapan as well as Armash Health Centre.

The delegation received no allegations of ill-treatment of patients by staff at the Forensic Psychiatric Unit and Syunik Dispensary; at the latter, patients spoke positively of the staff’s attitude towards them. At Armash Health Centre, however, the delegation heard some complaints that orderlies (“sanitars”), on occasion, shouted at patients and pushed them.

Turning to living conditions, at the Forensic Psychiatric Unit, although there have been some minor improvements since the CPT’s visits in 2010 and 2015, patients are still accommodated behind locked barred gates in dormitories that are rather dilapidated and austere. The Committee understands that funding has been allocated to significantly improve the conditions for patients at this establishment and calls upon the Armenian authorities to finally rectify the many long-standing deficits which the CPT has repeatedly highlighted there.

In the other two hospitals visited, despite some partial renovations, patients’ bedrooms and day areas were scruffy and impersonal.

Inadequate levels of staff of all disciplines were found, to differing degrees, in all the hospitals visited. Multi-disciplinary clinical staff were either entirely lacking or insufficient in number to meet the many psycho-social treatment and rehabilitation needs of the patients.

The delegation noted that seclusion was not used and that there was no excessive resort to mechanical or chemical restraint in the hospitals visited.

The delegation also noted that the placement of forensic patients was reviewed by the hospitals' commissions once every six months. However, despite the Committee's repeated recommendations, the basic safeguard of a periodic review at least once every six months is still lacking in the context of involuntary civil hospitalisation.

### **Social care establishments**

The delegation carried out a first-time visit to Dzorak Social Care Centre for Persons with Psychiatric Disorders located in the outskirts of Yerevan city.

The delegation received no allegations of physical ill-treatment of residents by staff or of verbally inappropriate behaviour. On the contrary, all residents who were able to, spoke positively about the staff's kind and warm attitude towards them, which the delegation witnessed throughout the establishment. This is especially commendable considering the challenges faced by the low numbers of staff caring for the many needy residents.

The resident dormitories were clean, warm and well ventilated; the delegation noted attempts made to personalise the environment and brighten the rooms with murals and pictures.

The delegation was impressed with the efforts made to individualise care for the residents, each resident being obviously encouraged to express him/herself and his/her individual personality. The range of multi-disciplinary structured psycho-social occupational and recreational activities, in which most of the residents participated, were of clear benefit to them.

The delegation noted that seclusion and mechanical or chemical restraint was not used in the establishment.

The CPT has encouraged the Armenian authorities to continue to pursue their efforts towards the development of community social care accommodation and day care, in liaison with the Ministry of Health and mental health care services, so as to shorten or avoid institutional stays and improve experiences and outcomes for service users, allowing their proper re-integration into the community.