

# STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED RESPONSES TO SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IN PRISONS



**Final Report**  
May 2019 to July 2021



**Layout:**

s-webdesign

**Photo:**

Yon Savin: Cover, 7, 9, 10, 12, 15, 19, 21, 22, 25  
Therapeutic Community Catharsis: 8, 13, 14, 23  
Lviv prison staff: 16, 17  
Pompidou Group staff: 17, 18, 24  
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**Imprint Publisher:**

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# STRENGTHENING HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED RESPONSES TO SUBSTANCE USE DISORDERS IN PRISONS

## **Final Report**

Prepared in August 2021 by the Pompidou Group Secretariat.

The project was funded by the **Fund to combat certain forms of crime of Luxembourg** and implemented from May 2019 to July 2021.



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# Acronyms/Abbreviations

<b>CPT</b>	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organizations
<b>EFTC</b>	European Federation of Therapeutic Communities
<b>EMCDDA</b>	European Monitoring Centre of Drugs and Drug Addiction
<b>HIV</b>	Human immunodeficiency virus
<b>MAT</b>	Medication-assisted treatment
<b>NAP</b>	National Administration of Penitentiaries of the Republic of Moldova
<b>OUD</b>	Opioid use disorder
<b>PG</b>	Pompidou Group
<b>PWUD</b>	People who use drugs
<b>Project</b>	Project 'Strengthening human-rights based responses to substance use disorders in prisons'
<b>SEE</b>	South-East Europe
<b>SUD</b>	Substance use disorders
<b>TC</b>	Therapeutic community
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WP-DI</b>	Within-prison drug injection



## Executive Summary

The project “Strengthening human rights-based responses to substance use disorders in prisons” helped to further strengthen drug treatment systems in Eastern and South-East European prisons. It placed the human rights of individuals at the centre of its interventions. In the longer term, the outcomes of the project are expected to contribute to improving human rights, health and wellbeing of people who are incarcerated and facing addiction problems. Moreover, it aimed at reducing burden on the public health system by tackling substance use disorders among detained people in the project countries. Based on extensive discussions with the project partners and beneficiaries, the project addressed the need to improve the skills of health professionals working with people who are incarcerated and use drugs through training seminars. Furthermore, awareness of decision makers was raised of the need for social rehabilitation of imprisoned people with substance use disorders through advocacy as well as showcasing project results and good practice examples at the national and international level. Systematic contacts and exchanges among field professionals and policy makers in the region were facilitated in order to multiply capacities and benefit from the exchange of experiences.

During its 27-month implementation, the project built on the Pempidou Group’s extensive experience in improving health conditions and reducing drug-related harm in prisons in Eastern and South-eastern Europe, carried out under its Criminal Justice and Prisons Programme since 2011. The rationale of the project was the relatively high

prevalence of drug use among people who are incarcerated and its consequences to the public health system, including the spread of blood-borne diseases linked to injecting drug use and comorbidities with mental health disorders. The project embraced a comprehensive drug treatment approach based on human rights principles. These complement supply reduction efforts in prison and encompass pharmacologically assisted treatment, harm reduction programmes and drug free treatment, as well as other types of psycho-social support to meet the complex health and social care needs of imprisoned people with substance use disorders.

Such approach requires long-term commitment, and accordingly, results of the project are to be assessed in light of the progress achieved throughout previous projects. Overall, the project contributed to enhanced protection of the human rights of people who are incarcerated and use drugs. It also reduced burden on the public health system through better addressing the needs of people who use drugs and those working with them in Eastern and South-East European prisons. Emphasis was placed on improving the coverage and quality of drug treatment systems in prisons in the project countries and actively encouraging policy changes and the regional exchange of experiences on treatment and social re-integration of drug using people involved in the criminal justice system.

A needs-based approach and flexibility in responding to urgent requests has been appreciated by the partners as the most important feature of the project and the Criminal Justice and Prison Programme in general. This approach yielded the following results:

**In Moldova**, the first prison-based Therapeutic Community programme was consolidated and extended through providing evidence of its long-term effectiveness, achieving progress in its integration into the national treatment curriculum and opening up access to people from other custodial settings. Rehabilitative activities attached to the programme were also diversified, in particular with a pre- and post-programme phase, peer-to-peer mentorship and entrepreneurial education. The programme was further showcased as a good practice in the region, inspiring interest by other countries to introduce it in their prisons and the creation of a handbook for setting up and running therapeutic communities in prison. Workshops and research conducted on the influence of criminal subcultures on effectiveness of drug treatment options in Moldovan prisons has led to a first discussion of this challenge among prison staff and leadership and to practical recommendations to mitigating this influence on uptake of treatment. Implementation of an interactive online course on delivering medication-assisted treatment in prisons also served the purpose of improving the quality of drug treatment in prisons by enhancing the competences of professionals working with people with opioid use disorders.

**In Ukraine**, the project facilitated the introduction of medication-assisted treatment in prisons and its piloting in pre-trial detention for treating opioid use disorder, thus contributing to the fight against the rapid spread of HIV and Hepatitis C in prisons in the region.

**In Georgia**, the project facilitated a nation-wide discussion on improving rehabilitation and resocialisation of drug-dependent people who are incarcerated and supporting implementation of the first National Drug Prevention Strategy, in the context of an ongoing drug policy reform.

At regional level, the project laid grounds for developing policy strategies to raise drug treatment standards in South-East European prisons and testing practical solutions to build capacities of professionals working with

people with substance use disorders in prisons within available resources.

In order to provide better protection of the human rights of people who are incarcerated and use drugs and improve public health through reducing the prevalence of substance use disorders in prisons, the project focused on achieving progress in two areas: first, by improving the coverage and quality of drug treatment systems in prisons; and second, by encouraging policy changes and strategies that strengthen alternatives to punishment and social re-integration of drug-using people involved in the criminal justice system.



*Resident at the Therapeutic Community "Catharsis"*

The project also contributed to the implementation of the Pompidou Group's work programme 2019-2022, especially through taking measures to reduce drug-related stigma and designing specific interventions for vulnerable groups. It is highly probable that active involvement of policy makers and professionals in project work during this and previous project cycles, and discussions on potential membership in the Pompidou Group on the occasion of project events also facilitated the decision of Georgia and Ukraine to join the Pompidou Group during the review period, to take effect in May 2020 and January 2022 respectively.



# Introduction

People who use drugs (PWUD) are overrepresented in prison populations throughout East and South-East Europe. They are often stigmatised and do not get the medical, social and psychological help they need. Prisons are risky environments both for the prisoners and the staff. In particular, injecting drug users are exposed to various health risks namely overdosing, abscessed infections of injection sites, and the transmission of blood-borne diseases such as Hepatitis C or HIV.

## Prison health

Available data indicate that Eastern Europe has not succeeded in controlling the HIV epidemic, as both new HIV infections and AIDS-related deaths continue to rise. The number of new HIV infections increased annually by an estimated 43% from 2010 to 2020, making the region the fastest growing HIV epidemic in the world. Key populations and their sexual partners are responsible for virtually all new infections in the region, with an estimated 43% of new HIV infections among adults who inject drugs.<sup>1</sup> Eastern Europe and also the Balkans face epidemics of tuberculosis (TB) and Hepatitis C virus (HCV) which require an integrated approach to prevention, diagnosis and treatment that is currently lacking.

Prisons are risky environments both for the prisoners and the staff. They are often characterised by overcrowding, poor hygiene and health conditions, which together represent a major challenge in controlling the spread of infections, including COVID-19. In particular, people who inject drugs are exposed to various health risks namely overdosing, abscessed infections of injection sites, and the transmission of blood-borne diseases such as Hepatitis C or HIV.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a major impact on the fight against HIV and Hepatitis. COVID-19 disrupted medication supply chains, restricted access to prevention commodities such as condoms and lubricants; it also cut off the supply of antiretroviral drugs. In many European prisons delivery of treatment and harm reduction services for people who use drugs was partly interrupted.<sup>2</sup> And most importantly, COVID-19 exacerbated the inequalities that make people more vulnerable to other infections such as HIV and Hepatitis C.<sup>3</sup>

People in prison report high rates of communicable and noncommunicable diseases, including cardiovascular diseases, cancer, diabetes and chronic respiratory diseases. They also experience disproportionate levels of sexual health problems, suicide attempts, self-harm, and mental health disorders.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, these health conditions are often overlapping, as multimorbidity is normative among people in prison, often with earlier onset and greater severity than in the general population.<sup>5</sup>

## Drug use disorder

One of the most prevalent disorders among the prison population is drug use disorder. Compared to the general population, people in prison report higher rates of drug use and drug-related problems<sup>6</sup>. Worldwide, it is estimated that 30% of men and 51% of women in prison have a drug use disorder<sup>7</sup>. In Europe, according to recent estimates, the lifetime prevalence of illicit drug use ranges between 13% to 87% depending on the substance used and the country. These values are substantially higher than those reported in the general population.<sup>8</sup>

To address drug-related issues, targeted interventions have been implemented in European prisons for more than twenty years. Drug services for people in prison include substance use assessment and detoxification (at prison entry); pharmacological treatment (mainly opioid agonist treatment), psychosocial treatment, and harm reduction interventions (mostly for the prevention and treatment of infectious diseases); interventions in preparation for release aimed at social reintegration.<sup>9</sup> The availability of these interventions vary by country, but their level of implementation is rare in most European prisons.

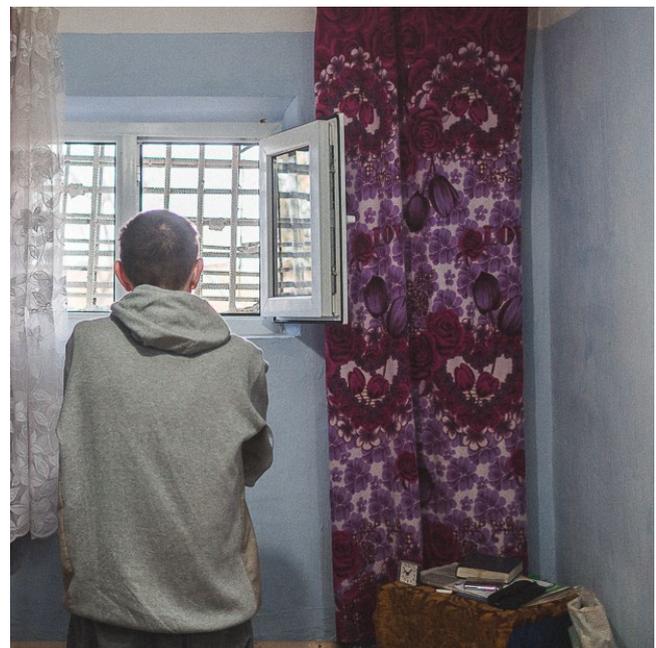
In many Eastern and South-East European prisons HIV infection, injection drug use, and incarceration are syndemic. However, few services are available to incarcerated people who use drugs. While data are limited internationally, within-prison drug injection (WP-DI) appears to be widespread and may pose significant challenges to prisons in the region.

## Human rights of detained people

In addition to the high risk of the transmission of communicable diseases, detained people are often subject to stigmatisation due to their dependence. The fear of being caught for drug possession, as well as backlash from the side of their peers often prevents them from seeking help or complying with their drug treatment. Mental illness is another particularly prevalent risk among prison populations, which is in close correlation with drug addiction. Prison conditions can have negative effects on mental health. Overcrowding, various forms of violence, enforced solitude or conversely a lack of privacy, a lack of meaning-

ful activity, isolation from social networks, insecurity about the future and lack of services providing psychosocial support are all reasons why prisons should be a priority area for preventing harmful drug use.

The prevalence of poor prison conditions and limited treatment options raise significant concerns related to the protection and guarantee of fundamental human rights, in particular the right to health. The right to health contains both entitlements and freedoms. Entitlements include the right to prevention, treatment and control of diseases, and freedoms entail the right to be free from non-consensual medical treatment, torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. Limiting the spread of communicable diseases in prison benefits both people who are incarcerated as well as society as a whole and reduces the burdens on a country's health system. In this respect, the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe promotes a human rights-based approach to drug policy encompassing all areas, from drug policy development through implementation and monitoring to evaluation.<sup>10</sup> Through its Criminal Justice and Prison Programme implemented in Eastern Europe, the Pompidou Group takes action to promote the right to health and tackle health inequalities in prison settings.



*Prison conditions can have a negative effect on mental health.*

## Pompidou Group experience

As being part of the Council of Europe the Pompidou Group upholds the core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and promotes a balanced approach in the response to drug use and illicit trafficking in drugs, supporting both demand and supply reduction. The Pompidou Group offers a forum for open debate, exchange of experiences and, as a platform for science and evidence-based innovation, it links policy, research and practice. The Pompidou Group provides added value to its members by:

- Giving perspective and insight based on scientific evidence, professional experience, practice and political feasibility;
- Offering direct cooperation contacts for governments, experts, professionals, and civil society with counterparts on all levels and areas of drug policies and related fields;
- Facilitating multilateral action by bringing together different stakeholders around the same table, including, when appropriate, civil society and private sector, and providing the support structure for joint actions;
- Holding a multidisciplinary forum of open debate for policy makers and policy advisors for dialogue on different policy responses, developments and new approaches;
- Providing active support and a think-tank function for its member States in their efforts to further develop drug policy, strategies, action plans and legislation;
- Empowering drug policy stakeholders by providing knowledge, training and capacity building based on the needs of member States.

The project built on more than 10 years of Pompidou Group experience on improving health conditions and reducing drug-related harm in prisons in Eastern and South-East Europe, accomplished within its Criminal Justice and Prison Programme and financially supported by the **Fund to**

**combat certain forms of crime of Luxembourg.** Thanks to the Programme, the PG managed to establish long-standing and robust co-operation with prison administrations in many Eastern European countries and maintains contact with a number of highly efficient partners: local administrations, international organisations, civil society and a wide network of experts and trainers. Consequently, activities of the project could be implemented without an inception phase due to the monitoring and analysis conducted in previous projects. The project has also served for further strengthening trust and cooperation among South-East European countries and through creating a thematic group focusing on the topic of drug treatment in prison, making use of the already existing and solidified regional cooperation network within the Pompidou Group.



# 1 Improving drug treatment systems in prisons

The project contributed to enhancing knowledge of prison staff working with people who use drugs on drug treatment and rehabilitation, raising awareness of decision makers on the need and importance of investing in social re-insertion of detained people with substance use disorders and creating them more opportunities to receive care and treatment.

## Extending the Therapeutic Community approach in the Republic of Moldova

Efforts continued to consolidate results achieved in the previous project cycle related to setting up and running the first in-prison therapeutic community (TC) programme in Moldova. This abstinence-based residential programme for treating drug addiction became operational in July 2018 as a pilot project in Pruncul prison and complemented other medication-assisted treatment options and psychosocial care that were already offered in Moldovan prisons.

In order to ensure sustainability of the programme, i.e. continued allocation of resources and staff, it was deemed necessary to measure its short- and long-term effectiveness. This was considered a complex task from the start, since such programme affects numerous aspects of the

beneficiaries' life (recidivism, wellbeing, family relations, employment, etc.) as well as overall costs in the criminal justice system, prison discipline and other. Furthermore, the staff working in the TC had very little experience in systematic monitoring of change in behavior and use of statistical and research tools that enable comparison over time. Firstly, four treatment specialists and representatives of the prison administration presented the TC programme during a dedicated symposium at the 17th conference of the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities (EFTC) and exchanged with other professionals operating TCs all over Europe on ways and means of measuring effectiveness of TCs. The contacts made through this international network led to substantial support from the former president of EFTC in creating and piloting a monitoring system for the use of TC staff in Moldova. A preliminary research then successfully tested the identified tools in practice, despite delays due to limited access to prisons amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The research conducted showed positive results with regard to the programme's effectiveness. The results can be used as important advocacy elements for the need of the TC and to demonstrate the change drug treatment programmes bring for both the prison system and the beneficiaries' lives. TC staff was trained to continue using the tools and collecting comparable and quantifiable data which will then serve to promote the Moldovan TC as a good practice example in the region and its extension at the national level.

Following a successful pilot phase, the National Administration of Penitentiaries (NAP) had been committed to integrating TCs into the national treatment curriculum in prisons that would ensure both greater sustainability and extension of the programme to a wider group of beneficiaries, notably people with substance use disorders in other custodial settings and those dealing with other types of addictions. Little progress was achieved on this front, however, due to political instability in the country, repeated dissolution of the parliament and consequently, substantial delays in the necessary legislative changes. Making the so-called 'halfway house' operational in Pruncul prison, which would allow to accommodate more beneficiaries and complement the TC with a pre- and post-programme rehabilitation phase, is still in progress. Hence, the TC does not yet operate in its full capacity. Other ways of filling all spaces in the TC were explored in the meantime: information material was developed and disseminated for directors of other prisons to raise awareness of the existence and benefits of the TC and a visit to the TC was planned for them which, however, could not yet take place due to restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. At a related online round table meeting, NAP also announced its intention to include the identification of potential TC beneficiaries in the objectives of all prison directors.

### » Joint efforts with Pompidou Group have improved comprehensive health care for people in Moldovan prisons.

*Vlad Busmachi, National Administration of Penitentiaries of Moldova*

The TC was also complemented with a peer-to-peer mentorship programme and entrepreneurship classes, working with formerly detained people who successfully completed the TC programme. These programmes are supervised by the NGO *Initiativa Pozitiva* and are aimed at increasing chances of rehabilitation and reintegration of people released from prison. The quail farm piloted within the TC programme in the previous project cycle not only devel-

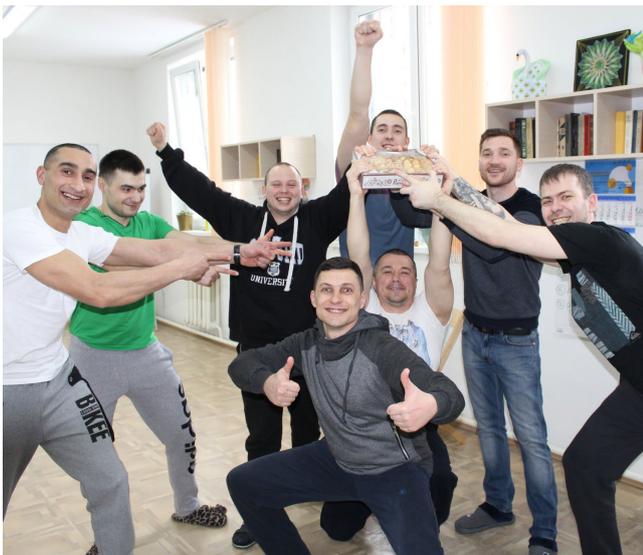
ops the residents' work skills for future reintegration into society, but has also become an income-generating activity from which profit is reinvested in social reintegration programmes; it is planned to be extended to other prisons.



*The residents of the Therapeutic Community run a quail farm*

The continued daily collaboration between NAP and the NGO *Initiativa Pozitiva* facilitated by the project has led to tangible progress in making involvement of civil society organisations in service provision in prisons more transparent. Following independent expert evaluation of the role of the NGO in delivering drug treatment services in Moldovan prisons which was commissioned by this project, a service catalogue was developed listing the costs and content of psychosocial care services that can be provided in prisons, and was negotiated with the prison administration. Once put in practice, the catalogue will allow the prison administration to procure services from NGOs

in a more transparent and accountable way. Nevertheless, for political reasons mentioned above recent changes in leadership positions in all fields, including NAP, risk to undermine the progress achieved. Continued support from the Council of Europe in related discussions is therefore essential.



The residents of the Therapeutic Community are highly motivated

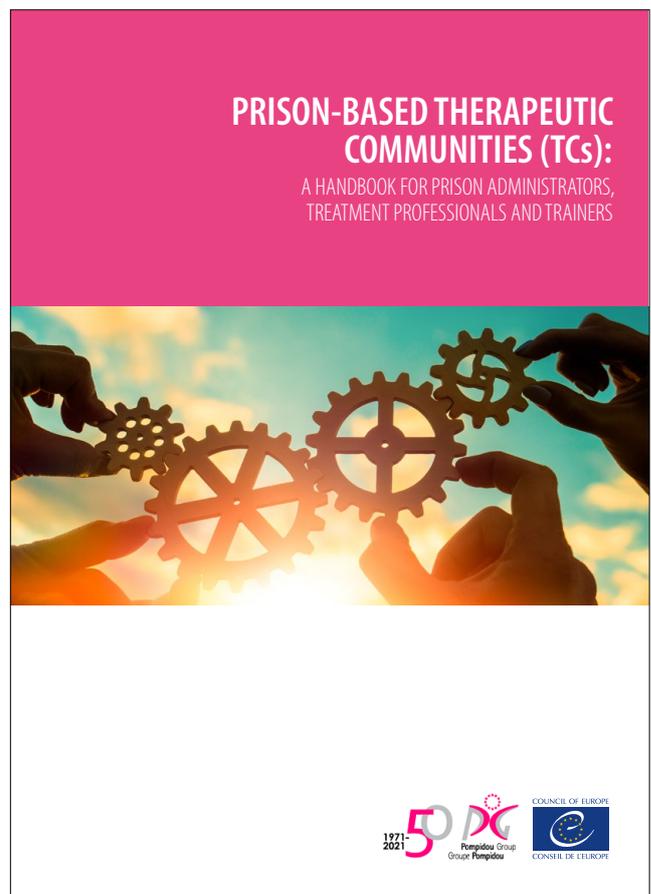
### Transferring the TC programme in the region

The knowledge and expertise on establishing and running a TC in prison accumulated over the years fed into a handbook for prison administrations, treatment professionals and trainers. It offers guidance on design, planning and implementation of a TC, including lessons learned from the Moldovan experience, as well as a 10-module curriculum for trainers. The handbook was disseminated among the target group, primarily in the Eastern and South-East European region, through a targeted online pre-launching event with the participation of 46 professionals in the drugs field, and through the PG Permanent Correspondents, website and social media channels. It will be used as a practical tool to sustain knowledge of prison staff in view of the typically high staff turnover and to further extend this treatment option in the region. The TC of Moldova was showcased as a proven practice in complementing pharmacological and other psychosocial treatment in prisons on several occasions, for example the 62<sup>nd</sup> session of the

UN Commission on Narcotic Drugs in Vienna, the 2<sup>nd</sup> European Prison Health Conference in Lisbon, a 2019 UNODC conference on drug policy implementation in Kiev, and the Pompidou Group's virtual study visit for South-East European (SEE) professionals working on prison health.

» This Handbook provides a comprehensive guide to understanding the Therapeutic Community approach and an essential resource for advancing TC programming in custodial settings.

George De Leon, Professor of Psychiatry, New York University



## Mitigating the influence of criminal subcultures in the Republic of Moldova

Moldova is one of the few countries worldwide to introduce HIV prevention strategies in prisons in line with WHO recommendations, including medication-assisted treatment and needle and syringe programmes. However, enrolment rate in drug treatment and harm reduction programmes in prisons has still been relatively low compared to the estimated number of people with injecting drug use in custodial settings. One of the reasons behind is suspected to be the strong influence of criminal subcultures/informal hierarchies which is highly prevalent in Moldovan prisons, similarly to other post-Soviet countries. A 2018 Council of Europe baseline study into criminal subculture in prisons confirmed this and developed recommendations for tackling the issue. However, the influence of prison subcultures and the related in-prison drug market on uptake of drug treatment services was not covered in the study.

To address this gap and upon request of NAP, a first workshop was organised for Moldovan prison staff to explore the topic which, thanks to the active involvement of NAP, managed to bring together 64 participants working in security, health care and psychosocial fields from all 17 prisons. Due to Covid-related restrictions the event was held online. This format proved to be inadequate to create a trustful environment for staff to share their opinion with honesty and openness and technical problems of connecting from the prisons meant an additional barrier. At the same time, it served as a suitable ground for starting discussion on the topic and exchanging on challenges perceived by prison staff that are specific to one or another prison. It also offered a unique occasion to bring together staff with different professional expertise from all prisons which would probably not have been possible in case of a physical meeting due to the persistent situation of understaffing.

One of the conclusions of the workshop was that a better understanding is needed of the extent to which criminal subcultures affect enrollment in drug treatment. A qualitative research study was commissioned in cooperation with Yale University – already active in the region in this particular research field – to further explore the issue. The research concluded with practical recommendations as to how the influence of criminal subcultures on treatment ef-

iciency could be mitigated in Moldovan prisons and how HIV prevention strategies could be optimized using the research findings. Piloting some of the practical solutions offered in the study will be envisaged in the next project cycle, if funding is secured.

## Improving medication-assisted treatment in Moldova and Ukraine

Research suggests that 20% of HIV infections nationally in the Eastern European region could be averted with up-scaling of medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in prisons where the high prevalence of HIV is fueled, to a large extent, by injecting drug use.



*Methadone is available as an oral solution*

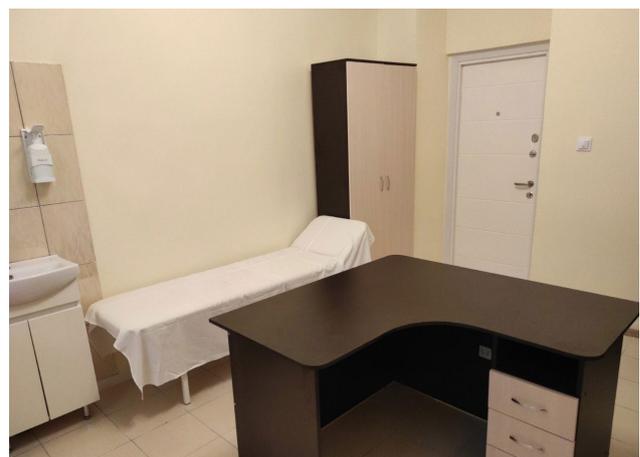
While Moldova introduced MAT in prisons already some 20 years ago, at a workshop on the influence of criminal subcultures on treatment efficiency in prisons, it became evident that prison staff working with people who use drugs urgently need to be trained on providing quality MAT. The high turnover of staff in prisons has visibly resulted in very low retention of expert knowledge on treating people with substance use disorders. To offer a sustainable solution for training medical staff and others involved in the delivery of MAT, an interactive online learning course was developed combining local and international expertise. After a test phase, the course is planned to be included in the national curriculum for medical staff and as an optional course for non-medical staff working in prisons. A pre- and post-module quiz and mini-evaluation tasks are built

into each module to measure increase in practical knowledge of the trainees and ensure retention of essential information, thus contributing to the improvement of quality service delivery for people with opioid use disorder.

Ukraine also made an important step forward in the fight against HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C when it started rolling out MAT for treating opioid use disorder in its penitentiary institutions in 2019. The Pompidou Group, along with other International Organizations, has supported these reforms by training Ukrainian prison staff on comprehensive drug treatment provision in prisons. After a successful piloting phase, provision of MAT was extended at national level in 2020. Nevertheless, little attention was paid to ensuring MAT in the pre-trial detention phase where 37 % of convicted adults were held in 2020, the vast majority for more than 6 months. Pre-trial detention centres thus represent an important gap in treatment provision for people with OUD transitioning between the community and prisons.

Following a request by the Public Health Center of the State Criminal and Executive Office of Ukraine, the project supported piloting of MAT in the pre-trial detention centre of Lviv in the Western region of Ukraine. In addition to the setup of a methadone dispensary at Lviv Penitentiary Institution No. 19, 17 psychiatrists, security officers and educators working at the centre were trained covering concepts of substance use disorders, treatment and harm reduction interventions, international prison health standards, national regulations for providing treatment as well as the importance of through-care and the role of civil society. Although visiting a Ukrainian prison where methadone treatment is already provided would have been most beneficial, the training instead took place in a hybrid format in Lviv, respecting sanitary and distancing measures to minimise the risk of COVID-19 infections. The main outcome of the training was a roadmap for the implementation of MAT in Lviv pre-trial detention service that was elaborated by the participants guided by Ukrainian and international experts. It clarifies the roles and responsibilities staff members would have in the MAT programme with a focus on a) assessing and enrolling patients in treatment, b) the practical process of methadone distribution, and c) risk management and communication. Efficiency of the training was measured through a daily online quiz using the Mentimeter tool, whereby participants were asked to

answer the same set of questions at the beginning and at the end of each training day. For example, 76 % of the participants (against 60 % in the morning) answered correctly at the end of the day about access to overdose prevention medication. Results of the quiz also demonstrated that participants' perception of drug addiction has changed considerably after the first day of the training, starting to perceive it more of a medical condition (increased from 19 to 43 %) than a moral weakness.



*Before and after: refurbished area ready to be used as methadone dispensary in Lviv pretrial detention.*



Hybrid training for prison staff in Lviv prison.

» **The new medical cabinet will allow us to provide state-of-the-art services to people with opioid dependence.**

*Tetiana Dergach, Head of the State Institution Health Care Centre Criminal Executive Service of Ukraine in Lviv region*

Due to delays in adjusting national regulations and licensing of medication, the MAT programme could be started only a few months later, in July 2021. The Pompidou Group offered a “hotline” for staff of Lviv to provide expert advice in the implementation process, in case new questions and challenges arise. After a successful piloting phase, it would be essential that Ukraine extends treatment provision to other pre-trial detention facilities, since the size of the country does not make it possible to regroup and centralise such services.

Long-standing support of Ukraine in the field of drug treatment in prison within technical assistance projects likely contributed to the decision of the Ukrainian parliament in July 2021 to become a member of the Pompidou Group.

This will open new avenues for supporting alignment of the country’s drug policy with international standards and human rights principles.

### Facilitating treatment and rehabilitation of incarcerated people in Georgia

90 decision makers, policy makers from line ministries and practitioners deepened their knowledge about evidence-based practices of drug treatment, rehabilitation and harm reduction in prisons at an international conference organised in Tbilisi in 2020. Discussions contributed to advancing the debate on moving towards a rehabilitative approach in the criminal justice system and strengthening alternatives to punishment and social re-integration of drug using people who are in trouble with the law. Introduction of a drug-free therapeutic community and self-help groups in and outside prison were underlined among the key interventions for follow-up, with the aim of improving throughcare and complementing recently introduced methadone treatment and psychosocial care interventions.

The outcome of the conference was the adoption of a strategic document with 15 recommendations the so-called “Tbilisi Declaration” to serve as a roadmap for improving the health conditions of detained people with



International conference in Tbilisi

SUD and raising awareness of their needs among decision makers. Nevertheless, more support would be needed to monitor implementation of these recommendations and identifying related gaps in the administrative and legal framework. The decision by Georgia to join the Pompidou Group shortly after the conference has facilitated greater involvement of the country in human rights-based drug policy cooperation.

According to written feedback collected by the Georgian Ministry of Justice, participants appreciated the highly inclusive and interactive format, its practical value for professionals, the opportunity to exchange knowledge and experiences between the key stakeholders from the fields of drug addiction, prison health and rehabilitation from Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and other countries, and the adoption of a strategic document.

» *The continuity of adequate prevention, treatment and care for patients between prisons and communities must be guaranteed from the first day of imprisonment until the first day after release from prison.*

*Extract from the Tbilisi Declaration*

» *The interactive and diversified format of the conference created diversified opportunities for participation, and sharing of experiences and knowledge.*

*Mariami Bregadze, Legal Adviser, Ministry of Justice of Georgia*

Shortly after the conference, in May 2020, Georgia decided to intensify international drug policy cooperation and joined the Pompidou Group as its 41st member.



*Formerly incarcerated people participated at PG event*



## 2 Promoting alternatives to punishment and social re-integration

In this area, the project facilitated regular interaction of policy makers and practitioners at regional level with the aim of informing them about good practice examples and lived experiences in implementing international recommendations related to treatment of detained people who face drug-related problems.

### **Raising standards on drug treatment and rehabilitation in South-East European prisons**

In June 2020, the Pompidou Group' South-East Europe cooperation group initiated a new activity on developing comprehensive drug treatment systems in prisons which aims to develop policy guidance on raising standards of drug treatment and rehabilitation in prisons and provide technical assistance in the SEE region.

» *The continuity of adequate prevention, treatment and care for patients between prisons and communities must be guaranteed from the first day of imprisonment until the first day after release from prison.*

*Jörg Pont, medical ethics and criminal justice expert.*

Under the ongoing project, ground work was laid for achieving the expected results of this activity: an online kick-off seminar offered the opportunity to the participating professionals and policy makers from 11 SEE countries to learn about the essential elements of a comprehensive drug treatment system; a working group was set up to develop a policy document on improving standards on treatment and rehabilitation; a rapid assessment was carried out to identify capacity-building needs of the SEE countries in this field. Capacity-building support, to be provided in the next project cycle, is expected to result in improved structures of drug treatment in prison, improved throughcare and enhanced understanding of correctional staff on addiction.

Bearing in mind that the main aim of the SEE thematic group is to foster cooperation, dialogue and practical exchange of knowledge and experience at regional level, it is proposed that one or two SEE countries work more closely on each of these action areas and that the implementing countries commit to becoming competence points in their action area. This entails putting the acquired knowledge and competences at the disposal of the other SEE countries upon their request.

### Supporting the implementation of the new Drug Prevention Strategy in Georgia

In the context of modernizing its drug policy, Georgia adopted its first National Drug Prevention Strategy for the period 2021-26. The Ministry of Justice, secretary of the Anti-Drug Inter-Agency Coordination Council responsible for implementation, perceived the low level of knowledge of drug prevention concepts by members of the council as an obstacle for operationalisation of the strategy and solicited the Pompidou Group for assistance. The 18 coordinators from 8 institutions involved (Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Healthcare, Ministry of Culture Sport and Youth, Office of the Resource Officers of Educational Institutions, Special Penitentiary Service, General Prosecutor's Office, National Drug Observatory) received expert support in the drafting process of the Action Plan 2021-22 and learned about the basic concepts of drug prevention. The participating representatives confirmed that the activities enabled them to increase their knowledge on drug prevention and its relevance in the criminal justice system, and to familiarize themselves with the result-oriented approach to strategic implementation. The draft Action Plan is to be finalised by September 2021 – only after then can it be evaluated how the acquired knowledge would be used by the contributing institutions. As part of the next project cycle, further support is planned for implementation of the Action Plan, especially targeting minors who are in contact with the criminal justice system and other vulnerable groups.



*Ministry of Justice in Tbilisi, Georgia*

Limited resources of this regional project did not allow to carry out more specific trainings and pilot programmes on drug treatment in prisons at national level. A fully fledged project focusing on Georgia's needs would bring better results and allow continued support for stepping up health-centred drug prevention in the criminal justice system. Accordingly, a project proposal on further supporting the implementation of the National Drug Prevention Strategy was developed and is waiting for funding. In the meantime, Georgia's decision in May 2020 to join the Pompidou Group will make it possible for the Group to involve the country in a wider area of drug policy cooperation and further facilitate support and alignment of its drug policy with international human rights standards.



## 3 Human Rights impact of the project

Prison is a high-risk environment – for detained people and staff alike. People who inject drugs in prison are exposed to various health risks: overdosing, abscessed infections of injection sites, and the transmission of blood-borne diseases such as Hepatitis C or HIV. Limiting the spread of communicable diseases in prisons thus benefits people who are incarcerated as well as society as a whole, and reduces burden on a country's health system. Consequently, drug policy experts around the world recommend developing drug treatment services, harm reduction interventions and criminal justice policies that support alternatives to imprisonment for people who use drugs and are in trouble with the law. In Europe, the Pompidou Group's Criminal Justice and Prison Programme, under which this project was implemented, supports governments in developing human rights-based criminal justice policies and comprehensive drug treatment systems in prisons.

The project is estimated to have a positive impact on the health and well-being of detained people who cope with SUD as well as on reducing burden on the public health and criminal justice systems by ensuring continuity of care for people facing addiction problems and their reintegration into society. In order to achieve this, the project created new structures for rehabilitation of people with SUD in prisons, strengthened or improved existing drug treatment programmes in detention facilities and influenced policy changes through dialogue, regional exchange of experiences and by linking policy, research and practice.

### An inclusive approach

The project concerns a specific group of society that faces multiple stigmatisation: people who are incarcerated and who have substance use disorders. To ensure protection of the rights of this vulnerable group, human rights standards were incorporated in all training activities. Raising awareness of practitioners and policy makers on non-discrimination of people who use drugs and the importance of using a human rights-sensitive language when talking about addiction have been important points of concern in project implementation. Collaboration with people who have benefited from the treatment programmes has been increased in order to demonstrate the importance and results of treatment and rehabilitation for the individuals' lives and the society as a whole.

Most activities and programmes covered in the project targeted the male prison population. One of the reasons for this is that many other international organisations active in the region focus their activities on the special needs of women in the criminal justice system, such as women who suffered trauma and domestic violence and pregnant women, covering also drug misuse. This is undoubtedly necessary because women who use drugs often face double stigma due to their drug use related to motherhood and their role in the family on one hand and being incarcerated on the other hand. Another reason is that women represent a small proportion of the prison population

and the majority of people who inject drugs linked to the spread of HIV and Hepatitis are known to be men.

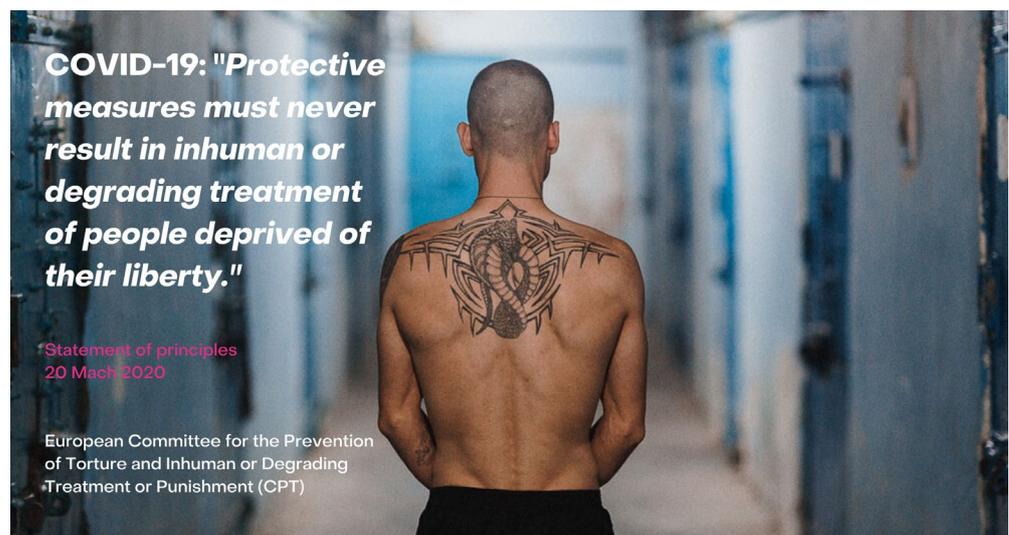
Nonetheless, awareness of gender-specific issues was built into the project design through topical discussions and interventions by experts. Given that the majority of professionals targeted in the project field tend to be women, especially in the health and social sector, more than 50 % of participants at project events typically consisted of female professionals.

## Stakeholders and partners

The project team has strived to create an atmosphere of understanding that actively involved project partners such as the beneficiaries and other stakeholders in a timely manner. Project plans, progress and results were disseminated to all stakeholders and regular consultation took place to ensure that project activities are agreed with the majority of stakeholders. Following stakeholders and partners were regularly informed of or actively involved in project activity planning and implementation: Ministry of Justice (Georgia, Moldova, Romania, Ukraine) Ministry of Health / Health care (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine), penitentiary administrations of all project countries, Civil Society organisations (NGO *Initiativa Pozitiva* in Moldova, *Tamagora* in Georgia) International Organisations (EMCDDA, UNODC, WHO) Council of Europe (Field offices in Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, CoE department working on prison health) Permanent Correspondents (national representatives) of the Pompidou Group, in particular those representing Eastern and South-East European countries. Synergies have also been created with other bodies and departments of the Council of Europe such as the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or De-

grading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) and international organisations working on drug-related crime and prison health, in particular the WHO Health in Prison Programme, EU4MD of EMCDDA and the Eastern European office of UNODC. The joint organisation of the 2nd European Prison Health Conference with EMCDDA, UNODC, WHO and the Association Health Without Barriers in Lisbon in 2019 is a good example of collaboration.

The Pompidou Group works closely together with civil society organisations (CSO) in the project countries. Whenever possible, project activities implemented involved relevant CSO actors. It is one of the core prison health principles upheld by the Pompidou Group to promote a logical connection between prison health services and community services. Representatives of NGOs working with people who use drugs, as well as associations of people who use drugs are invited to the most important project events. One example of exemplary involvement of civil society is the long-standing collaboration between the Moldovan prison administration and the NGO *Initiativa Pozitiva*, supported and facilitated by the project. The contractual activities of the NGO in the in-prison TC ensure the involvement of people who have successfully completed a drug treatment programme in prison as role models, mentors for support after release and staff members of community-based treatment programmes.



With the help of civil society organisations, the project management also invited the project's beneficiaries, with the aim of empowering them and getting direct feedback on the actions promoted by the project. Currently or previously incarcerated people with substance use disorders participated in seminars, workshops whenever possible and shared their experiences and wishes with experts and prison administrators.



*Graduates of drug treatment programmes become peer educators*

The visibility of the Council of Europe and the **Fund to combat certain forms of crime of Luxembourg**, was ensured in all communication activities by the Pompidou Group Secretariat. In addition, all 41 member states of the Pompidou Group were informed about project activities and results and were called upon to support and disseminate information about project initiatives. A successful example of using communication means to ensure participation of key stakeholders was a mini-campaign on launching the Handbook on prison-based Therapeutic Communities, as a result of which several Permanent Correspondents and numerous policy makers with an interest in introducing TCs in the SEE region participated. Furthermore, feedback and additional reviews by professionals were received in reaction to the handbook, positively assessing its usability and providing valuable advice from the target group for further improving in. A review was also published in the journal of the European Federation of Therapeutic Communities.

## Project management

The project activities were carried out and implemented by the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the relevant ministries and prison administrations and together with other partners in the countries concerned. A project manager was responsible for coordinating the events in the project area. A project assistant helped with the administrative and financial implementation of the project. The overall management was supported by the whole team of the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe and synergies were generated, wherever possible, with other activities in the framework of the Pompidou Group's work programme 2019-2022. For example, prison experts who were also active in the project contributed to a Pompidou Group initiative that collected good practices on how to deal with the Covid 19 pandemic.



A major challenge for project work was the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Europe in the spring of 2020. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic crisis, project activities had to be restructured to protect the health of project staff, partners, and also the target group in line with the pan-

demic measures of the participating countries. Almost all travel, prison visits and face-to-face meetings had to be suspended as long as sufficient vaccination protection did not exist for all participants. Communication was increasingly switched to videoconferencing. Most training events, technical meetings and conferences also took place online. The experience of the staff of the Pompidou Group and the Council of Europe with videoconferencing technology meant that these meetings could be conducted in a professional and goal-oriented manner.



*Video conferencing to stay in touch with project partners*

The pandemic-related need to carry out more of the project's work from a desk also led to a strategic focus on outputs that, on the one hand, promote sustainability of the project results and, on the other hand, ensure the quality of the activities supported by the project. For example, the project team invested more into the production of multimedia training materials, strategy papers, and evaluations. These activities also benefited from cost savings resulting from reduced travel expenses.

Following written and multi-media outputs were produced in the framework of the project:

- ✓ Handbook on prison-based Therapeutic Communities and supporting webpage with model presentations and handouts for training
- ✓ Report of the assessment visit on extending the therapeutic community programme in Moldovan prisons
- ✓ Pre-liminary study on effectiveness of the 'Catharsis' prison-based therapeutic programme with implementation plan for further data collection
- ✓ Research findings and recommendations for mitigating the influence of criminal subcultures on effectiveness of drug treatment programmes in Moldovan prisons
- ✓ Evaluation report on the role and added value of NGOs in delivering drug treatment services in prisons
- ✓ Service catalogue of psychosocial care services in prisons in the Republic Moldova
- ✓ Testimonial video and information material on the therapeutic community programme in Pruncul prison
- ✓ Interactive online learning course for delivering medication-assisted treatment in prisons
- ✓ Implementation plan and training for staff of Lviv pre-trial detention centre on introducing medication-assisted treatment for people with opioid disorder
- ✓ 'Tbilisi Declaration' – recommendations for improving treatment and rehabilitation of drug-dependent people who are incarcerated
- ✓ Action Plan 2021-22 for implementation of the National Drug Prevention Strategy of Georgia
- ✓ Background document and working group on developing comprehensive drug treatment systems in prisons in South-East Europe
- ✓ Expert assessment for identifying competence points for improving drug treatment standards in prisons in the South-East Europe region



## 4 Conclusions

Feedback by national project partners and a closer look at the results achieved and outputs delivered within the project implementation indicate that the project “Strengthening human-rights based responses to substance use disorders in prisons” has made a strong contribution to rolling out in-prison drug treatment services and sustaining good practices in Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and in the South-Eastern European region. National partners and professionals benefiting from project activities have repeatedly thanked the Pompidou Group and the **Fund to combat certain forms of crime of Luxembourg** for their support in letters and emails.

The decision of Georgia and Ukraine to join the Pompidou Group during the project period is most likely due to the active involvement of policy makers and experts in the project work during this and the previous project cycles. The desire of Georgia and Ukraine to be a more integral and active part of the broader European drug policy framework and to actively shape the project work of the Pompidou Group was reaffirmed by this decision by the project partners.

### Follow-up

National partners in the project countries asked for a continuation of collaboration in the future. They showed a strong interest in continuing jointly pursued activities in general, and specifically in achieving the following goals:

- raising awareness about the needs of staff delivering drug treatment services in prison and of people with problematic drug use as well as the importance of developing comprehensive drug treatment systems in places of incarceration;
- giving guidance, recognition and support to health professionals, social workers and security staff working in detention settings;
- providing a knowledge base for elaborating programmes and strategies for treatment and social re-insertion of drug-using detainees;
- establishing regular interaction at regional level to multiply capacities and exchange evidence-based practices on delivering treatment and rehabilitation services in prison.



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**The Council of Europe** is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

